

MINING THE SEAMS:

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF PUNNING 1590—1750

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DEDICATION

To Penelope Meyer.

For putting up with my bullshit more than any other person will ever have to.

With much hairy man love, Paul.

SUMMARY

This thesis examines puns in poetry from the Renaissance, through Milton, into the eighteenth century. It examines the puns through the lens of rhetoric, focussing upon the rhetorical techniques that are pun like in their effect: antanaclasis, asteismus, paronomasia, polyptoton, and syllepsis. Through this lens the thesis suggests that the canonical poets of the two eras did differ in their use of rhetorical puns. The eighteenth century saw the rise of the anti-pun debate, which led to the anti-pun attitude becoming a critical commonplace. However, it has long been known that the eighteenth century poets were willing to use puns despite the bad press wordplay was gathering at the time. The Renaissance poets were willing to follow what this thesis describes as the logic of the pun and to use it to structure their lyric poems. Milton appears to arrest this practice in his epic poetry, and, especially through the use of polyptoton, endeavours to bring the play of ambiguity inherent in punning under as rigorous a control as English can provide. The eighteenth century poets did not entirely follow Milton's lead but they do not appear to have returned to the pre-Miltonic use of the puns to deploy the logic of the pun. Rather, the eighteenth century begins to see the ascendancy of the euphemistic pun. While the thesis points to the larger narrative of the pun becoming, as at least one critic would have it, the lowest form of wit, it also suggests the ways in which the poetic punning was altered, challenged, and enriched by poets between 1590 and 1740.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

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I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor Robert Phiddian. There are the usual platitudes a disciple generally offers a master, however, it is true that without his guidance and perseverance, this thesis would have fallen off the wagon years ago. To his interminable question ‘have you written a thesis yet?’ I can now honestly respond ‘*alea iacta est*’.

This thesis would have died in the arse without being aided and abetted by the following: my secondary supervisor Graham Tulloch and fellow PhD students at Flinders University (Chad, Lisa, Sara, Edo, Ben, Tully, Savvy, Nick, Rebecca).

A lack of food, shelter and succour would have also caused this thesis to be stillborn and so I would like to thank my parents Keith and Marie Sutton, my siblings Ben, Alice and little Lucy, Joel, Léonie and our Joe, Robyn and Peter Meyer and anyone unfortunate enough to co-habit with me throughout this process (Penny, Chad, Chuckie, Lenny, La-Ra, Our Joe).

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Absalom and Achitophel</i>	<i>AA</i>
<i>The Dunciad in Four Books</i>	<i>DFB</i>
<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>	<i>OED</i>
<i>Paradise Lost</i>	<i>PL</i>
<i>Paradise Regain'd</i>	<i>PR</i>
<i>The Rape of the Lock</i>	<i>RL</i>
<i>Virgil's Aeneid</i>	<i>VA</i>

1 A BRIEF HISTORY

‘Puns are very good titles, of course, and very bad puns are extremely good. Make a list of excruciating puns, and the ones you reject will do you very nicely as chapter headings’.¹

On Thursday 10th May 1711, Joseph Addison printed in *The Spectator* an essay that now commonly bears the title ‘False Wit: Punning’. It begins with the following paragraph.

There is no kind of false Wit which has been so recommended by the Practice of all Ages, as that which consists in a Jingle of Words, and is comprehended under the general Name of *Punning*. It is indeed impossible to kill a Weed, which the Soil has a natural Disposition to produce. The Seeds of Punning are in the Minds of all Men, and tho’ they may be subdued by Reason, Reflection, and good Sense, they will be very apt to shoot up in the greatest Genius, that is not broken and cultivated by the Rules of Art. Imitation is natural to us, and when it does not raise the Mind to Poetry, Painting, Musick, or other more noble Arts, it often breaks out in Punns and Quibbles.²

Addison goes on to give a brief history of punning in which he nominates the reign of James I as being the most conducive to producing punsters although he does note that it is a habit indulged in throughout all recorded history. It was Addison, in the same essay, who proposed the acid test to determine if a witticism was true wit or not by seeing if it withstood translation into another language. If yes, then it was true wit. If not, then it was a pun and therefore false wit.³ Addison’s attitude towards punning is, as we shall see, emblematic of the larger cultural attack on the pun that occurred in the eighteenth century.

¹ John Clarke, *The Fred Dagg Scripts* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1981), p. 183.

² Joseph Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 61, Thursday, May 10, 1711', in *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 259.

³ Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 61, Thursday, May 10, 1711', p. 259.

Not every age has necessarily shared in Addison's negative zeal. In the Renaissance, when writing about the punning rhetorical technique paronomasia, George Puttenham commented that:

when such resemblance happens between words of another nature, and not upon mens names, yet doeth the Poet or maker finde pretty sport to play with them in his verse, specially the Comickall Poet and the Epigrammatist.⁴

While Renaissance hierarchies of poetry may be grounds for considering Puttenham's statement as a small slight against puns (that they are used primarily by comic and epigrammatic poets rather than by the tragic or epic poets), such a view is not as negative as that which Addison propagates.

Simon J. Alderson claims that the anti-pun debate was 'a genuine social phenomenon with a number of conflicting social values attached to it'.⁵ Walter Redfern claims the English anti-pun debate was a reaction against what was viewed as a 'plague [...] of literature'.⁶ Broadly speaking, those Englishmen who condemned punning in the eighteenth century viewed it as a break in decorum; and, the higher the literary art-form, the more obnoxious the existence of a pun. As demonstrated by the examples provided by Addison and Puttenham, it helps to compare critical writings in order to ascertain the difference in attitudes that indicates a cultural and philosophical change between eras of English literature. The pun, in some respects, is trans-historical because it appears in all languages at all times. Attitudes towards the pun and punning, however, are grounded in the social fabric of their time and are the result of what could broadly be called historical trends. One way to gauge the virulence of anti-pun rhetoric is to examine an earlier sample of critical writing and compare it to extracts of critical writing from the

⁴ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*. ed. by Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 202.

⁵ Simon J. Alderson, 'The Augustan Attack on the Pun', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 20 (1996), p. 2.

⁶ Walter Redfern, *Puns: More Senses Than One* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000), p. 62.

eighteenth century. The piece we will start with, Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry*, demonstrates a joyful lack of anxiety about using puns to help prosecute its case.

APOLOGIE FOR POETRY

Sir Philip Sidney's seminal work of English poetical theory makes use of puns to highlight, deepen, produce and propagate the central arguments of the text. This is evident from the title of the tract onwards. There are two possible titles for the text: *The Defence of Poesie* or *An Apologie for Poetry*. In *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defences of Poetry* Margaret Ferguson claims that Sidney 'would have relished the ambiguity created by his text's two titles, and would have seen that both are relevant to the problems he explores'.⁷ It is important to note, though, that Sidney did not choose a title for his work. Composed sometime in the early 1580s, the text was first published in 1595 by Henry Olney, well after Sidney's death in the spring of 1586, under the title *An Apologie for Poetrie*. Olney, it appears, was being a little underhand in his printing of the text because William Ponsonby had entered the work into the Stationer's register on the 29th of November, 1594. Ponsonby then forced Olney to turn over his unsold copies to Ponsonby who released them with a new cover along with his version called *The Defence of Poesie*.⁸ Ferguson goes on to argue that the rhetoric of people writing Renaissance defences or apologies for poetry 'oscillates between apology in the 'Greek' sense of self-justification and apology in the modern sense of a plea for pardon or indulgence'.⁹ The ambiguity that Ferguson highlights comes not just from the reader's

⁷ Margaret W. Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defences of Poetry* (London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 137.

⁸ Scholars, in the main, tend to refer to the text as the *Defence*, legitimizing Ponsonby's title. R. S. Bear, 'Introduction', University of Oregon, (1992) <<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/defence.html>> [Accessed 20/02/2007 2007].

⁹ *ibid.*

choice between ‘defence’ or ‘apology’ as the key word in the title, but from the possible polysemy that Ferguson finds in ‘apology’ and which, as we will see, also exists in ‘defence’.

Three meanings of the word ‘apology’ were available to Olney when he published Sidney’s tract. The first is the rhetorical meaning of a ‘pleading off from a charge or imputation; defence of a person, or vindication of an institution’;¹⁰ the second is the more common use nowadays of ‘apology’ as a ‘justification, explanation, or excuse, of an incident or course of action’.¹¹ The third definition offered by the *OED* is interesting because it makes reference to a reader or listener:

an explanation offered *to a person* affected by one’s action that no offence was intended, coupled with the expression of regret for any that may have been given; or, a frank acknowledgement of the offence with expression of regret for it, by way of reparation [emphasis mine].¹²

You apologize to someone whom you have affected negatively and now wish to affect in another more positive manner. It is the affective power of poetry that drives much of the *Apologie* and when one is advocating an affective art form, one must have some idea of who is to be affected and what is to be their role in the art form. Dorothy Connell points out that Sidney’s attention in the *Apologie* is ‘directed towards the feelings of the reader, not the poet’.¹³ While Sidney never openly admits that poetry causes offence or demonstrates any regret for pursuing poetry as a topic, there remains the nagging doubt behind his rhetoric that if poetry is less effective than history or philosophy at moving people towards a more pious life then it is an offence to indulge in poetry when one could be reading history or philosophy and thus learning how to lead a pious life. In this

¹⁰ *OED apology, n. 1.* (1533-1850) 2nd Edition 1989. A fuller explanation of this citation method is provided in the next chapter.

¹¹ *OED apology, n. 2.* (1588-1855) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹² *OED apology, n. 3.* (1594-1848) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹³ Dorothy Connell, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Maker's Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 45.

way, the potential pun on ‘apology’ demonstrates to the reader the hidden anxieties of the text that shadow Sidney’s treatise.

The word ‘defence’ has many more shades of meaning than ‘apology’ though few are relevant to Sidney’s text. The two relevant meanings in the OED are ‘defending, supporting or maintaining by argument; justification, vindication’¹⁴ and ‘a speech or argument in self-vindication’.¹⁵ ‘Defence’ is a potential pun that allows the subject of the text to be both poetry (first meaning) and the poet (second meaning). ‘Apology’ on the other hand, is a potential pun that allows the subject to be poetry (first meaning) and the poet (second meaning) and to include the reader (third meaning which specifically mentions ‘offered to a person’). Ferguson argues that Sidney ‘plays with the classical roles of forensic and epideictic orator in ways that deliberately blur the distinction between the authorial subject and the theoretical subject, poetry’.¹⁶ To this, we might add the third subject, the ‘right reader’ that is instituted by the potential pun on ‘apology’ but is developed as a theme throughout the course of the text.¹⁷

¹⁴ *OED defence, defense, n. II.6.a.* (1382-1848) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁵ *OED defence, defense, n. II.6.b.* (1557-1875) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁶ Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry*, p. 139.

¹⁷ Right reading is an extension of the idea of the ‘right poet’. Much has been written about Sidney’s idea of the ‘right poet’. For example, see: Connell, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Maker’s Mind*, M. J. Doherty, *The Mistress-Knowledge: Sir Philip Sidney’s Defence of Poesie and Literary Architectonics in the English Renaissance* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1991), A. C. Hamilton, ‘Sidney’s Idea of The “Right Poet”’, *Comparative Literature*, 9 (1957), Daniel Jacobson, ‘Sir Philip Sidney’s Dilemma: On the Ethical Function of Narrative Art.’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54 (1996), Michael Mack, *Sidney’s Poetics: Imitating Creation* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), Niel L. Rudenstine, *Sidney’s Poetic Development* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), Robert E. Stillman, ‘Deadly Stinging Adders: Sidney’s Piety, Philippism, and the *Defence of Poesey*’, *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual*, XVI (2002), Robert E. Stillman, ‘The Scope of Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*: The New Hermeneutic and Early Modern Poetics’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 32 (2002), Robert E. Stillman, ‘The Truths of a Slippery World: Poetry and Tyranny in Sidney’s “Defence”’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 55 (2002). However, it is interesting that throughout *The Apologie*, Sidney not only retells stories but he also provides the reader with interpretations of the stories and thus demonstrates what could be termed ‘right reading’. This process begins with the Pugliano anecdote with which Sidney starts *The Apologie* and continues throughout it. I would argue that the ‘right reader’ or ‘right reading’ is an important subtext of *The Apologie* and despite the fact that ‘right reading’ or the ‘right reader’ are never overtly discussed in a meaningful way by Sidney, they are worthy of closer critical examination. It was Klein who provided me with the initial impetus for the idea of a ‘right reader’

We cannot be sure that Sidney intended either ‘defence’ or ‘apology’ to star in the title of his work given that each title was applied by a publisher to the text. This is why thus far I have been referring to ‘apology’ and ‘defence’ as potential puns. So, while we can concur with Ferguson about Sidney appreciating the ambiguity inherent in the variant titles of his treatise, if we are to find puns that we can attribute to Sidney we must delve into the text itself.

Sidney uses poetry’s ability to ‘delight’ the reader to demonstrate poetry’s pre-eminence when compared with the stereotypical dullness of philosophical writing. When it comes to countering the claims of historians, Sidney relies upon his distinction between the ‘brazen world’ of history and the ‘golden world’ of poetry.¹⁸ In an effort to prove that the ‘golden world’ of poetry taught the reader more so than ‘brazen world’ of history, Sidney relates two stories, one from a text he considered historical, and one from a work of fiction. In the first story, its veracity testified to by Herodotus and Justin, a servant of King Darius enacts an ‘honourable subterfuge’ to serve his king. The servant has his ears and nose removed and he runs away to the Babylonians who are the enemies of Darius. The Babylonians welcome him with open arms thinking him to also be an enemy of Darius. The servant though, is able ‘to deliver them [Babylonians] over to Darius’.¹⁹

and ‘right reading’. Lisa M. Klein, *The Exemplary Sidney and the Elizabethan Sonneteer* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998).

¹⁸Stillman, ‘The Truths of a Slippery World: Poetry and Tyranny in Sidney’s “Defence”’, p. 1296. Sidney’s argument is essentially that history is tied to recounting both the positive and negative attributes of the people whose lives it tells and therefore it is an inferior teacher to poetry where a moral and virtuous character can be created that will not be susceptible to the flaws of a ‘real’ human being. Hence the historical world view is brazen because Caesar, Alexander, et al, have bad character traits as well as positive one but the poetical world view is golden because Aeneas is virtuous, brave, and pious.

¹⁹ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*. ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 111.

Sidney then states:

Xenophon excellently **feigneth** such another stratagem performed by Abradatas in Cyrus' behalf. Now would I **fain** know, if occasion be presented unto you to serve your prince by such an honest dissimulation, why you do not as well learn it of Xenophon's fiction as of the other's verity; and truly so much the better, as you shall save your nose by the bargain: for Abradatas did not counterfeit so far.

(Bold mine.)²⁰

There is a pun here on 'feigneth' and 'fain'. Then, as now, 'feign' and 'fain' were homophones of one another.²¹ Not only that, potentially, they could be homonyms as the *OED* claims that 'fain' is a variant spelling of 'feign', and *vice versa* 'feign' is also variant spelling of 'fain'.²² The *OED* defines a 'pun' as:

The use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words.²³

The *OED* allows for puns that are homonymic (a word with two or more meanings) or homophonic (words of the same or nearly the same sound). One of the accusations that Sidney is defending poetry against throughout the *Apologie* is the claim that poetry lies. The reason it is charged with lying is because of the very feigning (to 'fashion fictitiously or deceptively'²⁴) that Sidney's example relies upon.

The adverb 'fain' means 'gladly, willingly, with pleasure'.²⁵ A link is made by Sidney between 'feign' and 'gladly, willingly, with pleasure' — or, to use a word potent in the context of *The Apologie*, 'delight'. As Sidney points out, by feigning, a nose has been saved. Indeed, Sidney takes his argument one step further and claims that while

²⁰ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 111.

²¹ Helge Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 173.

²² *OED feign*, v. Spellings, 2nd Edition, 1989; *OED fain*, a. and adv. Spellings, 2nd Edition, 1989.

²³ *OED pun*, n.¹ (1644-1992) Draft Revision June 2008.

²⁴ *OED feign*, v. **II.** (a1300-1862) 2nd Edition, 1989.

²⁵ *OED fain*, a. and adj. **B.** (c1175-1880) 2nd Edition, 1989.

Abradatas may have ‘feigned’ he ‘did not counterfeit so far’ as Darius’ servant. One reading of this is that Abradatas’ fakery did not have to extend to cutting his nose off. A second reading is that there is a difference between ‘feigneth’ and ‘counterfeit’ and that is because ‘feigneth’ is linked to ‘fain’ because the one is a homophone, a pun, of the other, while ‘counterfeit’ is linked to cutting one’s nose off — a thoroughly unpleasant connotation. The feigning indulged in by the poet and readers of poetry has become an activity that may be engaged in more willingly, gladly, and with more delight than history or the reality that history seeks to recreate or, to use Sidney’s terminology, ‘counterfeit’.

It may be thought that this is a long bow to stretch based on a simple pun, but Sidney was a master of rhetoric, he was acknowledged as a master orator by his uncles and fellow university students, and this subtle, some might even say sly, pun would not be beyond him.²⁶ In some senses, this is a classic use of a pun to invert an argument through the seemingly random chance of homophony. But, it is important to recognise that while the homophony might be random in terms of how the two words came to sound alike, the homophony is not random when used by Sidney. It is deployed for a particular effect and that effect is to render the feigning of poetry more pleasurable than the kind of counterfeiting engaged in by Darius’ servant.

Other puns occur when Sidney relates Menenius Agrippa’s body politic speech, from Livy’s *History*, which was designed to stop the Roman mob from continuing the civil unrest in which they were then engaged due to a rift between the populace and the Senate.

²⁶ Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 30 and p. 42; Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 56; Malcolm William Wallace, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967), p. 99.

He telleth them a tale, that there was a time when all parts of the body made a mutinous conspiracy against the belly, which they thought devoured the fruits of each other's labour; they concluded they would let so unprofitable a spender starve. In the end, to be short, (for the **tale** is **notorious**, and as **notorious** that it was a **tale**), with punishing the belly they plagued themselves. This applied by him wrought such effect in the people, as I never read that only words brought forth but then so sudden and so good an alteration; for upon reasonable conditions a perfect reconcilment ensued.

(Bold mine.)²⁷

Shepherd isolates the pun in the parenthesis and notes that it is 'the sort of brisk, rather empty wordplay which Sidney usually avoids in the *Apology* except in moments of banter and deprecation'.²⁸ Shepherd might be thinking of a homophonic pun between 'tale', a story, and 'tail', the bottom, with all the scatological connotations such a pun would make available to the reader; an understandable reading given that the pun is made during a story about the body, in particular the stomach which generally leads to the employment of one's bottom. However, I think Sidney is in actual fact, employing a more subtle use of puns here.

Firstly, 'notorious', during Sidney's time, was capable of meaning both 'infamous'²⁹ as well as 'of a fact: well known; commonly or generally known; forming a matter of common knowledge'.³⁰ The *OED* clearly distinguished between notorious meaning 'with neutral or favourable connotations'³¹ and notorious denoting 'with depreciative or unfavourable connotations'.³² Sidney performs a homonymic pun with 'notorious' which initially gives the word neutral or favourable connotations and then,

²⁷ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 115.

²⁸ Geoffrey Shepherd, 'Notes', in *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 184.

²⁹ *OED notorious, adj.*¹ and *adv. A.II.4.a.* (1549-1988) Draft Revision June 2009.

³⁰ *OED notorious, adj.*¹ and *adv. A.I.1.a.* (c1495-1992) Draft Revision June 2009.

³¹ *OED notorious, adj.*¹ and *adv. A.I.* Draft Revision June 2009.

³² *OED notorious, adj.*¹ and *adv. A.II.* Draft Revision June 2009.

when he repeats it, turns the connotations into negatives, which in turn help engender the homophonic pun on ‘tale–tail’ that Shepherd finds ‘empty’.

While I do not doubt that the ‘tail–tail’ homophonic pun is present as Shepherd claims, I would like to offer a second potential pun, this time involving a homonymic pun on ‘tale’. One of the most well known meanings for ‘tale’ is a ‘story or narrative, true or fictitious, drawn up so as to interest or amuse, or to preserve the history of a fact or incident; a literary composition cast in narrative form’.³³ This meaning has been in use since 1200 and continues to this day. However, contrast that meaning with this: ‘a mere story, as opposed to a narrative of fact; a fiction, an idle tale; a falsehood’.³⁴ The ‘empty wordplay’ contained in parenthesis is in reality an instance of Sidneian irony being shown through an act of punning. Both ‘notorious’ and ‘tale’ are suspect terminology and Sidney does not let us forget this by repeating the words to allow the ambiguity to play between a positive reading and a negative reading. Thrown into this is the effect of the homophonic ‘tale–tail’ pun which lends the effect of asserting that a ‘tale’ is nothing more than someone literally speaking out of their arse. Sidney seems to be attacking the historical veracity of the story which suits his purpose because he is arguing that poetry and fiction move people to behave properly more so than history or philosophy. It also seems to mock two key phrases with which he concludes the recounting of the body politic speech: ‘so good an alteration’ and ‘a perfect reconciliation’. In the puns on ‘good tale’–‘bad tale’–‘tail’ and ‘good notorious’–‘bad notorious’, there is a ‘good’ iteration of the words but because it is ambiguous as to which particular use of either ‘notorious’ or ‘tale’ bears the positive denotation and

³³ *OED tale*, n. 4. (c1200-1821) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁴ *OED tale*, n. 5.a. (c1250-1867) 2nd Edition 1989.

which the negative denotation, it is impossible to provide a ‘perfect reconciliation’ while the ambiguity engendered by the wordplay continues to reverberate.

One can read this a number of ways: 1) it is empty wordplay in the context of the *Apologie*; 2) it is highlighting the fact that while Sidney is arguing for an affective poetics, he is doubtful of its existence in the real world; 3) it is a clever means with which to highlight a potential problem for the ‘right poet’ (a mix of classical orator and biblical prophet according to commentators) that Sidney will solve in the *refutation*. This would not be the first time that Sidney has dramatized a problem before offering a solution to it in the *Apologie*, indeed, the tract begins with the Pugliano anecdote which demonstrates the affective power of language but raises, as an issue, the ends to which people put the affective power of language.³⁵ Given this, I am inclined to read the puns as partly prefiguring and dramatizing a problem that Sidney will solve later through the idea of the ‘right poet’. Still, as Sidney never identifies an English ‘right poet’ that others can look to for an example, the puns discussed above do encode an ironic nod to the reality of a poet being a ‘moving’ force in the world.

Sidney, while capable of sneaking in the scatological through a pun, is also capable of entirely serious puns that are used more to complicate and coagulate several ideas than to tickle a reader’s funny bone. He ends the first part of his *examination* with a summary that includes one such pun:

By these, therefore, examples and reasons, I think it may be manifest that the poet, with that same hand of delight, doth **draw** the mind more effectually than any other art doth. And so a conclusion not unfitly ensue: that, as virtue is the

³⁵ Sidney relates a conversation he had with John Pietro Pugliano about horses and horsemanship. Sidney ends the anecdote with the wry comment that if he had been less of a ‘logician’, then Pugliano may have persuaded Sidney that he should have ‘wished myself a horse’. (Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 95.) What the passage does is demonstrate an instance whereby rhetorical skill almost overwhelms the logical skill of the listener. Sidney actively engages with Pugliano’s speech when he uses logic to avoid the mistake of thinking it is preferable to lead an equine existence over a human existence.

most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman.

(Bold mine.)³⁶

Ronald Levaio also spotted the pun and concludes that the phrase ‘doth draw the mind’ means both depicting the mind and leading the mind to action.³⁷ This pun is important because it encapsulates Sidney’s entire argument about how the ‘right poet’ differs from the divine and philosophical poets:

Sidney’s divine poet teaches delight, and the philosophical poet delightfully teaches; but neither end, nor both together, adequately describes the work of the right poet. Because Sidney understands the poet’s entire purpose is to feign his golden world of images, he goes beyond the Horatian account of the end of poetry and emphasizes wholly its rhetorical end of ‘moving’.³⁸

Or, in other words, the right poet ‘draws’ the mind, at once depicting a virtuous mind and leading the reader’s mind towards becoming that virtuous mind.

However, out of eighty-nine separate meanings that the *OED* attributes to the verb ‘draw’, I want to look at four in particular that were available to Sidney at the time of his writing the *Apologie*. Firstly, ‘to attract by moral force, persuasion, inclination’,³⁹ is obviously pertinent to Sidney’s argument throughout the *Apologie*. The second relevant meaning is ‘to pull out or extract (a sword or other weapon) from the sheath, etc. For fight or attack’.⁴⁰ While this may not seem applicable at the moment, in the *refutation* Sidney compares poetry with swords and also describes Alexander the Great conquering the world accompanied by an edition of Homer. A sword is drawn in order to use it. The right poet ‘draws’ the reader to action in the same way a sword is drawn.

³⁶ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 115.

³⁷ Ronald Levaio, ‘Sidney’s Feigned *Apologie*’, in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. by Dennis Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 132.

³⁸ Hamilton, ‘Sidney’s Idea of The “Right Poet”’, p. 57.

³⁹ *OED draw*, v. **B.II.26**. fig. (c1175-1861) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁰ *OED draw*, v. **B.III.33.a**. (c1200-1852) 2nd Edition 1989.

The right poet — and consequently ‘right poetry’ — always carries the ghost of militant protestant action when discussed by Sidney. As Klein argues, a common critical reading of the *Apologie* is that it is ‘a disguised apology for Protestant activism’.⁴¹ ‘To represent in words, describe’⁴² is the third meaning; clearly, this is one of the meanings that Levaio construes in his understanding of ‘draw’. Finally, the fourth pertinent meaning is ‘to frame (a writing or document) in due form; to compose, compile, write out’.⁴³ If we allow Sidney the axiom that poetry moves a reader, that it moves the reader by ‘drawing’ the mind like a sword, that poetry ‘represents’ an exemplary mind at work, is it too much of a stretch to allow that ‘right poetry’ will ‘frame’ or ‘compile’ the mind of the ‘right reader’?

We have now examined four puns from Sidney’s *Apologie*, 1) ‘feigneth–fain’, 2) ‘notorious’, 3) ‘tale–tale–tail’, 4) ‘draw’. These four puns constitute a mere scratching of the surface. Even from this brief exploration, it is clear that Sidney had little anxiety about any critical pressure to avoid punning in his prose tract that is today recognised as being a major work of Renaissance literary criticism and theory.⁴⁴ Foremost of the four puns which support the idea that Sidney did not view puns as a breach of critical decorum is the ‘tale–tail’ pun with its scatological connotations. The fact that Sidney felt that a scatological pun did not breach the decorum of his treatise demonstrates that he did not think the reception of his text would suffer should it include puns.

⁴¹ Klein, *The Exemplary Sidney and the Elizabethan Sonneteer*, p. 39. While there has been debate about what particular brand of Protestantism Sidney followed there is little doubt that Sidney’s faith was a pillar of his poetics (see Mack, *Sidney’s Poetics: Imitating Creation*, p. 4).

⁴² *OED draw*, v. **B.V.60.c. fig.** (c1374-1891) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴³ *OED draw*, v. **B.V.63.a.** (a1300-1879) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁴ For discussions about the status of Sidney’s text, please see: Dennis Kay, ‘Introduction: Sidney - a Critical Heritage’, in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. by Dennis Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet*; Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life*; Klein, *The Exemplary Sidney and the Elizabethan Sonneteer*.

Of more interest, though, is the way in which Sidney deploys puns to convey complicated ideas and concepts that are central to the concerns he is addressing in his poetic manifesto. They are the ‘feign–fain’ pun and the pun on ‘draw’. These puns both help Sidney adumbrate his poetic theory. While ‘feign’ and ‘fain’ link the ideas of pleasure and the poet’s ‘golden world’ of half truths, it is ‘draw’ that combines the rhetoric of Protestantism with meditations on the relationship between a reader and a text. The puns of the *Apologie* are capable of heavy theoretical lifting and it is a mark of Sidney’s confidence in his audience’s ability to recognise these puns that he does not see the need to state the multiple meanings inherent in the puns as separate ideas consigned to their own individual sentences.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM

In stark contrast to Sir Philip Sidney’s use of puns in a critical text are the comments of prominent eighteenth century critics on puns and punning in the writings of others. Our first example of eighteenth century anti-pun commentary is taken from John Dennis’ critique of Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*.

But there are a great many Lines, which have *no Sentiment* at all in them, that is, no *reasonable Meaning*. Such are the *Puns* which are every where spread throughout it. *Puns* bear the same Proportion to *Thought*, that *Bubbles* hold to *Bodies*, and may justly be compared to those gaudy Bladders which Children make with Soap; which, tho’ they please their weak Capacities with a momentary Glittering, yet are but just beheld, and vanish into Air.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ John Dennis, ‘Remarks on the Rape of the Lock’, in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), p. 347.

The attitude towards puns is clearly not a positive one. Puns are described as child's play, as having the life expectancy of a soap bubble, and being as far removed from thought as a soap bubble is from a person's body.

This treatment of puns in the writing of even the most respected poets is a feature of eighteenth century criticism as both Addison and Samuel Johnson demonstrate. Of Milton, Addison wrote that a 'second Fault in his [Milton's] Language is, that he often affects a Kind of Jingle in his Words'⁴⁶ where the phrase 'Jingle in his Words' echoes Addison's definition of punning with which we began this introduction: 'a Jingle of Words'.⁴⁷ Addison then lists four puns from *Paradise Lost* to exemplify which jingling words constituted a fault in Milton's poem:

And brought into the World a World of woe.
. . . Begirt th' Almighty throne
Beseeching or besieging . . .
This tempted our Attempt . . .
*At one slight Bound high overlept all Bound.*⁴⁸

While a modern audience might debate about whether the first example is a clear pun or not (and this question will be addressed later in this thesis) the last three examples are all recognised puns from *Paradise Lost*.

Johnson, in his 'Preface to Shakespeare', wrote:

A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra* for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Joseph Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 297, Saturday, Feb 9, 1712', in *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 63.

⁴⁷ Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 61, Thursday, May 10, 1711', p. 259.

⁴⁸ Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 297, Saturday, Feb 9, 1712', p. 63.

⁴⁹ Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare, 1765', in *Johnson on Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 74.

Addison is clear that punning is a flaw in *Paradise Lost* while Johnson views puns as ‘poor and barren’ and as something that would cost Shakespeare “the world” and its esteem. Even more extraordinary, a pun must be purchased through the forfeit of one’s reason. For Dr. Johnson, puns require insanity and, or, a lack of intelligence on behalf of those who would use them. The eighteenth century bias against puns is a clear hallmark of Dennis, Addison, and Johnson’s thought.

POPE

We can see that what was a reasonable rhetorical tactic in Sidney’s critical writing was not even a reasonable poetic tactic for the critics of the eighteenth century. This has been demonstrated, briefly to be true, using examples from Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apologie* and the critical writings on the poetry of others by Addison, Dennis and Johnson. However, a quick sampling of some eighteenth century poetry will highlight the paradox inherent in the claims of eighteenth century critics: despite the fact that puns became critically derided, the poets continued to use them as, indeed, Dennis’ comments on *The Rape of the Lock* demonstrate.

Here, for instance, is Pope punning and also poking fun at the critics who would condemn such an activity. *The Dunciad in Four Books* contains one of Pope’s most famous puns and it has as its butt the still divisive Milton editor, Richard Bentley.

As many quit the streams that murm’ring fall
To lull the sons of Marg’ret and Clare-hall,
Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport
In troubled waters, but now sleeps in **Port**.

(DFB 4.199-202. Bold mine.)

The commentary that Pope included with the poem offers two definitions for ‘sleeps in Port’. Firstly, it defines ‘port’ as meaning ‘now retired into harbour, after the tempests that had long agitated his [Bentley’s] society’.⁵⁰ It then offers a second reading which turns ‘Port’ into a pun: ‘But the learned *Scipio Maffei* understands it of a certain Wine called *Port*, from *Oporto* a city of Portugal, of which the Professor [Bentley] invited him to drink abundantly’.⁵¹

The two definitions of ‘Port’ offered by the commentary on the poem, that it denotes both a harbour and a fortified wine, have been recognised as existing in the poem by critics since the poem first appeared. F. R. Leavis wrote of it:

The famous pun on Port is a truly poetic pun, depending for its rich effect on the evocative power of the first couplet: the streams are really lulling as if they had been Tennyson’s, with the result that, after ‘tempestuous’, the ‘troubled waters’ are to the Leviathan resting in sheltered waters after majestic play and the befuddled don dozing.⁵²

Leavis conveys successfully the bathos that the ‘Port’ pun creates around the figure of Bentley. William Empson, on the other hand, finds the port pun to be an example of what he termed eighteenth century punning.

The pun is sustained into an allegory by the rest of the couplet; *tempestuous* and *sport* are satirical in much the same way as the last word. But here, I grant, we have a simply funny pun; its parts are united by derivation indeed, but too accidentally to give it dignity; it jumps out of its setting, yapping and bites the Master in the ankles [...] The eighteenth century pun is always worldly; to join together so smartly a business and a philosophical notion, a nautical and a gastronomical notion, with an air of having them in watertight compartments in your own mind [...] the pun is used as the climax of a comparison between the subject of the poem, something worldly, and a stock poetical subject with which

⁵⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*. ed. by Valerie Rumbold (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1999), note **202. sleeps in Port.**, p. 301.

⁵¹ Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, note **202. sleeps in Port.**, p. 301.

⁵² F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1936), pp. 93-94.

the writer is less intimately acquainted, which excites feelings simpler and more universal. Wit is employed because the poet is faced with a subject which it is difficult to conceive poetically.⁵³

More recent readings have highlighted the fact that the ‘Port’ pun is also used in the third book of *The Dunciad*: ‘Alma mater lie dissolved in Port!’ (*DFB* 3.338). Margaret Anne Doody explores this example of the ‘Port’ pun.

The Augustan proclaimed distaste for puns may merely have reflected a feeling that puns of the simple sort were too grossly obvious to be much fun. Complete in themselves, and attention seeking, puns signify a stop to the work of thought, and the two languages are baulked before they can go anywhere [...] ‘To lie in port’ is a phrase used of ships, and indicates the idea of reaching a happy haven, well deserved after the struggle of a journey. Alma mater has no journey and no right to a happy haven. The ‘port’ to which a ship comes is transformed into another liquid element, both like and unlike that associated with a sea-port; the university seems to be submerging in a liquid element underneath the resting place, disappearing into what ought to support it and ought not to act as a solvent. There is an oxymoronic relationship between lying in port and being dissolved in it.⁵⁴

Both Doody and Empson attempt to define and discuss the eighteenth century attitude towards puns. Importantly, they both seek to base the larger claim on individual examples of puns used by Pope.

All the above criticism does not highlight the excellent parody of critical scholarship that Scriblerus (for this note in the commentary is attributed to him) creates with his comments on the ‘Port’ pun. The *OED* lists two possible etymologies for ‘port’: ‘Either shortened < the name of *Oporto*, or < *Porto*, the Portuguese form of the name’.⁵⁵ ‘Oporto’ was, as Scriblerus pointed out, a city in Portugal and, perhaps, more to the

⁵³ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), pp. 108-109.

⁵⁴ Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 225.

⁵⁵ *OED port, n.*⁷ Etymology. Draft Revision March 2009.

point, it was a coastal city which was ‘the chief port of shipment of wines of the country’.⁵⁶ Scriblerus’ proposed etymology of the word ‘port’ justifies the reading of a pun in the poem. In fact, it is Scriblerus’ knowledge which both introduces the subversive meaning and then cements it. Puns are odd beasts in that when Pope deploys the word ‘port’ the language around it (particularly ‘streams’ and ‘waters’) works to create a context in which ‘Port’ is to be read as ‘harbour’, but the context cannot stop the word making available to the reader, especially a reader knowledgeable about Bentley’s preference for a tipple, the meaning ‘fortified wine’. Scriblerus deploys the scholarship to demonstrate his own learning; behind Scriblerus, Pope uses the very scholarship with which Bentley made his name to hang Bentley’s alcoholism up to the scorn of the ages.

It is worth pointing out that Pope was not above the snobbery of his age and was more than capable of making as much fun of puns as he was of people he didn’t like.

Here one poor word an hundred clenches makes,
And ductile dulness new meanders takes;
There motley Images her fancy strike,

⁵⁶ *OED Oporto, n.* Etymology. Draft Revision December 2008.

Figures ill pair'd, and Similes unlike.

(*DFB* 1.63-66.)

A 'clench' is a synonym of 'pun' and is defined as such by the *OED*.⁵⁷ Puns, it would seem, are on a par with poorly thought out similes and figures of speech. Indeed one reading of the passages is that puns are an abuse of language because a 'poor' word is forced to bear the burden of an hundred denotations. One cannot avoid the irony though—a word with an hundred denotations is, perhaps, not poor but rich. A more abrasive view of puns is espoused in Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*.

Or at Ear of *Eve*, familiar Toad,
 Half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad,
 In Puns, or Politicks, or Tales, or Lyes,
 Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies.⁵⁸

Here, in Pope's portrait of Lord Hervey, puns become part of the way in which Lord Hervey communicates. As such, puns are the choice of Satan (who whispers into Eve's ear in *Paradise Lost*) and are on the same satirical scale, if not actually on a par, with 'Lyes', 'Smut', and 'Blasphemies'. We have travelled some way from Sidney's use of puns to help convince the reader that poetry is the best means of moving humanity to right action.

To bring the subject matter of this thesis quickly and bluntly to the fore: it is apparent even from the brief examples used thus far that the eighteenth century critical distaste of punning did not extend fully to the habits of the poets who wrote during the eighteenth century. While Pope may have disparaged puns in his poetry, he also deployed them to great effect throughout his poetical oeuvre. However, though eighteenth century poets continued to indulge in punning, was there a change in punning

⁵⁷ *OED* **clench**, *n.* **II.4.** (1638-1824) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵⁸ Alexander Pope, 'An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot', in *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One Volume Edition of the Twickenham Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1963), ll. 319-322.

between the practice of Renaissance poets and eighteenth century poets that either mirrors or matches in any way the change in critical temperament between the two ages? Any answer to this question will have to first of all define the term ‘pun’, and take into account contemporary theoretical thinking on or about puns.

A study of this kind can go down one of two paths. The first is an empirical survey of the quantitative variety in which one identifies and counts individual puns, followed up by comparing data from different periods and making a judgment based on that comparison. The thesis would then become little more than a catalogue of puns and, generally speaking, such catalogues already exist.⁵⁹ The second, and more amenable to my own interests, is to take a small sampling and subject them to a more intense scrutiny. This will enable me to ask questions that the first method ignores, questions such as: how is the pun working in this example? why has a pun been used here? is there any similarity or likeness between this pun and that pun? How, though, do we go about reducing the potential primary sources which constitute the raw material for this thesis?

The larger question being posed, and answered, by this thesis is: was there a change in punning congruent with the change in critical attitude towards punning between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century? When deciding which texts to examine, it is worth examining eighteenth century ideas about what constitutes ‘good’ poetry. That is, what kind of poetry did the writers of the eighteenth century attempt to emulate and what kind of poetry did they seek to write? By answering these questions, and noting that later poets are influenced by earlier poets, we might be able to reverse

⁵⁹ Such catalogues normally focus upon one particular author or one particular theme: Edward Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981); Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1984). Others tend to be alternative dictionaries that aim to explain ‘cant’ or ‘slang’ words that the establishment, the OED in particular, may have overlooked or find insufficient evidence for: Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language* (London: Athlone Press Ltd., 1997).

engineer a list of writers and texts that may have been important for the final poets examined in this thesis: Dryden and Pope.

Hammond claims that our sense of what constitutes the English canon prior to the eighteenth-century, and the classical canon of the Roman and Greek authors, is indebted to the critical judgement of Dryden himself.

It was largely Dryden who established the English poetic canon: he promoted Chaucer through his translations in *Fables Ancient and Modern* (which also included an accessible reading text of Chaucer's originals), and through the Preface which placed him in the company of Ovid and Boccaccio as witty storytellers; Shakespeare is recognized as the presiding genius of the English stage, both through critical evaluations in essays and prologues, and through adaptation and imitation in *The Tempest*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All for Love*; while Milton is increasingly (if unobtrusively) the dominant English voice in Dryden's poetry. It was also largely Dryden who established the canon of Latin and Greek poetry in English, with the help of his publisher Jacob Tonson. Their complete translations of Juvenal, Persius, and Virgil, and their substantial selections from Homer, Horace, Lucretius, Ovid, and others, brought the classics into English with a lucidity and panache missing from most earlier versions. The compact Dryden-Tonson miscellanies, and their handsome folio volumes of Juvenal and Persius, and of Virgil, brought the classics to a non-specialist readership, fashioning in the process a new sense of national culture.⁶⁰

This awareness that Dryden had of his poetic precursors, that his 'companions were not only Oldham, Dorset, and Congreve, but Homer, Virgil, and Shakespeare'⁶¹ (and Milton) aided Dryden's description of his relationship to his poetic forebears in the poem 'To my Dear Friend, Mr. Congreve, On His Comedy, call'd, *The Double Dealer*':

Strong were our Syres; and as they Fought they Writ,
Conqu'ring with force of Arms, and dint of Wit;
Theirs was the Gyant Race, before the Flood;

⁶⁰ Paul Hammond, 'Introduction: Is Dryden a Classic', in *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 8.

⁶¹ Hammond, 'Introduction: Is Dryden a Classic', p. 14.

And thus, when *Charles* Return'd, our Empire stood.
 [...]

 Our Age was cultivated thus at length;
 But what we gain'd in skill we lost in strength.
 Our Builders were, with want of Genius, curst;
 The Second Temple was not like the first.⁶²

It was this passage that prompted W. Jackson Bate to the thoughts that were eventually published as *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*.⁶³

Bate's work helped prompt Bloom to his theory about the role anxiety plays in the relationship of one poet to a precursor poet and the way in which anxiety and poetic influence appear to be inextricably linked.⁶⁴ Earlier thought about canons and canon formation did not stress the anxiety that is noticed by Bate and made central to the workings of influence by Bloom. In some ways, earlier constructions of influence tend to take a more positivist approach to the experience of influence.⁶⁵ While canons and canon formation became hot topics in the later stages of the twentieth century, especially under the auspices of post-colonial literary theory, and these critiques provided new and intriguing ways of questioning, broadening and ultimately strengthening established and

⁶² John Dryden, 'To My Dear Friend, Mr. Congreve, on His Comedy Call'd, *the Double Dealer*', in *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1693-1696*, ed. by A. B. Chambers and William Frost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), ll. 3-6, 11-14.

⁶³ W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1970).

⁶⁴ To begin with, Milton is the poet who creates the most anxiety in later poets. By the mid to late 1990s, Bloom has replaced Milton with Shakespeare as the central figure of the western canon. The essential texts are: Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence : A Theory of Poetry*. 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*. 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon : The Books and School of the Ages*. 1st edn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994); Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary and Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate Limited, 1999); Harold Bloom, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004). A useful, if somewhat dated, analysis of Bloom's theory of influence can be found in Peter de Bolla, *Harold Bloom: Towards Historical Rhetorics* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁶⁵ Two prominent examples are: Leavis, *Revaluation* and T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

emerging canons, they have little to say about the canon of English literature as it grew in its neophyte stages through the eighteenth century.⁶⁶

In *The English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century*, Trevor Ross challenges the assumption that canon formation began in the eighteenth century. Rather, Ross proposes that a shift occurred over the seventeenth century between a canonical consciousness focused on how a text was produced, to a canonical consciousness that was focused on what texts should be read and how they should be read. The latter form of canonical consciousness is one we are still endowed with today as the academy argues not only over who should be read (which authors in which course) but how we should read them (literary theory). The key difference created by the shift is noted early by Ross: ‘Evaluative rankings of authors, for example, only begin to appear in English critical discourse in the mid-eighteenth century’.⁶⁷ As Sons of Ben, both Dryden and Pope are significant individuals in Ross’ illumination of the way in which ideas of ‘the canon’ altered.

Jonson’s presentism then became cultural conservatism with Dryden and Pope, whose strategic pursuit of classicist refinement in poetry enabled them at once to disavow economic interest, to assert their moral autonomy, and to present their work as essential in preserving English society from the commercialization and corruption which they felt was threatening to overtake it.⁶⁸

Both Dryden and Pope were actively engaged in the processes of canonization and both helped in the initial creation of what we now know as the English literary canon.

The English literary canon is an elitist formation, and was intentionally created as such by those who began applying hierarchies to writers in the eighteenth century.

⁶⁶ A classic example of such a post-colonial text would be Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁶⁷ Trevor Ross, *The English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), p. 24.

⁶⁸ Ross, *The English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 197-98.

But, as we have seen above, the canon was important to both Pope and Dryden for both poetic and cultural reasons. Therefore, if this thesis is seeking to see if the poetic use of puns has changed along with critical attitudes, it is worth examining the poets that were highly regarded by Pope and Dryden, poets they were more likely to imitate and be influenced by. Those poets are the ones that today would be referred to as ‘canonical’ poets: Shakespeare, Milton, Jonson, Spenser, Chaucer, Ovid, Virgil, Homer, Juvenal, Horace.

If we seek to link a thread from the eighteenth century to the Renaissance, and if we follow the lead of the eighteenth century canon formers, it might look something like the following: Pope → Dryden → Milton → Spenser. This lineage is reliant upon epic poetry constituting the link between the various poets. However, Milton’s epic poetic practice was not reliant upon all consuming allegory in the same way as Spenser’s.⁶⁹ For that matter, Pope and Dryden, who used allegory for mock-epic purposes, also never used allegory as the primary poetic technique as Spenser did. Some in the Renaissance rated lyric poetry as second only to epic poetry⁷⁰ and the shorter poems of the Renaissance do constitute part of the forge in which Milton’s poetic techniques were tempered. A preferable canonical lineage that we can draw would be Pope → Dryden → Milton → Donne → Shakespeare → Sidney. This lineage has its roots in Renaissance

⁶⁹ The traditional view is that Milton ends traditional allegory (as practiced by Spenser) with the subdued allegorical figures of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*. Such a view, for example, is expounded in Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Towards a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); and later, Michael Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in Its Rise and Decline* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); it can also be found in Catherine Gimelli Martin, *The Ruins of Allegory: Paradise Lost and the Metamorphosis of Epic Convention* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). There have been alternative arguments written about the uses of allegory, for example: Kenneth Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic Form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). But, the predominate view is that traditional allegory for all intents and purposes had its final flowering in *The Faerie Queene*.

⁷⁰ See Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 103.

lyric poetry, moves into Milton's epic poetry, before finishing with the mock-epic and translated epic of Dryden and the early and late mock-epics of Pope.

2 METHODOLOGY

‘...quipproquo of directions...’¹

THE PROBLEM WITH PUNNING

Punning is one of many paths down which madness lies. *Finnegans Wake* is, perhaps, the most thorough deployment of puns in English literature. Umberto Eco noted that the ‘atomic element’ of *Finnegans Wake* is ‘the pun’.² The multilingual and polysyllabic homophony of language is exploited ceaselessly throughout the novel and, when it concludes, where is the reader? Why, right back at the beginning, as Seamus Deane argues when he questions ‘if the first page can be called the start, since its opening sentence really begins on the last page’.³ *Finnegans Wake* is an extreme example of punning, but it does demonstrate the hermeneutic problems that punning can create for the reader. As Eco writes, ‘there are poetic texts whose aim is to show that interpretation can be infinite. I know that *Finnegans Wake* was written for an ideal reader affected by an ideal insomnia’.⁴ Deane is blunter in his assessment: ‘The first thing to say about *Finnegans Wake* is that it is, in an important sense, unreadable’.⁵ The problems that *Finnegans Wake* creates — sustained multiplicity and ambiguity of meaning through multiplying homophonic and homonymic connotations and denotations — are all problems that puns create in critical theories that are, however nervously, still attached to the idea that words mean something.

¹ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 432.

² Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 140.

³ Seamus Deane, ‘Introduction’, in *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. xxix-xxx.

⁴ Umberto Eco, ‘Interpretation and History’, in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 40.

⁵ Deane, ‘Introduction’, p. vii

In order to investigate changing usage of the pun through an historical milieu, it is useful to have a critical apparatus that can aid the investigation with a language suited to analysing puns but which seeks to limit the interpretative excesses that can be the product of ambiguity and polysemy. This chapter outlines such a pragmatic apparatus. It begins by first of all defining what a pun is. The *OED* defines ‘pun’, the noun, as:

the use of a word, in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words.⁶

This definition covers a lot of territory; the initial claim is that a ‘pun’ is an instance of homophony or homonymy, but it ends by stating that a ‘pun’ is ‘a play on words’ which would appear to make any kind of wordplay a ‘pun’. The limitation of this definition is that it does not include any deeper understanding of how puns operate. A second limitation is that for the first third of the period covered by this thesis, from 1590 until roughly 1640, the word ‘pun’ meaning ‘wordplay’ is anachronistic.⁷ This creates a conundrum: if Shakespeare, Jonson, Sidney, Donne and Milton did not use the term ‘pun’ when discussing wordplay then how can they have conceived and understood that practice of wordplay that we term ‘punning’? In order to define what a ‘pun’ is, it is worth exploring its etymology and synonyms to see if English had a native concept that all the poets being studied would have been aware of. While this thesis proposes to use rhetoric to ensure that anachronism is being kept to a minimum, it will explore twentieth and twenty-first century approaches to ‘pun’ and ‘punning’. These explorations are no detour, but, instead, they enable this thesis to approach rhetoric with a firm understanding of what a ‘pun’ is and how its effects are generated; in turn, this

⁶ *OED pun, n.*¹ (1644-1992) Draft Revision Sept. 2009.

⁷ As the above citation indicates, the first example provided by the *OED* is from 1644 while its most recent extract featuring the word ‘pun’ is from 1992.

understanding will aid us in recognizing which rhetorical techniques operate as puns and which do not.

Moreover, the interpretative plenitude that puns and punning can lead to is limited through the application of Umberto Eco's concept of interpretation as compared to overinterpretation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is the historical record of the English language and its manifold performances; in this thesis it becomes the means by which a reasonable limit is placed on possible interpretations of the puns being studied. This is so because this thesis does not anticipate an ideal reader afflicted with an ideal insomnia. Taken together, the twin hermeneutics of rhetoric and Eco's approach to interpretation, constitute the methodology which allows this thesis to investigate puns and punning across one hundred and fifty years of poetic endeavour.

WHAT IS A PUN?

Etymology and Synonyms

The *OED* offers a broad but useful definition of a 'pun' as an instance of homophony, homonymy or wordplay. An older meaning of 'pun' offered by the *OED* is that it was a regional variation of 'pound'.⁸ Johnson tenuously suggested that 'pun' meaning 'pound' and 'pun' meaning 'a word with more than one denotation' might be linked.

I know not whence this word is to be deduced: to *pun*, is to grind or beat with a *pestle*; can *pun* mean an empty sound, like that of a mortar beaten, as *clench*, the old word for *pun*, seems only a corruption of *clink*?⁹

Walter W. Skeat followed Johnson's lead in linking 'pun' to 'pound'¹⁰ and the *OED* still maintains that 'pun' meaning 'wordplay' is of 'Origin unknown. Perhaps shortened <

⁸ *OED pun*, v.² Draft Revision Sept. 2007 and *pound*, v.¹ Draft Revision June 2009.

⁹ Samuel Johnson, 'Pun', in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967).

[PUNCTILIO](#) *n.* or its etymon Italian *puntiglio*, although no exact semantic parallel has been attested for either the English or the Italian word'.¹¹ 'Pun', meaning 'pound' is found in Middle English writings all the way through to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and beyond; while it recognizes the history of 'pun' meaning 'pound', the *OED* claims that there is no etymological connection between 'pun-wordplay' and 'pun-pound'.¹²

The lack of an authorized etymology for 'pun' has provided the opportunity for some wits to develop their own punning etymologies for 'pun', as Jonathan Swift did in 1716.

The Word *Pun* appears to be of Greek Originall. Some derive it from Πύνδαξ, which signifies either *Fundum*, a Bottom, or *Maniebrium gladii*, the handle of a sword. From the former, because this kind of Wit is thought to lye *deeper* than any other...Secondly, from the Handle of a Sword: Because whoever *wields* it will shew something *Bright* and *Sharp* at the *End*: Another and more probable Opinion is that the word *Pun* comes from Πυνθάνομαι; because without *Knowledge*, *hearing* and *Enquiry*, this Gift is not to be obtained. There is a more modern Etymology which I cannot altogether approve, tho' it be highly ingenious: For, the Cantabrigians derive the Word from *Ponticulus* Quasi, *Pun tickle us*, which signifies a *little Bridge*, as ours over *Cam*, where this Art is in highest perfection. Again; others derive it from *Pungo*; because whoever lets a *Pun go* will be sure to make his Adversary *smart*. And to include this Head, I shall not conceal one Originall of this Word assigned by our Adversaryes, from the French word *Punaise*, which signifies a little stinking Insect that gets into the Skin, provokes continual *Itching*, and is with great Difficulty removed. These Gentlemen affirm the same Evils in punning, that it is very offensive to company, that the *Itch* of it is hardly to be cured, and that the Custom of

¹⁰ Walter W. Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, Wordsworth Reference (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993), p. 367.

¹¹ *OED pun, n.*¹. Etymology. Draft Revision June 2008.

¹² *OED pound, v.*¹Draft Revision Sept. 2007. See William Shakespeare, 'Troilus and Cressida', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), II.1.37.

Scratching a man when he makes a Pun, (which is a Rudeness much practised by Abhorrrers) came from the same Originall.¹³

While it is unlikely that any of Swift's etymologies would stand up to the scrutiny of today's lexicographic community, the passage pays homage to the spirit of puns and punning in a way that the other etymologies do not. The multiple punning etymologies that Swift presents are an ideal representation of the multivocal and ambiguous nature of the pun. To the romantically inclined, it is representative of punning wisdom that the most comprehensive treatment of the etymology of 'pun' is a joke that fails to offer a single, conclusive answer. Given that the etymologists have been unable to establish a bona fide etymology for 'pun', we are unable to assert that Renaissance writers, specifically those writing prior to 1644, had a direct antecedent of 'pun' to mean 'play on words'.

'Pun', though, is not the only English word to mean 'play on words'. It has four synonyms and we should find out if they are anachronistic or not. The synonyms are 'quibble', 'equivocation', 'cavil', and 'clench'. Johnson links 'pun' to 'quibble' and 'equivocation'. His definition of 'pun' is: 'PUN. An equivocation; a quibble; an expression where a Word has at once different meanings'.¹⁴ The *OED* defines 'quibble' as 'a play on words, a pun'.¹⁵ This follows Johnson's definition of 'quibble' as 'a very low conceit depending on the sounds of words; a pun'.¹⁶ The second edition of the *OED* states that in 1611 'quibble' was first used to mean 'pun' but the 2008 draft revision of the word has changed the date of its first use to approximately 1627.¹⁷ So, while it is

¹³ Jonathan Swift, 'A Modest Defence of Punning', in *A Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue Polite Conversation, Etc.*, ed. by Herbert Davis with Louis Landa (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), pp. 205-06.

¹⁴ Johnson, 'Pun',

¹⁵ *OED quibble*, n. 1. (a1627-1993) Draft Revision December 2008.

¹⁶ Samuel Johnson, 'Quibble', in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967).

¹⁷ *OED quibble*, n. 1. (2nd Edition 1989 and Draft Revision Dec. 2008)

contested when ‘quibble’ was first used to mean ‘pun’, it suffers from the same issue — it is anachronistic when used to describe early Renaissance writing habits.

‘Equivocation’ is derived from the late Latin *æquivocus* meaning ‘ambiguous’. It is a portmanteau word which combines *æquus*, ‘equal’, and *vocāre*, ‘to call’.¹⁸ The earliest example cited by the *OED* comes from 1380 and is defined as:

using (a word) in more than one sense; ambiguity or uncertainty of meaning in words; also [cf. Sp. *Equivocacion*], misapprehension arising from the ambiguity of terms.¹⁹

This meaning is now obsolete, and was last used by Coleridge in 1809-10.²⁰ The word has a second meaning, also obsolete, but extant between 1605 and 1856.

The use of words or expressions that are susceptible of a double signification, with a view to mislead; *esp.* the expression of a virtual falsehood in the form of a proposition which (in order to satisfy the speaker’s conscience) is verbally true.²¹

The first recorded use of ‘equivocation’ in this second sense, according the *OED*, is in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*: ‘To doubt th’equivocation of the fiend, | That lies like truth’.²²

Obviously, both meanings are extant for the period this thesis examines, but both denotations are still too broad — the ‘use [of] (a word) in more than one sense’ and the ‘use of words or expressions that are susceptible of a double signification’ — doing little to narrow or define what a ‘pun’ could be. What the definition of ‘equivocation’ does do, that the definition of ‘pun’ does not, is highlight the slipperiness of language and the possibility of confusion and mistakes being made by those interpreting the language. These two denotations would seem to differentiate between an honest error and the

¹⁸ *OED equivocal*, *a.* and *n.* Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁹ *OED equivocation*, **1.** (c1380-1809-10) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *OED equivocation*, **2.** (1605-1856) 2nd Edition 1989.

²² William Shakespeare, ‘Macbeth’, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), V.v.41-42.

malicious or pernicious use of language in order to deceive and confuse. While it is true that not all puns are used to mislead (indeed, as we shall see later, Empson regards some puns as not being ambiguous or confusing at all) it is true that multiplicity of meaning can lead to confusion. This multiplicity of meaning, this ‘uncertainty of meaning in words’, this capability of ‘double signification’ is another way of describing the endless play of signifiers that deconstruction celebrated. But, as Macbeth pointedly makes clear, when the word ‘equivocation’ is used to refer to that uncertainty of meaning or play of signification, it carries with it the odour of hell and deliberate, malicious, linguistic trickery.

Connotations of linguistic trickery, although of another domain, also infect the definition of ‘cavil’. A ‘cavil’ was ‘a captious, quibbling, or frivolous objection’.²³ It is the shortened form of ‘cavillation’ which the *OED* defines as:

In early use, *esp.* The making of captious, frivolous, quibbling, or unfair objections, arguments, or charges, in legal proceedings; the use of legal quibbles, or taking advantage of technical flaws, so as to overreach or defraud; hence, chicanery, trickery, overreaching sophistry.²⁴

While ‘cavillation’ began as a legal term, by Shakespeare’s time it had moved into general usage. But, it is not completely a pun. The legal objection could be a quibble, but it could also simply be a frivolous or captious objection. No doubt the three often combine, but, technically a frivolous objection could be a ‘cavil’ without being a ‘quibble’ or ‘pun’. Therefore, while ‘cavil’ is not anachronistic when applied to the period this thesis studies, it does go beyond the scope of meaning ‘play on words’.

The last synonym for ‘pun’ is ‘clench’ or ‘clinch’ as it is sometimes known. The sixth definition provided by the *OED* for ‘clinch’ is a ‘sharp repartee that twists or turns

²³ *OED cavil*, n. 1. (1570-1850) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁴ *OED cavillation*, 1.a. (c1340-1636) 2nd Edition 1989.

about the meaning of a word: a word-play, a pun. Also CLENCH'.²⁵ The fourth meaning given for 'clench' is 'a play on words, pun, quibble'.²⁶ 'Clench' and 'clinch' are interesting for two reasons; firstly, they do not carry the negative connotations that attach themselves to 'quibble', 'cavil' or 'equivocation'. Secondly, 'clench' and 'clinch' would, perhaps, support the old meaning of 'pun' as 'pound' being a valid etymology for 'pun' meaning 'play on words'. The two words were both building terms used to describe a nail bent back and driven again into the wood it has just passed through.²⁷ The action is to stop the nail protruding but it also effectively doubles the nail to fasten it in the wood. When applied figuratively or metaphorically, this definition then becomes 'To make firm and sure (a matter, assertion, argument, bargain, etc.); to drive home; to make conclusive, confirm, establish'²⁸ or 'To fix, confirm, drive home, settle conclusively (an argument, a bargain, etc.); usually with the notion of fastening securely by a finishing stroke'.²⁹ When 'clench' and 'clinch' are figuratively applied to argument it is metaphorically utilizing the way in which the nail would secure the wood; however, it is the doubling of the nail which is the metaphorical link between 'clench', 'clinch' and 'pun'. But, it is a constructive doubling as opposed to the legalistic doubling of 'quibble' and 'cavil' or the malicious doubling of 'equivocation'. To 'pun' or 'pound' materials in a pestle is also a constructive action. Be it spices or building materials, 'To break down and crush by beating, with or as with a pestle; to reduce to a pulp or powder; to pulverize'³⁰ is more violent than any definition for 'clinch' and 'clench', but it does not carry the negative association of legal trickery or malicious ambiguity. It does, however,

²⁵ *OED clinch*, n.¹ **6**. (1630-1774) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁶ *OED clench*, n. **II.4**. (1638-1824) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁷ *OED clinch*, v.¹ **1**. (1250-1869) 2nd Edition 1989; *clinch*, v.¹ **1**. (1570-1883) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁸ *OED clinch*, v.¹ **5**. (1716-1868) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁹ *OED clench*, v.¹ **6**. (c1677-1883) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁰ *OED pound*, v.¹ **1.a**. (OE-1600) Draft Revision March 2009.

convey some sense of how words can be constituted of different meanings, that we can break down a word when we start using it to denote more than one meaning at a time. Also, homophonic puns do tend to break words down into individual sound units highlighting and drawing attention to the constitutive syllables of words that generally pass by unnoticed. Still, while the argument adds a metaphorical power to the argument that ‘pun’ the trope could have been derived from ‘pun’ the variant of ‘pound’, this is moving this thesis into Swiftian waters that the *OED* is unlikely to authorize.

To summarize, the terms ‘pun’ and ‘quibble’ are anachronistic when applied to Elizabethan and Jacobean poets. Also, all the pun-like denotations available for the five terms, ‘quibble’, ‘equivocation’, ‘cavil’, and ‘clench’, and ‘clinch’ are still rather broad on how they work as a punning technique. Importantly, what the synonyms of ‘pun’ demonstrate is that poets who live and wrote from 1590 to 1740 had native English terms for ‘pun’ and so this project itself is not anachronistic. Further, a noticeable feature of this examination of ‘pun’ and its synonyms is that ‘pun’ came into existence as neo-classical poetics was searching for a pejorative term for verbal wit that it did not appreciate. For those critics who established and elaborated neo-classical poetics, ‘pun’ was something of a blank slate with which they could do as they pleased. It did not carry the baggage that ‘equivocation’, ‘cavil’ and ‘clench’ carried. With ‘pun’, and to some extent ‘quibble’, the critics of the eighteenth century had words that enabled them to focus attention on the technique itself rather than the ends to which the technique was used. Where do we turn, then, for a working definition of ‘pun’ that is not an anachronism and which provides us with enough detail of its workings to help explain how poets are using it? Initially at least, twentieth and twenty-first century analyses of puns and punning can deepen our understanding of how puns operate.

The Contemporary Pun

Simon Alderson argues, in ‘The Augustan Attack on the Pun’, that modern criticism demonstrates three main approaches to puns: 1) universalizing, 2) trying to explain how the pun works, and 3) using the pun to talk about a particular author.³¹ To this, we might add a fourth category, the taxonomic effort to name and define different kinds of techniques that are all puns but which operate in slightly different ways. Walter Redfern typifies the first, universalizing approach to the pun. In *Puns: More Senses than One*, Redfern sweeps through history and geographical locations to prove that punning is a universal constant in any language. From ancient Greece to contemporary France, he dips his fingers in here and there to pull out and display a multitude of puns. When Redfern defines the pun, though, he leaves it as open as possible. ‘Perhaps all we really need, in terms of rhetorical nomenclature, is the idea of trope: a pun is figurative use of a word or phrase’.³² Indeed, by the end of Redfern’s book, we are no closer to a definition of the word.

Here, there is a bit of everything. I make no apologies. The pun *is* a bit of everything: logic and illogicality, reason and madness, gratuitousness and pointedness. A bastard, a melting-pot, a hotchpot, a potlatch, potluck.³³

Redfern’s book is an entertaining and informative look at the pun, but he is given to generalization: ‘Where Shakespeare paraded, Milton camouflaged’.³⁴ To some extent this sentiment may be true, but this thesis will demonstrate that, in Milton’s case in particular, it is not that simple. For Redfern, because of the vastness of his historical scope, it can not be any more complex or it would take up more room than he has

³¹ Alderson, ‘The Augustan Attack on the Pun’, pp. 1-2.

³² Redfern, *Puns: More Senses Than One*, p. 96.

³³ Redfern, *Puns: More Senses Than One*, p. 217.

³⁴ Redfern, *Puns: More Senses Than One*, p. 57.

available. This thesis aims to examine in detail various uses that were made of puns; for that purpose, Redfern's definition of a pun as 'a trope' is a little too broad.

The second approach that Alderson identifies, that of trying to explain how a pun works, has two main theoretical approaches. Initially, in the 1950s and 1960s formalist and structuralist critics such as Brown in 'Eight Types of Pun' and Kelly in 'Punning and the Linguistic Sign' attempted to bring the principles and ideals of structuralism to help in the analysis of puns. Structuralism resulted in post-structuralism and, of the post-structuralists, it was the deconstructionists who demonstrated the most affinity for puns. Jonathan Culler edited a collection of essays that demonstrated a wide range of opinions and critically nuanced approaches to explaining how puns work. The collection was entitled *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters* and it illustrates both the diversity but also the critical similarities of post-structuralist approaches to punning. Some essayists take a Lacanian psychoanalytical approach towards puns; others take an historical approach examining puns in Latin and Ancient Greek; yet others examine pun subspecies like the rhyme pun.³⁵ But, nobody makes a committed effort to define 'pun' *per se*. The stated aim is to

explore the various manifestations of that opposition [the view that puns are the lowest form of wit] and ways in which puns might challenge it. Committed to the view that puns are not a marginal form of wit but an exemplary product of language or mind, these essays share an interest in what puns show about the functioning of language, or literature, or the psyche.³⁶

So it is no surprise to find a little later down the page a rather broad conception of 'pun'.

³⁵ See: Frederick Ahl, 'Ars Est Caelare Artem (Art in Puns and Anagrams Engraved)', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988); Derek Attridge, 'Unpacking the Portmanteau, or Who's Afraid of *Finnegans Wake*?', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988); Debra Fried, 'Rhyme Puns', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988).

³⁶ Jonathan Culler, 'The Call of the Phoneme: Introduction', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), p. 4.

Nowhere is the shakiness of the foundation clearer than in the shifty relation between letter and sound: the two meanings brought forth by a pun may be evoked by various similarities of sounds and letters. Most often, in English, different letters shadow forth the difference of meaning borne by similar sound sequences: *puns aren't just some antics*. Homophones are for us the very type of the pun ('They went and told the sexton—And the sexton tolled the bell'), but there are many other possible configurations, including the pure play of the letter in anagrams, which makes Ronald Wilson Reagan an *insane Anglo warlord* or that in French the demon (*demon*) lies hidden in the world (*monde*).

Scholars have sought to define and classify puns, but the results have never met with success. Since the essays in this volume take pun as paradigm for the play of language, they do not seek to circumscribe it or discriminate it from other sorts of wordplay.³⁷

Culler and Redfern take a similar, open, embracing approach to puns and punning which seeks to allow the broadest possible conception of punning. Further, Culler goes so far as to intimate that a satisfactory definition of 'pun' might not really ever be possible, given that all previous efforts have 'never met with success'. The lesson here, though, is that puns push the boundaries of signification and, while we may endeavour to apply reasonable limits to puns' powers of signification, we should always be wary of that power backfiring upon us. As we have seen with Swift's etymologies, recognizing the untameable, malleable nature of the pun is vital to any understanding of how it operates. But, this thesis requires a workable framework for understanding 'pun' and taking the broad church approach advocated by Redfern and Culler is not the framework best suited to this thesis' purpose.

Culler and Redfern are emblematic of late twentieth century approaches to punning. The very openness that both celebrate can be seen as a reaction to the circumscribed, prescriptive efforts of the structuralist critics who preceded them. We

³⁷ Culler, 'The Call of the Phoneme: Introduction', pp. 4-5.

now turn to structuralist efforts to define and explain the ‘pun’. James Brown bases his formalist effort on the central idea, not disputed by anyone, that ‘the pun effect, it seems, results from some kind of greatly accelerated or simultaneous perception of multiple meanings’.³⁸ He then contends that:

puns fall into two large classes or groups, defined by the relation which holds between the syntactical assertion of the sentence (which I will call its syntax) in which the pun occurs and the total meaning of that sentence (which I will call its sense).³⁹

Group one covers sentences whose syntax is literal to the sense while the second group covers sentences whose syntax is metaphorical to the sense, or in Brown’s words, ‘sentences whose total meanings differ from their syntactical assertions’.⁴⁰ Each group is broken down into four categories which then demonstrate how the pun creates a multiplicity of meaning. The four categories are: 1) the pun is literal to both syntax and sense; 2) the pun is literal to the syntax and metaphoric to sense; 3) the pun is metaphoric to syntax and literal to sense; 4) the pun is metaphoric to syntax and sense.⁴¹ Despite Brown’s best intentions, his framework is perhaps too convoluted to render it usable for this thesis. What he does bring to our attention is the way in which puns affect the overall meaning of a sentence. Often the focus is upon the multiple denotation of the homophone or homonym and in some circumstances, that is acceptable but in others, the real issue is the way in which the multi-vocal nature of the pun affects the structure within which it occurs.

L. G. Kelly also claims that there are two different essential types of pun:

For the purposes of this article, the pun can be divided into two classes. The first type of pun is a direct linguistic reflection of two different qualities inhering in

³⁸ James Brown, ‘Eight Types of Pun’, *PMLA*, 71 (1956), p. 14.

³⁹ Brown, ‘Eight Types of Pun’, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰ Brown, ‘Eight Types of Pun’, pp. 18-22.

⁴¹ Brown, ‘Eight Types of Pun’, pp. 18-22.

the reality described: linguistic ambivalence corresponds to the ambivalent situation. In the second, linguistic ambivalence depends on the linguistic interplay between linguistic units in context.⁴²

Kelly concludes that puns are a result of ‘functional ambivalence and inherent ambivalence’ in the semantic sign.⁴³ Essentially, either the context of the sentence allows a double meaning or there is an instance of slippage in the linguistic unit that allows the ambiguity, slippage being my gloss for ‘polysemy and homonymy’.⁴⁴ This thesis will go on to support Kelly’s basic premise that puns can be created by context or that polysemy, homonymy, and we should add homophony, can result in a word bearing more than one meaning. This thesis will move beyond Kelly when it asserts that polysemy, homonymy and homophony can be used to create and open contexts within which more puns can exist.

Another stream of criticism within which puns are scrutinized is composed of that body of work which examines the punning habits of individual authors. Unfortunately, when critics use puns to investigate a single author, they rarely define precisely what a pun is. M. M. Mahood fails to define what either ‘pun’, ‘wordplay’, or ‘quibble’ mean in her landmark work *Shakespeare’s Wordplay*. The closest she gets to a definition of ‘pun’ is to cite Sister Miriam Joseph’s argument for a rhetorical approach only to dismiss it in favour of the loose terms ‘pun’, ‘wordplay’ and ‘quibble’.⁴⁵ In *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton’s English Poetry*, Edward Le Comte defines ‘pun’ as ‘a catch-all term for ambiguity of vocabulary or syntax’.⁴⁶ Such approaches are part of the

⁴² L. G. Kelly, 'Punning and the Linguistic Sign', *Linguistics*, 66 (1971), p. 5.

⁴³ Kelly, 'Punning and the Linguistic Sign', p. 10.

⁴⁴ Kelly, 'Punning and the Linguistic Sign', p. 10.

⁴⁵ M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 18. See also Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947) p. 165.

⁴⁶ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. vii.

Redfern and Culler open church definition of ‘pun’ and consequently have little to directly offer this thesis.

The taxonomical approach to punning is perhaps best exemplified by Hammond and Hughes’ book *Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures*.⁴⁷ With the added twist of examining pun effects in pictures, Hammond and Hughes attempt to show how puns are organized into two basic categories which can then be broken down into a number of specific types. Their basic categories are homophones and homonyms. Very early on, Hammond and Hughes conclude that a ‘pun’ is a homophone whereas a homonym should properly be called a ‘play on words’.⁴⁸ They propose a change in nomenclature because, they claim, puns are ‘capricious and irrational’ as they are based upon sound similarity while the ‘play on words’ is ‘rational and erudite’ due to its etymological base.⁴⁹ However, they do admit that in some ‘rare’ cases a pun can be a homonym and a play on words can be a homophone.⁵⁰ They then go on to include, under the heading of ‘pun’ the spoonerism, malapropism and portmanteau word; while the double entendre and Tom Swifty are counted as examples of ‘playing on words’. In terms of this thesis, the flaw at the heart of their system is that the very categories they establish in the first two pages become inextricably mixed five pages later. However, their basic surmise is that if you think a pun requires ‘rational and erudite’ thinking then it is not a pun but a play on words, on the other hand, if a pun seems to be driven by accidental sound similarity or some other ‘capricious’ element then it is indeed a pun.

⁴⁷ Paul Hammond and Patrick Hughes, *Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures* (London: W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1978). This is the standard scholarly taxonomy of punning. While it is now dated, it has yet to be seriously superseded. Taxonomies for the public also appear, on example being Paul Clarke & Joan Sauers, *Pundemonium: The Step-by-Schlep Guide to Humour's Lowest Form* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1996). While entertaining, such texts are little more than an opportunity to print a catalogue of famous puns and hence are of limited use in this thesis.

⁴⁸ Hammond & Hughes, *Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁹ Hammond & Hughes, *Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Hammond & Hughes, *Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures*, pp. 7-8.

Hammond and Hughes provide a valuable collection of punning terms and effects but their work is of limited use for the purposes of this thesis because the vast majority of the terms are anachronistic when applied to the poetry this thesis will examine.

This division of puns into two camps has occurred again elsewhere under the terminology 'good pun' versus 'bad pun'.

A good pun is one in which the polysemy intrinsic to language is allowed to play for a strictly measured amount of time before being sorted out and tidied away.

Bad puns, by contrast, are less amenable to such interpretive straightening, divided not into two neat signifieds which combine with satirical effect but rather into a plethora of half-suggested meanings which, if adding nothing obviously relevant to the context in hand, are branded as altogether extraneous.⁵¹

Catherine Bates, as well as highlighting the common everyman division of puns, highlights an area that critics need to be aware of: 'the critic still has to keep puns to the point, still has to act as if some, or even most, words can be treated as relatively stable and assumed to mean what they say'.⁵² The bad pun, the one that causes all the trouble for critics is, of course, what is celebrated by Culler, Redfern and others. Yet even this framework of 'good pun' and 'bad pun' does little to solve my problem. The very division of puns into 'good' or 'bad' is a value decision that does not bear on how the pun is being used. Bates, it should be acknowledged, does not validate the value judgement inherent in the labels 'good' and 'bad'; unfortunately, once the label has been deployed, the value judgement exists to some extent. The anti-pun attitude, still alive in the classifications of 'good pun' and 'bad pun', once attracted the following criticism:

The assumption that puns are *per se* contemptible betrayed by the habit of describing every pun not as *a pun*, but as *a bad pun* or *a feeble pun* is a sign at

⁵¹ Catherine Bates, 'The Point of Puns', *Modern Philology*, 96 (1999), p. 429.

⁵² Bates, 'The Point of Puns', p. 427.

once of sheepish docility and desire to seem superior. Puns are good, bad, and indifferent, and only those who lack the wit to make them are unaware of the fact.⁵³

Fowler remains a contentious figure but his approach to puns, unlike Bates', recognizes that there will be good puns, indifferent puns, and poor puns just as there exist good similes, indifferent similes and poor similes. While Bates, however, attempts to go deeper than Fowler, her essential differentiation between the good and bad pun is a division we have seen before in Hammond and Hughes between the 'rational and erudite' and the 'irrational and capricious', between the homonymic and the homophonic.

Bates draws attention to the key issue that modern approaches to punning do not resolve — how to usefully control the potentially infinite polysemy that puns can lead to. Modern approaches, however, have yielded some useful insights into how puns operate. In English, as Hammond and Hughes assert, 'punning' is the use of homophony or homonymy within a text. As Brown noticed, puns will affect the context in which they appear, doubling or tripling not just itself but the phrase, sentence, poem or paragraph in which they appear. Culler and Redfern highlight the ability of puns to question and subvert the texts in which they appear and they rightly point out that this subversion can be intended and, as Freud powerfully asserted early in the twentieth-century, unintended. As we move into an examination of rhetorical techniques that rely upon the homophony and homonymy of words, it is worthwhile to keep the deconstructive and psychoanalytical understanding of puns in our minds — we need to be alert to the ways in which rhetorical puns will evade us even as we attempt to define them.

⁵³ H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. 1st edn, *Oxford Language Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 474.

A Linguistic and Cultural Treasury of Punning Terms

It is not a new argument that knowledge of rhetoric aids in the reading of texts written between the Renaissance and eighteenth century.⁵⁴ Indeed, the classical art of rhetoric was the dominant hermeneutic of the period this thesis examines: from 1590 to 1740. Rhetoric could be the framework that this thesis requires to avoid the anachronism inherent in the term 'pun'. Brian Vickers argues that all writers of the Renaissance through to the Eighteenth Century, would have been trained in classical rhetoric through the education system of the time.

We may posit that Dr Johnson and Burke had essentially the same education as Hooker and Bacon, and it was not till the reform of the curricula and the rise of modern subjects in the nineteenth century that the rhetorical education becomes reduced to one simply in classics, just one subject amongst many.⁵⁵

For Vickers, knowledge of rhetoric is vital to any attempt to understand the mind of a writer from the English Renaissance until the change in education in the nineteenth century.

If you cannot pick up a list of figures and read it through avidly, thinking of all the instances of their application and re-creation in Petrarch or Racine, Shakespeare or Milton, then you have not yet thought yourself back into a Renaissance frame of mind.⁵⁶

A clear example of Vickers' point is provided by Addison writing in *The Spectator*:

⁵⁴ See Marjorie Donker and George M. Muldrow, *Dictionary of Literary-Rhetorical Conventions of the English Renaissance* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982); Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*. 1st edn (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1970); Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968); Marion Trousedale, 'Rhetoric', in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); Peter Dixon, *Rhetoric*, ed. by John D. Jump, *The Critical Idiom* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971); Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Leslie O'Dell, *Shakespearean Language: A Guide for Actors and Students* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, p. 283.

Upon Enquiry, I found my learned Friend had dined that Day with Mr. *Swan*, the famous Punnster, and desiring him to give me some Account of Mr. *Swan*'s Conversation, he told me that he generally talked in the *Paronomasia*, that he sometimes gave into the *Plocè*, but that in his humble Opinion he shined most in the *Antanaclasis*.⁵⁷

This thesis seeks to discuss punning as demonstrated here by Addison's learned friend, as far as possible using the terminology of rhetoric to investigate acts of punning within poetry of the time. This is an underexplored contemporary framework for the analysis of poetic conduct that we now label 'punning'.

Rhetoric has four figures that are clearly based on punning effects of language and one figure that is a borderline case. The four clear punning rhetorical figures are *antanaclasis*, *asteismus*, *paronomasia* and *syllipsis*, while the borderline figure is *polyptoton*. Because definitions of these figures are not wholly agreed upon in the academic community, we will now explore these five tropes, synthesize descriptions for them with the aid of previous criticism, and thereby establish a framework which can be deployed to discuss puns and punning between 1590 and 1740 with a minimum of anachronism. A schematic summary of the following section is contained in 'Appendix 1' for ease of reference.

ANTANACLASIS

Antanaclasis is a technique whereby a word is repeated and the meaning shifts with each instance of the word. Or, as Vickers defines it, 'where a word is used twice (or more) in two (or more) of its senses'.⁵⁸ Several other sources define antanaclasis in much the same manner. Gideon Burton defines it as 'the repetition of a word or phrase whose

⁵⁷ Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 61, Thursday, May 10, 1711', pp. 260-61.

⁵⁸ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, p. 491.

meanings change in the second instance'.⁵⁹ Antanaclasis 'requires the repetition of a word in an altered sense' according to Walter Nash.⁶⁰ The *OED* states that antanaclasis is a 'figure of speech, "when the same word is repeated in a different, if not in a contrary signification"'.⁶¹ Richard A. Lanham suggests 'One word used in two contrasting, usually comic, senses';⁶² while he cross references antanaclasis with paronomasia, Lanham also argues that antanaclasis is the 'classical term closest to a plain English pun'.⁶³ A well known English Renaissance rhetorician, George Puttenham, defined antanaclasis as a term that 'playeth with one word written all alike but carrying divers senses'.⁶⁴

Here is an antanaclasis from Alexander Pope: 'All seems **Infected** that th' **Infected** spy' (bold mine).⁶⁵ The first use of 'infected' signifies 'tainted with disease or infectious properties'.⁶⁶ However, around the time Pope was writing, it could also mean 'Discoloured; stained; tinged'.⁶⁷ Another meaning of 'infected' according to the *OED* is 'Of persons or animals, the body or its parts, the mind'.⁶⁸ Combining antanaclasis with synecdoche, Pope turns 'infected' from a universal adjective into the word that signifies those who look at the world and interpret it through a characteristic of their own. We could rewrite the line as 'everything appears diseased to those who look at the world while they are diseased'. Such a construction repeats the same word but does not complete the same twist, or change in meaning, that Pope creates when he repeats

⁵⁹Gideon O. Burton, 'Silva Rhetoricae', Brigham Young University, (1996-2003) <<http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>> [Accessed 30/11 2006], antanaclasis.

⁶⁰ Walter Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 117.

⁶¹ *OED antanaclasis*, 1. (1657-1711) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶² Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, p. 12.

⁶³ Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 207.

⁶⁵ Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', in *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One Volume Edition of the Twickenham Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1963), ln. 558.

⁶⁶ *OED infected*, ppl. a. 1. (1480-1897) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁷ *OED infected*, ppl. a. 3. (1701-1713) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁸ *OED infected*, ppl. a. 1.b. (1597-1828) 2nd Edition 1989.

‘infected’. The antanaclasis as used by Pope, mimics in reverse the condition that he is describing: the way in which a particular issue or concern can come to dominate and determine how an individual interprets the world.

ASTEISMUS

This rhetorical technique is primarily used by playwrights because it requires two speakers. Gideon Burton defines it as ‘a figure of reply in which the answerer catches a certain word and throws it back to the first speaker with an unexpected twist’.⁶⁹ A simple example comes from an early Shakespeare play:

Antipholus of Syracuse: Where is the thousand **marks** thou hadst of me?
 Dromio of Ephesus: I have some **marks** of yours upon my pate,
 Some of my mistress’ **marks** upon my shoulders,
 But not a thousand **marks** between you both.
 (Bold mine.)⁷⁰

Where Antipholus means money or coins, it is clear that Dromio means bruises. Both meanings can be found for ‘mark’ in the *OED*.⁷¹ Part of the humour in this short extract is created by Dromio’s use of asteismus. He takes Antipholus’ word and changes the meaning to celebrate his own misfortune and luck in not having a ‘thousand marks’.

A second, subtler, example can be found in *Hamlet*:

Guildenstern: The King, Sir—
 Hamlet: Ay, sir, what of him?
 Guildenstern: Is in his retirement marvellous **distempered**.
 Hamlet: With drink, sir?
 Guildenstern: No, my lord, rather with **choler**.
 Hamlet: Your wisdom would show itself more richer to signify
 this to his doctor, for for me to put him to his purgation would

⁶⁹ Burton, 'Silva Rhetoricae' asteismus.

⁷⁰ William Shakespeare, 'The Comedy of Errors', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), I.ii.81-84.

⁷¹ *OED mark*, n.² 2. (OE-1892) Draft Revision Sept. 2008; *OED mark*, n.¹ V.19.a. (OE-1994) Draft Revision June 2009.

perhaps plunge him into far more **choler**.

(Bold mine.)⁷²

To begin with, we should take note of the possible meanings of ‘distempered’. Firstly, we begin with what Guildenstern presumably intends to signify with it: ‘a being out of humour; ill humour, ill temper; uneasiness; disaffection’.⁷³ Given that the King has just witnessed the play in which Hamlet has, as he hoped, caught the conscience of the King, it is legitimate to presume that the King is ill tempered and feeling uneasy. However, ‘distempered’ bears two more meanings pertinent to the extract above. The verb ‘distemper’ can mean ‘*spec.* to intoxicate; *refl.* to get drunk’.⁷⁴ It is this meaning that Hamlet uses to reply to Guildenstern with the question, ‘With drink, sir?’. The third meaning reinforces Hamlet’s agile second reply — ‘deranged or disordered condition of the body or mind (formerly regarded as due to disordered state of the humours); ill health, illness, disease’.⁷⁵ This meaning is part of what prompts Hamlet’s response to Guildenstern’s statement that the King is in a the throes of ‘choler’ by which Guildenstern intends to denote that the King is inhabiting an emotional state ruled by ‘anger’.⁷⁶ Hamlet, however, interprets ‘choler’ as signifying ‘bile viewed as a malady or disease’.⁷⁷ This, of course, would require ‘purgation’ as Hamlet suggests — although we know that Hamlet’s purgation would likely leave the King dead which would indeed, ‘plunge him into far more choler’. Until his final use of ‘choler’, Hamlet is content to deliberately misinterpret Guildenstern and he does this through asteismus. While Hamlet only once actually returns the word to Guildenstern, he quite clearly wants Guildenstern

⁷² William Shakespeare, ‘Hamlet’, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephan Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), III.ii.274-81.

⁷³ *OED distemper*, n.¹ 3. (a1555-1850) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁴ *OED distemper*, v.¹ 4.c. (1491-1679) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁵ *OED distemper*, n.¹ 4. (1598-1873) 2nd Edition 1989. (The *OED*’s first two examples, dated 1598 and 1602, are taken from Shakespeare, *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Hamlet* respectively.)

⁷⁶ *OED choler*, n.¹ 2. (1530-1858) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁷ *OED choler*, n.¹ 1.c. (c1386-1683) 2nd Edition 1989.

to realize which word he is playing with. And Guildenstern clearly does, because he attempts to clarify and correct the first perceived miscommunication. Hamlet will not let him off the hook so easily, though, and pounces upon a second possible asteismus.

Rhetoric began as a verbal practice amongst ancient Greeks and it is easy to see the use of asteismus in the verbal cut and thrust between lawyers and politicians. In the Renaissance, as the world was moving towards a print culture, asteismus became a favoured technique of the stage because the stage is, primarily, an oral medium of language. In epic poetry, characters tend to make long set speeches that do not replicate the repartee common in conversation. As has been demonstrated above, a repetition of a word in one speech that shifts meaning is, in actual fact, an instance of antanaclasis. Poetry, especially lyric and epic poetry, rarely contains conversations conducted in the quick-fire manner in which asteismus is regularly deployed. Due to this, asteismus is not referred to often in this thesis.⁷⁸

PARONOMASIA

Paronomasia as a term has come to signify the act of punning as the *OED* makes clear when it defines ‘paronomasia’ as ‘Wordplay based on words which sound alike; an instance of this, a pun’.⁷⁹ Critics differ in their conception of paronomasia. Some, like Vickers and Burton claim that it requires two or more words in proximity to each other and which sound similar but differ in sense.⁸⁰ According to Vickers, Burton, and the *OED*, a paronomasia is an example of an homophonic pun. Nash is as vague as the *OED* when he claims that paronomasia ‘can be taken as an inclusive term for the whole family

⁷⁸ Any work dedicated to an examination of puns in plays throughout this period would find that asteismus rapidly becomes part of its working vocabulary.

⁷⁹ *OED paronomasia*, n. (1577-2001) Draft Revision Dec. 2007.

⁸⁰ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, p. 497; Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, p. 143; Burton, ‘*Silva Rhetoricae*’ paronomasia.

of puns — of which there are species and sub-species’.⁸¹ Puttenham, like Vickers and Burton, seems to argue that two or more words are involved, paronomasia for him being ‘a figure by which ye play with a couple of words or names much resembling’.⁸² However, when providing an example of paronomasia, Puttenham is less clear.

As, *Tiberius* the Emperor, because he was a great drinker of wine, they called him by way of derision to his owne name, *Calsius Biberius Mero*, in steade of *Claudius Tiberius Nero*: and so a jesting friar that wrate against *Erasmus*, called him by resemblance to his own name, *Errans mus*, and are maintained by this figure *Prosonomasie*, or the Nicknamer.⁸³

In Puttenham’s example, a friar attacking Erasmus in writing utilized a homophonic pun when labeling Erasmus ‘*Errans mus*’ (which Burton translates as ‘errant mouse’⁸⁴) but it is unclear whether the friar used the name ‘Erasmus’ anywhere near ‘*Errans mus*’. The first example, however, makes clear that the name played upon did not have to be present because the homophonically similar ‘*Calsius Biberius Mero*’ was used ‘in steade of *Claudius Tiberius Nero*’.

For the purposes of this thesis it is not ideal that paronomasia signifies ‘the whole family of puns’ but it should not be the case that we abide by the strict definitions provided by Vickers and Burton in which paronomasia requires that a word be followed by its homophone. What that definition fails to account for is the use of a word or words where the homophone is implied but is not written into the text as a separate word or words. What all the definitions of paronomasia have in common is that the words played upon sound alike, that all examples of paronomasia are homophones. So, whether the example has one or two words in the text, if it is homophonically based, then this thesis will treat it as an example of paronomasia. We already have one term that covers a word

⁸¹ Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion*, p. 124.

⁸² Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 202.

⁸³ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 203.

⁸⁴ Burton, ‘*Silva Rhetoricae*’ paronomasia.

being repeated and its meaning changing — antanaclasis — and this slightly more open definition of paronomasia will allow me to talk about homophonic word play that includes both single word homophones as well as instances of a word followed on the page by its homophone. As shown by Puttenham’s example, while this might not have been the most common conception in the Renaissance, it was an accepted one. If not, he would not have phrased the punning name included ‘in steade of’ Tiberius’ actual name.

SYLLEPSIS

The fifth and final rhetorical technique that has a pun-like effect is syllepsis. Syllepsis has often been, and still is, confused and conflated with zeugma. The reason for this is that they both appear to be doing the same thing but in reality one is a subtype of the other as Burton states when defining zeugma.

A general term describing when one part of speech (most often the main verb, but sometimes a noun) governs two or more other parts of a sentence (often in a series). Zeugma is sometimes used as a synonym for syllepsis, though that term is better understood as a more specific kind of zeugma: when there is disparity in the way that the parallel members relate to the governing word (as a vice or for comic effect).⁸⁵

Perhaps the most famous zeugma in English literature is that of Pope’s from *The Rape of the Lock*: ‘Here Thou, Great *Anna!* whom three Realms obey, | Dost sometimes Counsel **take** — and sometimes *Tea*’ (*RL* III.7-8 bold mine). Clearly, ‘take’ does not change meaning at all but it governs both the phrases ‘sometimes Counsel’ as well as ‘sometimes *Tea*’. Let us compare this to a syllepsis that we have already encountered earlier in this thesis.

As many quit the streams that murm’ring fall
To lull the sons of Marg’ret and Clare-hall,
Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport

⁸⁵ Burton, ‘Silva Rhetoricae’ zeugma.

In troubled waters, but now sleeps in **Port**.

(DFB IV.199-202. Bold mine.)

The double meaning of 'Port', the ship's berth and the liquor, serves both the surface context of the image created by the words 'tempestuous' and 'troubled waters'; but, also Bentley's love of fortified wine.⁸⁶

Puttenham attempted a definition of syllepsis in which he renamed it the 'double supply':

But if such want be in sundrie clauses, and of severall congruities or sence, and the supply be made to serve them all, it is by the figure *Sillepsis*, whom for that respect we call the *double supplie* conceiving, and, as it were, comprehending under one, a supplie of two natures, and may be likened to the man that serves many masters at once.⁸⁷

Burton also offers a pithy definition of syllepsis as a 'combination of grammatical parallelism and semantic incongruity, often with a witty or comical effect. Not to be confused with zeugma'.⁸⁸ The clearest definition is offered by Sister Miriam Joseph: 'Syllepsis is the use of a word having simultaneously two different meanings, although it is not repeated'.⁸⁹ It is clear that while 'take', in the first example from Pope, does indeed supply two clauses with meaning, it does not in the one word provide 'a supplie of two natures'. That syllepsis and zeugma are related is clear; however, a distinction can be drawn between the two because one operates like a pun (syllepsis) while one does not (zeugma).

What, then, is to stop syllepsis from being treated as paronomasia? Or, if syllepsis covers the use of one word that provides multiple meanings, why can not paronomasia simply refer to an instance of a word and then its homophone being used in

⁸⁶ For a more in depth discussion of this pun, please refer to p. 18 of this thesis.

⁸⁷ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 165.

⁸⁸ Burton, 'Silva Rhetoricae' syllepsis.

⁸⁹ Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*, p. 166.

close proximity as most commentators would think? The answer lies all the way back in Hammond and Hughes, where they differentiate between the homophonic and homonymic pun. While paronomasia can be used to refer to all homophonic puns, antanaclasis and asteismus refer to homonymic puns. As we shall shortly see, polyptoton is a trope where the root word remains the same but in a different inflexion so that while it might appear to be a homonymic pun it is in fact a special kind of homophonic pun ('creatures' sounds very similar to, but not exactly the same as, 'creature'). What antanaclasis and asteismus do not include is the use of a single word that has two or more meanings. Each of these techniques requires that a word be repeated in some way, whether the word is repeated by one individual or whether a rejoinder from a second speaker willfully misinterprets the first word in a way the original speaker did not intend. Syllepsis fills the gap of the one word homonymic pun.

POLYPTOTON

According to at least one commentator, this technique is not well suited to the English language. Nash defines polyptoton as:

the repetition of a word in a different inflected form...when it is deliberate it is often a form of word-play. Strictly speaking, this figure is proper to richly inflected languages like Greek and Latin, with their variety of word-endings denoting case, tense, mood and so on. The English examples are approximations, and might be described as pseudopolyptoton.⁹⁰

All commentators agree with Nash that polyptoton is the repetition of a word, with the second instance of the word being the same root word in a different form. For example:

'Tis more to *guide* than *spur* the Muse's Steed;
 Restrain his Fury, than provoke his Speed;
 The winged **Courser**, like a gen'rous Horse,

⁹⁰ Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion*, p. 117.

Shows most true Mettle when you *check* his **Course**.

(Bold mine.)⁹¹

While the two words used here are based on the same root word, ‘course’, the change also represents a semantic change. The difference from antanaclasis is that in antanaclasis the word remains in the same form while undergoing a semantic change. The above example would appear to contest Nash’s claim that English is only capable of pseudopolyptoton; however, there is some truth in what Nash says, as will be shown later in this thesis. But, it is important to bear in mind that while polyptoton might be more suited to languages that rely heavily upon inflexion to carry grammatical meaning, it is nevertheless still possible in English where inflexion is not as influential in creating meaning. Indeed, its presence in Milton’s work will prove crucial to the development of the thesis’ argument.

From this point on, the noun ‘pun’, in this thesis, is taken to be a collective noun for the five rhetorical techniques antanaclasis, asteismus, paronomasia, syllepsis, and polyptoton. The verb ‘to pun’ is to be read as a collective verb covering the act of deploying one of the five rhetorical techniques. Often, however, I will discuss the tropes individually as they occur in the poetry under examination. ‘Wordplay’, in the context of this thesis, means other types of wordplay that are not covered by the five rhetorical tropes discussed above. This provides us with a framework that contains anachronism as much as possible while obeying the shared modern understanding that puns are instances of homophony or homonymy resulting in a multiplicity of signification.

⁹¹ Pope, ‘An Essay on Criticism’, ll. 84-87.

INTERPRETATIVE PLENITUDE

Eco's Economy

In order to discuss puns and punning, however, we still require a working model of polysemy. That is, the application of the lens of rhetoric does not subdue what was identified as the *Finnegans Wake* effect in the introduction to this chapter. The multiplicity of meaning that punning creates is, in *Finnegans Wake*, essentially endless. By contrast, this thesis requires a reading methodology which admits linguistic ambiguity but does not license uncontrollable indeterminacy. As I lack the space to map an entire hermeneutic system in which to place punning indeterminacy, I propose somewhat arbitrarily to deploy Umberto Eco's theory of economy as elaborated in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. This system of reading both allows for ambiguity and seeks to limit its most extravagant consequences on the edge of intelligibility.

Eco's strategy of reading seeks to avoid the most exuberant excesses of interpretation through reference to a lexical and informational heritage. His strategy is composed around a principle of economy.

Thus every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader's world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an economic way.⁹²

Eco's concept of economy is a liberal version of Ockham's Razor. The *OED* glosses Ockham's Razor as 'parsimony';⁹³ the relevant definition of 'parsimony' according to the *OED* is:

⁹² Umberto Eco, 'Between Author and Text', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 68.

⁹³ *OED Ockham's Razor*, n. Draft Revision Dec. 2008.

Economy in the use of assumptions in reasoning or explaining; esp. **law of parsimony** (also **principle of parsimony**), the principle that no more entities, causes, or forces than necessary should be invoked in explaining a set of facts or observations (cf. **OCKHAM'S RAZOR** *n.*).⁹⁴

Consequently, Eco outlines the entities, causes or forces that are required for an interpretation to be admitted as an economic reading.

Of central importance to this thesis is Eco's proposition that an economic reading relies upon interacting with the cultural linguistic treasury out of which the text was born. The text is an historical artefact that was created at some point in the past by an author (or authors, or a combination of author, editor, publisher, typesetter, printer, and anyone else involved in the process of text production). The historical fact of the author's existence and the existence of the culture and process within which, and from which, the text arose allows the reader to test his or her interpretation against the linguistic 'treasury'⁹⁵ which existed at the time of the text's creation. Eco argues that if we want to '*interpret*' a text we must respect the 'cultural and linguistic background' of the text.⁹⁶ Respecting the cultural and linguistic background, for Eco, means interacting with what he calls 'language as a social treasury'.⁹⁷ Eco defines 'language as a social treasury' as:

not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole encyclopaedia that the performances of that language have implemented, namely, the cultural conventions that that language has produced and the very

⁹⁴ *OED parsimony, n. 3*. Draft Revision June 2009.

⁹⁵ Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 67.

⁹⁶ Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 69. Eco's work here is in reaction against what Eco terms 'overinterpretation'. Eco contrasts 'interpretation' with 'overinterpretation', hence, Eco's italicization of 'interpret' in this quote. However, this thesis is not going to engage in the theoretical implications of, nor rely upon, such a binary which would be grist for the very mill Eco is seeking to limit — deconstruction. Rather, out of many possible methods of interpretation, this thesis chooses to make use of Eco's suggested method of interpretation as the best suited to the research that this thesis engages in.

⁹⁷ Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 67.

history of the previous interpretations of many texts, comprehending the text that the reader is in the course of reading.⁹⁸

This definition encompasses a large amount of available knowledge, not just the mentality of a typical reader. It is likely that no single reader will be able to properly bring to bear upon their reading all that Eco outlines here, but readers will, with varying competences, have access to parts of it, and all parts need to be plausibly available to them.

The key proposition lies in Eco's idea that the reader can check the 'consensus of the community'⁹⁹ to ensure that their reading is an economical one. Eco maintains that he can know 'that an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 because I trust the community'.¹⁰⁰ We have not been present for every performance of the English language throughout its long and varied history. However, the lexicographic community has endeavoured to produce an encyclopaedia of the performances of English that demonstrates the cultural conventions (meanings) that English has produced throughout its existence: the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The *OED* provides this thesis with the current consensus of the English lexicographers community about the record of the social and cultural treasury of English at any particular time. It may not be perfect, but it is a lot better than any one individual's grasp.

Where Eco's 'social treasury' comes into use, for this thesis, is in deciding what might and might not be historically available denotations of words. This range can be established with a high degree of probability (though not definitive certainty) using the

⁹⁸ Eco, 'Between Author and Text', pp. 67-68.

⁹⁹ Umberto Eco, 'Reply', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 144.

¹⁰⁰ Eco, 'Reply', p. 150.

OED.¹⁰¹ In order to argue from a text that a pun could be read as a pun, this thesis requires a demonstration that an audience at the time of the text's production could have understood it as a pun — in other words, that the two or more meanings posited as existing in the pun were plausibly available to a reader at the time of the text's production. The *OED* can tell us what the current consensus is about the earliest known use of particular denotation and the last known use of particular denotation. The consensus extends to community judgements such as a particular denotation now being rare, or in some cases, obsolete.

Eco provides an example of an economic reading when he discusses the phrase penned by Wordsworth, 'A poet could not but be gay' from the poem 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'.¹⁰² Eco repeats a statement he made to Geoffrey Hartman as an example of how to interact with language as a social treasury.

I said to Hartman that he was a 'moderate' deconstructionist because he refrained from reading the line

'A poet could not but be gay'

as a contemporary reader would do if the line were found in *Playboy*. In other words, a sensitive responsible reader is not obliged to speculate about what happened in the head of Wordsworth when writing the verse, but has the duty to take into account the state of the lexical system at the time of Wordsworth. At

¹⁰¹ As we shall shortly, see, the *OED* is by no means perfect and is being constantly revised, edited and improved. This means that any current definition provided by the dictionary is likely to be superseded in the future as the consensus of the lexicographic community changes to accommodate new research. It simply provides the best current consensus of the English lexicographic community.

¹⁰² William Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 208, ln. 9. As an aside, it is interesting to note that Wordsworth was also concerned about the ambiguity of language: 'I may have written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words, from which no man can altogether protect himself'. (William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', in *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 757.) The danger that Wordsworth seems to be pointing to is that the author is possibly reading more into his or her text than is actually there. But, the basis of that overinterpretation is still the same — the ability for words to denote and connote in way that is beyond the author's control.

that time 'gay' had no sexual connotation, and to acknowledge this point means to interact with a cultural and social treasury.¹⁰³

The fact that Wordsworth wrote 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' and it was published in 1804 allows the reader to make certain economical interpretative decisions. Eco then claims, on that basis, that it is unreasonable to read 'gay' as having a sexual denotation or connotation when Wordsworth uses it because to the best of Eco's knowledge, it was the case that 'gay' did not have a sexual denotation or connotation in 1804. That is, an anachronistic reading is an uneconomical reading, both for Eco and for this thesis, except that recent lexicography has cast this particular reading into doubt. The last printed edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* was published in 1989, and it was this edition that enabled Eco to make the argument cited above about the word 'gay' as used by Wordsworth. When Eco refers to the meaning of 'gay' that would be inferred by a reader of *Playboy*, presumably he anticipates that we will recognise that a reader of *Playboy* is likely to interpret 'gay' as meaning 'homosexual'.¹⁰⁴ Another sexual denotation offered by the second edition of the *OED* is 'of a woman: Leading an immoral life, living by prostitution' and the *OED* provides references from 1825 through to 1885.¹⁰⁵ Given that *Playboy* was first published in 1953,¹⁰⁶ it is unlikely that this denotation is available to a reader of *Playboy*; it is equally likely that an 1804 reader of 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' could not interpret 'gay' meaning 'prostitute' either. The second edition of the *OED* supports Eco's reading of 'gay'. However, that modern tool of research, the Internet, allows the *OED* to publish not only the second edition, but also

¹⁰³ Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ *OED gay, a., adv., and n. A.2.c.* (1935-1968) 2nd Edition 1989. The *OED* points out that this denotation is primarily U.S. slang, worth knowing given that *Playboy* started as U.S. magazine.

¹⁰⁵ *OED gay, a., adv., and n. A.2.b.* (1825-1885) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Jancovich, 'The Politics of *Playboy*: Lifestyle, Sexuality and Non-Conformity in American Cold War Culture', in *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s*, ed. by David Bell and Joanne Hollows (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 71.

the various draft revisions that occur from time to time in the English lexicographic community.¹⁰⁷ This allows the online version of the *OED* to be several generations ahead of the printed version of the dictionary. The draft revision of ‘gay’ published online in September 2009 requires a modification of Eco’s statements about ‘gay’ and what it denotes at the time of Wordsworth.¹⁰⁸ It supports his contention that a reader of 1804 is unlikely to have interpreted ‘gay’ as ‘homosexual’,¹⁰⁹ but it does not support his supposition that during Wordsworth’s time ‘gay’ had no sexual connotation. The draft revision of the *OED* claims that definition of ‘gay’ denoting ‘of a woman: living by prostitution. Of a place: serving as a brothel’ was available from around 1795 until 1967.¹¹⁰ If Eco were to have written *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* today, he may well have had to say that ‘gay’ had no homosexual connotation in Wordsworth’s time, and not made the larger claim that it could not contain any sexual connotations.

Thus far, the ‘consensus of the community’ and the ‘linguistic treasury’ are two entities that Eco offers to help a reader engage in a reasonable act of interpretation. The third tool that Eco uses is the text itself; Eco claims that the ultimate proving ground of any interpretation is the text and the only way to prove an interpretation is ‘to check it

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that the online version of the *OED* makes available to the researcher all versions of the dictionary from the second edition onwards. The second edition definitions cited here were all accessed through the online database. I have altered the citation system preferred by both the *OED* and the Modern Humanities Research Association to take into account the information that is required for this thesis: a date range for the definition, whether it is a draft revision or second edition or addition definition, and finally because Endnote lists each citation of a different word as different entry requiring its own entry in the bibliography which would make this thesis’ bibliography a little unwieldy.

¹⁰⁸ Given that these revisions of the definitions of ‘gay’ were published in 2009 and Eco’s comments were published in 1992, I am at pains to point out that Eco is not wrong in what he said. According to the cultural consensus of the time in which he commented on the meanings of ‘gay’, Eco was correct. Some seventeen years later, it is necessary to modify Eco’s comments in order to take into account the current consensus of the community about the denotations of ‘gay’. It is likely that several readings included in this thesis will also be rendered somewhat obsolete as the consensus of the English lexicographical community changes over the passage of time.

¹⁰⁹ *OED gay. adj., adv., and n. A.4.d.* (1922-2003) Draft Revision September 2009.

¹¹⁰ *OED gay. adj., adv., and n. A.4.c.* (?1795-1967) Draft Revision September 2009.

upon the text as a coherent whole'.¹¹¹ This has been a relative constant in Eco's thought over the last two decades. In *The Limits of Interpretation* Eco writes:

the interpreted text imposes constraints upon its interpreters. The limits of interpretation coincide with the rights of the text (which does not mean with the rights of the author).¹¹²

In a recent iteration, Eco has recast the 'rights of the text' as 'the intention of the text'¹¹³ thereby softening his stance somewhat but the basic principle remains the same: an economical reading is contingent on the context of the text. Eco offers an example of this in action:

Borges (á propos his character Pierre Ménard) suggested that it would be exciting to read the *Imitation of Christ* as if it were written by Céline. The game is amusing and could be intellectually fruitful. I tried; I discovered sentences that could have been written by Céline ('Grace loves low things and is not disgusted by thorny ones, and likes filthy clothes'). But this kind of reading offers a suitable 'grid' for very few sentences of the *Imitatio*. All the rest, most of the book, resists this reading. If on the contrary I read the book according to the Christian medieval encyclopaedia, it appears textually coherent in each of its parts.¹¹⁴

Eco's definition of 'overinterpretation' includes reading practices like the one Borges suggests — that is, reading a text in such a way as to produce a reading that the text would seem to 'resist'. In other words, it is a reading that fails to ask 'if what is found is what the text says by virtue of its textual coherence and of an original underlying signification system'.¹¹⁵ But, for some readers, asking a text questions that it seems to resist is a powerful and productive method of producing an interpretation. 'Many of the most interesting forms of modern criticism', writes Culler, 'ask not what the work has in

¹¹¹ Umberto Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 65.

¹¹² Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹³ Umberto Eco, *On Literature*. trans. Martin McLaughlin (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004), p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', p. 65.

¹¹⁵ Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', p. 64.

mind but what it forgets, not what it says but what it takes for granted'.¹¹⁶ While fruitful enough in its own terms, such reading against the grain, as outlined here by Culler, Borges and Eco is not what this thesis intends to practice. It is more interested in what puns are designed to do, not what they might be made to betray.

One objection that might be raised at this point is that Culler's viewpoint has been arrived at after an extended study of, and interaction with, deconstruction as practiced by Jacques Derrida and that form of deconstruction, with its copious use of puns and punning, might be a relevant approach to the evaluation of puns within poetic texts.¹¹⁷ 'Plato's Pharmacy' demonstrates Derrida's signature use of puns. At the core of this essay are the follow sentences.

Hence, for example, the word *pharmakon*. In this way we hope to display in the most striking manner the regular, ordered polysemy that has, through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by 'remedy', 'recipe', 'poison', 'drug', 'philtre'.¹¹⁸

Walter Brogan uses this to support his argument that Derrida's hermeneutic utilizes all the available polysemy of key words in the text.

Although, as Derrida points out, Plato never uses the word, *pharmakon* is related to the word *pharmakos* which means a scapegoat sacrificed for atonement and purification. It is also related to the word *pharmakia* which means pharmacy or sorcery and is also the name of the maiden with whom Orithyia was playing in the myth of Boreas that Plato relates in the *Phaedrus*.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Culler, 'In Defence of Overinterpretation', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 115.

¹¹⁷ While deconstruction is a broad theoretical term incorporating both French and Anglo traditions that can roughly be described as the School of Derrida and the School of De Man, this thesis uses the term 'deconstruction' to refer to the practice of those critics who follow Derrida's approach. This is mainly because Derrida utilizes puns more so than De Man. See Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essay in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd edn (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1983).

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 71.

Derrida insists that even when Plato contextualizes this word in such a way as to lead its meaning in one of these directions rather than another, the multivalence of the word remains in effect in the Greek text.¹¹⁹

Despite Plato's efforts to control the denotation of *pharmakon*, Derrida insists that he can utilize any or all of *pharmakon*'s possible meanings, thereby allowing himself to bring into his reading a concept that he uses to deconstruct the intentions of Plato's text.

The circuit we are proposing is, moreover, all the more legitimate and easy since it leads to a word that can, on one of its faces, be considered the synonym, almost the homonym, of a word Plato 'actually' used. The word in question is *pharmakos* (wizard, magician, poisoner), a synonym of *pharmakeus* (which Plato uses), but with the unique feature of having been overdetermined, overlaid by Greek culture with another function. Another *role*, and a formidable one.

The character of the *pharmakos* has been compared to a scapegoat.¹²⁰

Derrida argues that Western Philosophy has preferred speech above writing, turning the latter into a scapegoat because problems created by writing have a tendency to infect speech and by exorcising its supplement, speech attempts to cleanse itself of the paradox at its heart — that the construction of speech versus writing duality means that one cannot be construed without the other, that writing supplements speech in order to define speech and *vice versa*. By following the homophonic and etymological links and making the connection between *pharmakeus*, *pharmakon*, and *pharmakos*, Derrida is able to claim that Plato's text initiates the movement of Western Philosophy that institutes the scapegoating of writing by those who prefer speech. All this was possible because Derrida followed the pun, the homophonic and etymological links between *pharmakeus* and *pharmakos*.

¹¹⁹ Walter Brogan, 'Plato's *Pharmakon*: Between Two Repetitions', in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. by Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 8.

¹²⁰ Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', p. 130.

Derrida is, nevertheless, reluctant to describe a methodology for his use of puns. As we have already seen earlier in the chapter, Culler provides a definition and methodology for examining puns in his introduction to *On the Pun*.¹²¹ That definition and methodology was an open and inclusive one that did ‘not seek to circumscribe it or discriminate it from other sorts of wordplay’.¹²² While Culler’s practice is informed and instructed through a long term interaction with Derrida’s thought, Culler’s practice is not necessarily Derrida’s method. The closest Derrida comes to a methodology for punning in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ is when he writes:

And that person would have understood nothing of the game who, at this [*du coup*], would feel himself authorized merely to add on; that is, to add on any old thing. He would add nothing: the seam wouldn’t hold. Reciprocally, he who through ‘methodological prudence’, ‘norms of objectivity’, or ‘safeguards of knowledge’ would refrain from committing anything of himself, would not read at all. The same foolishness, the same sterility, obtains in the ‘not serious’ as in the ‘serious’. The reading or writing supplement must be rigorously prescribed, but by all the necessities of a *game*, by the logic of *play*, signs to which the system of all textual powers must be accorded and attuned.¹²³

One of this passages’ key phrases, as posited by Seán Burke in *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, is ‘The reading or writing supplement must be rigorously prescribed’. When drawing attention to the phrase ‘exemplary rigour’, Burke defines it as a hallmark of the Derridean style.¹²⁴ Derrida’s technique is described by Burke as ‘an interminable rereading in the closest

¹²¹ See p. 38 of this thesis.

¹²² Culler, ‘The Call of the Phoneme: Introduction’, p. 5.

¹²³ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 64.

¹²⁴ Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. 3rd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 119.

possible manner',¹²⁵ and he notes that deconstruction requires at least a double reading for

As a general principle, preparatory labours of construction must accompany any deconstructive act, for the reading must propose a model of order even if only in the interests of finally unsettling that order [...] this initial phase of construction is common to all the deconstructive readings.¹²⁶

The first reading is a rigorous close reading applying all the tools of what we might term 'classical scholarship'; 'rigour' also applies to the second, doubling, deconstructive reading. The rigor of the deconstructive reading is reliant upon two other concepts that Derrida brings to our attention: the metaphor of the 'seam' and the 'signs to which the system of textual powers must be accorded and attuned'.

The rigour that Derrida promotes is a little harder to demonstrate and define. In essence it relies upon two factors. The first is that Derrida's stretching of philological decorum to breaking point occurs without the pursuit of merely arbitrary associations; rather, the associations that he makes are drawn from the words of the text he is reading. It should also be recognized that Derrida rarely introduces through a pun a concept or idea that does not aid or contribute to his objective at the time of writing. Finally, what 'Plato's Pharmacy' makes clear is that Derrida abides by the principle that Eco was to later term 'language as social treasury'.¹²⁷ That is, when Derrida uses homophony and etymology to link *pharmakeus* and *pharmakon*, he does not engage in anachronism but uses words and denotations available to Plato when he wrote all those years ago in Athens (to the best of his, and the academic community's, knowledge). He can only make one word mean both medicine and poison because it was so for the Ancient

¹²⁵ Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, p. 161.

¹²⁶ Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, p. 127.

¹²⁷ Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 67.

Greeks who used that word and the translators who have followed them. He exploits the linguistic treasury (in part what he calls the textual sign system) to further his own agenda, yes, but at the same time a rigor is enforced on his thinking by that linguistic treasury — Derrida is bound and circumscribed by the language he uses and interacts with.

At all points, Derrida is keen to follow the ‘seam’ with ‘rigour’ because, as Burke claims, that is how deconstruction ‘never speaks *in propria persona*, but only with a voice borrowed from the author’.¹²⁸ The ‘seam’ that Derrida follows is always the text and the textual sign system; or, to use a different phrase of Burke’s, Derrida finds his ‘voice in the hollow of an Other’s’.¹²⁹ One such ‘hollow’ of the other’s voice can be found through punning. Whether the pun appears to have been intended by the author or not is immaterial — if the word in question has more than one denotation then the alternative denotations can form the hollow out of which Derrida forms his own voice. Indeed, puns can be viewed as one of the best methods for exploring a hollow in another’s text and one deconstructionist, Michael Riffaterre, has gone so far as to claim that ‘syllepsis is the literary sign par excellence’.¹³⁰

Derrida’s hermeneutic is a powerful tool but it is not one always used by followers with the same rigor as the master. Deconstruction, by unleashing polysemy, has in practice allowed some readers to ‘produce a limitless, uncheckable flow of “readings”’,¹³¹ based on the polysemy inherent in language, and licensed by Derrida’s

¹²⁸ Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, p. 162.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Michael Riffaterre, ‘Syllepsis’, *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (1980), p. 638.

¹³¹ Stefan Collini, ‘Interpretation Terminable and Interminable’, in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

assertion that there is a fundamental ‘instability of all meaning in writing’.¹³² Or, as Phiddian defines it, ‘an aggressive enough deconstructive reading can make any text tell the story of its incapacity to escape the indeterminate play of language’.¹³³ We have returned to where we began this chapter, the world of *Finnegans Wake* and the realm of unending polysemy and this is not a terrain in which this thesis seeks to operate.

We can avoid, though, throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Previously, we have seen how Derrida prefers to define the structure of his work as being operations of the ‘seam’, using ‘rigor’ and the textual sign system within which it is operating. As we know, Eco has postulated that ‘there are somewhere criteria for limiting interpretation’,¹³⁴ and Stefan Collini explains that Eco proffered the idea of limiting interpretation as a ‘protest against what he [Eco] sees as the perverse appropriation of the idea of “unlimited semiosis”’.¹³⁵ This is not to say that Eco thinks that interpretations based on ‘unlimited semiosis’ are simply wrong, but rather, according to Collini’s account, that Eco labels them acts of ‘overinterpretation’ and insists

that we can, and do, recognize overinterpretation of a text without necessarily being able to prove that one interpretation is the right one, or even clinging to any belief that there must be *one* right reading.¹³⁶

In order to differentiate between an act of interpretation and an act of overinterpretation, Eco argues that acts of interpretation follow the principle of economy while acts of overinterpretation do not take the principle of economy into account. This constitutes the essence of Eco’s argument against those deconstructive readings which permit the

¹³² Collini, 'Interpretation Terminable and Interminable', p. 7. See also Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*.

¹³³ Robert Phiddian, 'Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing?', *New Literary History*, 28 (1997), p. 680.

¹³⁴ Eco, 'Interpretation and History', p. 40.

¹³⁵ Collini, 'Interpretation Terminable and Interminable', p. 8.

¹³⁶ Collini, 'Interpretation Terminable and Interminable', p. 9.

unending and uncircumscribed reverberations of the polysemy and ambiguity inherent in language.

Intriguingly, Eco's method of reading, as outlined earlier, bears some similarity to Derrida's concepts of 'seam', 'rigor', and the 'textual sign system'. When Derrida follows the textual sign system of Ancient Greek, he is reading within what Eco would consider as the 'cultural and linguistic treasury' of the time Plato's text was produced. He does not introduce an anachronistic reading of Plato's text but, rather, uses polyptoton to add to the reading of the text the concept of the 'scapegoat'. Polyptoton allows him to ensure that the seam holds, that his rereading of the text is linked to the text by the root word which links *pharmakos*, *pharmakon*, and *pharmakeus*. The rigor that Derrida calls for, and which is present in Eco's concept of 'interpretation' also, is found in the systematic close reading within which the deconstructive manoeuvre operates. This ensures that an interpretation is checked against the context of the text, and is allied to an in-depth knowledge of the 'textual sign system' out of which the text was created.

As has been stated before, this thesis aims to cover texts which were produced over a period of time and therefore will not be focussing on one particular author or one particular text (a common methodology for ensuring a detailed and coherent reading is offered). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to survey all (or even many) of the puns used in English poetry between 1590 and 1740, so the approach must be selective. I will proceed by close reading of selected passages containing polysemy within the Eco's constraints of economy as defined in practical terms by the *OED*. The next chapter of this thesis, 'The Gyant Race', does deal with short lyric poetry produced during the English Renaissance, as the thesis moves along its timeline, it engages with poetic texts

which could never attract the sobriquets ‘short’ or ‘lyric’. It is the intention of this thesis to pay attention to how individual puns operate within those larger narrative poems and, in order to properly explicate how each pun is operating, the passages in which they occur will be read closely. Such an approach will necessarily involve knowledge of the larger narrative structure in which the passage occurs; moreover, while a close reading of particular passages is not going to allow a totally coherent view of the entire poem, it will enable this thesis to suggest larger movements in the narrative poem. This thesis will be able to pursue individual puns thoroughly; that thoroughness will result in the limitation that it will only be capable of pointing to, and suggesting, the larger movements of the contemporary culture and poetics.

Individual puns will be read in the context in which they appear and through the *OED*; these two interpretative tools establish the basic methodology of this thesis. However, while *Finnegans Wake* invites the study of its puns, an essay of Addison’s in *The Spectator* would seem to do the opposite; that is, there are some texts where the puns are an explicit part of the context but in other texts, puns are not part of the context. While one would struggle to argue that a study of the pun in *Finnegans Wake* constitutes what Eco termed ‘overinterpretation’, it might be reasonable to assume that a study of the puns of *The Spectator* could constitute overinterpretation. But, if it can be demonstrated that a pun within an anti-pun text can be read as such according to the *OED*, and the consensus of the English literary community supports the pun’s existence, along with economical contextual support, then it is reasonable to interpret the pun as a pun in such a way that we are not engaging in overinterpretation.

Sometimes it can be easy to demonstrate that a pun should be read as a pun, as with this example from Swift’s ‘A Modest Defence of Punning’: ‘*J. Baker Knight* [...]’

seems to have *founded* his whole Discourse upon one grand Mistake: And therefore his whole Discourse will be *founddead*'.¹³⁷ Swift, or at least the publisher or typesetter, has italicized the pun to ensure that we do not miss it (and it is an unsurprising technique in a text bearing the title 'A Modest Defence of Punning'). The neatness of this pun, its precise aural homophony, combined with the typographical evidence which includes the compounding of 'found' and 'dead' all add up to ensure that both we and Swift's contemporary audience realize that the pun is there and that it was an intentional piece of wit. In such an example the *OED* is not really required. This, however, is the exception and not the rule, as an example from the text that occasioned Swift's can demonstrate. I will deal with this example exhaustively not because of its intrinsic literary interest (which is no better than marginal) but because by doing so I can mark the range of how my approach will deal with the polysemy inherent in puns.

'A Modest Defence of Punning' was a response to a tract entitled 'God's Revenge Against Punning' published in 1716 under the pseudonym J. Baker, Knight.¹³⁸ At one point in the text, the phrase 'Funest Disasters' is used.¹³⁹ When one reads the title and then the phrase, it is easy to link 'punning' and 'Funest Disasters'. A modern reader approaching the word 'funest', a word not currently part of our everyday lexicon, would, perhaps, read it as 'fun-est' rather like 'biggest' or 'littlest': the word 'fun' meaning 'a source of amusement or pleasure'¹⁴⁰ combined with the suffix '—est' that forms the

¹³⁷ Swift, 'A Modest Defence of Punning', p. 205.

¹³⁸ There is some dispute over who authored the text. The *OED* cites the text as an example of the word 'funest' being used in print and attributes it to Swift's *Complete Works* of 1755. Pope scholars have attributed it to Pope and included it in editions of Pope's complete works. Who wrote the text will become important shortly but for the sake of clarity — and to uphold the author's, or authors', fiction — I will refer to the author as J. Baker, Knight; but, all references will be to Alexander Pope, 'God's Revenge against Punning', in *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Norman Ault (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1936).

¹³⁹ Pope, 'God's Revenge against Punning', p. 269.

¹⁴⁰ *OED fun*, n. 2.a. (1727-1958)

superlative degree of adjectives or adverbs.¹⁴¹ However, if one were to read the beginning of ‘God’s Revenge Against Punning’, that is, within the context of the text in which it occurs, something quite interesting occurs to our modern reader’s experience of ‘funest’.

Manifold have been the Judgements which Heav’n from Time to Time, for the Chastisement of a Sinful People, has inflicted on whole Nations. For when the Degeneracy becomes Commen, ’tis but Just the Punishment should be General: Of this kind, in our unfortunate Country, was that destructive Pestilence, whose Mortality was so fatal, as to sweep away, if Sir *William Petty* may be believ’d, Five Millions of Christian Souls, besides Women and Jews.

Such also was that dreadful Conflagration ensuing, in this famous Metropolis of *London*, which Consumed, according to the computation of Sir *Samuel Moreland*, 100000 Houses, not to mention Churches and Stables.

Scarce had this Unhappy Nation recover’d these Funest Disasters, when it pleased God to suffer the Abomination of Play-houses to rise up in this Land.¹⁴²

It appears that ‘Funest Disasters’ are not puns but the Black Plague and the Great Fire of London. Our contemporary reader is now in the difficult position of trying to reconcile a superlative source of amusement or pleasure with the Black Plague and the Great Fire of London. The *OED* reveals that there was a word ‘funest’ and it meant ‘causing or portending death or evil; fatal, deadly, disastrous, deeply, deplorable’.¹⁴³ The *OED* provides the first date of use being 1654, with other instances from 1671, 1727, and 1865. The *OED* has classified the word ‘funest’ as now rare. This definition of ‘funest’ makes more sense in the context of the Black Plague and the Great Fire of London. The *OED* is here providing evidence which supports the argument that ‘funest’ is not a pun.

¹⁴¹ *OED* –est, suffix.

¹⁴² Pope, ‘God’s Revenge against Punning’, p. 269.

¹⁴³ *OED* funest, *a.* (1654-1865).

But, one could pursue the other evidence in an effort to help prove that ‘funest’ is a pun. Could it not be possible that ‘funest’ points back to the Black Plague and Great Fire of London, while the reading ‘fun-est’ points forward to later instances in the text of puns and the dire but amusing results of those puns? Take, for example, the final paragraph:

A *Devonshire* Man of Wit, for only saying, in a jesting manner, *I get Up—Pun a Horse*, instantly fell down, and broke his Snuff-box and Neck, and lost the Horse.¹⁴⁴

Here we have a pun that an overly tolerant reader may feel is ‘fun-est’ while the result of that pun is definitely, for its perpetrator, ‘funest’. Once again, the *OED* may help resolve our dilemma. ‘Funest’, as we have seen entered the language around 1654 and was still current around 1865. ‘God’s Revenge Against Punning’ was published in 1716 so it clearly falls within the boundaries of when ‘funest’ was part of the accepted linguistic treasury. ‘Fun’, as defined above, however, is credited with its first use by Swift in 1727 and is still current today. It may be fair to assume that Swift did not create this meaning all on his own and that perhaps it was being used in spoken conversation before Swift wrote it down in 1727; therefore, there is a chance that J. Baker, Knight (be he Swift or Pope), may well have known about this meaning of ‘fun’ when he wrote ‘Funest’ in 1716, but it would have been a strikingly novel usage, not reliably intelligible to a wide audience.¹⁴⁵ More plausibly present, on the other hand, is the first meaning of ‘fun’ recorded in the *OED*, ‘a cheat or trick, a hoax, a practical joke’.¹⁴⁶ The meaning has examples from 1700 and 1719, and the *OED* states that the noun came from the verb

¹⁴⁴ Pope, ‘God’s Revenge against Punning’, p. 272.

¹⁴⁵ Norman Ault, ‘Introduction’, in *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Norman Ault (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1936), p. cx.

¹⁴⁶ *OED fun*, n. 1. (a1700-1719).

‘fun’ which meant ‘to cheat, hoax; also, to cajole’,¹⁴⁷ for which examples range from 1685 to 1886. Clearly, a publication date of 1716 for ‘God’s Revenge Against Punning’ when taking into consideration the timelines offered by the *OED*, allows for a possible pun on ‘funest’ meaning ‘deeply deplorable’ or ‘fun-est’, a superlative ‘cheat’ or ‘hoax’. Grammatically, though, we would be stretching to admit the pun to the text, as it still does not provide an obviously economic construction of meaning.

There is even a third option. If we decide that Swift was the author of ‘God’s Revenge Against Punning’,¹⁴⁸ we might reasonably think that, given his time spent in Ireland, he may have known about Irish words that could be related to ‘fun’. When we go to an Irish dictionary, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, we find the following:

fonn², Air, tune; melody, song [...] things done with a good or bad grace.

fonn³, Desire, wish, inclination, urge [...] ~**gáire**, inclination to laugh.¹⁴⁹

It is not a massive leap from ‘inclination to laugh’ to ‘a source of amusement or pleasure’, and we may even recruit the Victorian etymologist Walter E. Skeat to our cause. Skeat, in *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* claimed that the English word ‘fun’ was indeed descended from the Irish word ‘fonn’.¹⁵⁰ (The *OED* claims that ‘fun’ is from the English ‘fon’ but while it suggests an etymology for ‘fon’ it does not cite Irish as a possible source.¹⁵¹) So, if Swift was the author, or if Swift had enlightened Pope as to the Irish nuance of language, and if the audience was also aware of the Irish word ‘fonn’ in relation to the English word ‘fun’, perhaps they might have read ‘funest’ as the pun ‘Funest–fun-est’.

¹⁴⁷ *OED fun*, v. 1. (1685-1886).

¹⁴⁸ See note 137 above.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Fonn’, in *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, ed. by Niall O Donaill (Baile Atha Cliath: tSolathair, 1977), p. 568.

¹⁵⁰ Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, p. 165.

¹⁵¹ *OED fun*, v. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989; *OED fon*, n. and a. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

The criterion of economy would seem to be against this, so, finally, we may step outside the text, and talk about authorial intent; that Pope was a writer of satire, that Pope used puns in his poetry, that ‘God’s Revenge Against Punning’ was written as a satire of those critics of the pun who were loud and vocal during this period, that indeed ‘God’s Revenge Against Punning’ is ‘fun-est’ because it is a hoax. However, this is territory that the text itself cannot help us with. Unless the consensus of the community could provide us with a significant body of critical commentary which supports the argument for the ‘funest–fun-est’ pun, we are, perhaps, justified in arguing that the text does not allow ‘Funest’ to be a pun and that it denotes, within the context in which it appears, the only denotation that the *OED* ascribes to it: ‘causing or portending death or evil; fatal, deadly, disastrous deeply deplorable’.¹⁵² The location of ‘Funest’ in the text is paramount to this decision. It is the adjective adding vigour to ‘Disasters’ and it appears after two clear references to significant disasters that had struck London. If we are to apply the principle of economy to this example then it is clear that the consensus of the community is silent on the matter and that the linguistic treasury does not support the assertion that ‘Funest’ is a pun. The other two denotations — ‘hoax’ and ‘source of amusement or pleasure’ — require too many ifs and buts, too much coincidental reasoning, to provide an economical reading. ‘Funest’, and the resolution of possible its possible denotations as exemplified above, has been a demonstration of how the consensus of the community, the linguistic treasury and the context created by the text, can all work together to resist the existence of a pun. A sufficiently determined reader can still make a pun exist subjectively, but there is no good reason why others should attend to that reading.

¹⁵² *OED funest, a.* (1654-1865) 2nd Edition 1989.

CONCLUSION

Bertrand Russell once wrote:

If there is any unity in the movement of history, if there is any intimate relation between what goes before and what comes later, it is necessary, for setting this forth, that earlier and later periods should be synthesized in a single mind.¹⁵³

Such a synthesis involved dangers as Russell was well aware: ‘Without detail, a book becomes jejune and uninteresting; with detail, it is in danger of becoming intolerably lengthy’.¹⁵⁴ This chapter has identified the danger inherent in punning — that of the limitless play of signification that puns help engender. In response to that danger, I have proposed a methodology that will allow us to examine puns from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century. The methodology rests on the twin pillars of classical rhetoric and Umberto Eco’s principle of economy in interpretation.

Classical rhetoric, in which all the poets being studied were educated, provides us with five rhetorical techniques which rely upon homophony or homonymy. When this thesis uses the word ‘pun’ it is referring to those five rhetorical techniques: antanaclasis, asteismus, paronomasia, syllepsis and polyptoton. ‘Punning’ therefore denotes the use of these five rhetorical techniques. ‘Wordplay’ will be used to describe anything that would appear to fall beyond the bounds of any of the five rhetorical tropes. As has been stated previously, ‘pun’ is anachronistic when applied to poets prior to Dryden and Pope. The benefit of using the terms of classical rhetoric is that we thereby minimize anachronism.

The open, subversive and potentially limitless nature of wordplay has been highlighted throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. This is both a source of

¹⁵³ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy, Routledge Classics* (London: Routledge Classics, 2004), p. x.

¹⁵⁴ Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. xi.

strength for puns and a danger to those who would analyze them. In order to reasonably control that danger, amongst other issues, Umberto Eco proposes his theory of economy in interpretation. Eco argues that an economical interpretation of a text takes into account the linguistic treasury at the time the text was written, the context of the text itself, and the consensus of the community about the text. This thesis will use primarily the *Oxford English Dictionary* to describe the signification that puns enact. Those denotations will be checked against the collected scholarship that has built up around the poetry being studied to bring to bear both the context of the text being studied and the community consensus about the text upon this thesis' interpretation of puns.

Given that we now have a workable model of puns and punning along with a framework for their interpretation, it is time to begin our investigation of punning from 1590 until 1740. This thesis began with a brief examination of Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry* in which we saw that he had little, if any, compunction against using puns in critical prose tracts. After an introduction outlining in broad strokes where the Renaissance might have looked for examples of punning, the next chapter starts its analysis of puns with examples taken from Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*.

3 THE GYANT RACE

‘He would pun thee into shivers’.¹

OVID

It has been posited that ‘Ovid was the most imitated and influential classical author in the Renaissance’.² Indeed, Browns argues that:

a great many Elizabethan poets turned to Ovid with unashamed relish. Among the facets of Ovidianism which found favour with his many imitators in this period were an interest in wordplay and paradox, the employment of decorative mythological machinery and a preoccupation with sexuality, particularly non-standard sexuality.³

The two hundred and fifty or so myths in the *Metamorphoses* and its frank depiction of deviant sexuality have been the centre of most critical investigations into the influence Ovid has exerted upon the Renaissance.⁴ What is of interest here, though, is that for Renaissance poets, according to Browns, Ovid demonstrated and validated an interest in puns.

Critics have linked wordplay and the *Metamorphoses* both thematically and structurally. Ahl makes this point by claiming that:

¹ Shakespeare, 'Troilus and Cressida', II.i.37.

² Colin Burrow, 'Re-Embodying Ovid: Renaissance Afterlives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. by Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 301.

³ Sarah Annes Browns, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 57.

⁴ See amongst others: Raphael Lyne, 'Ovid in English Translation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. by Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Robin Sowerby, *The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry* (London: Longman, 1994); L. T. Percy, *The Mediated Muse: English Translations of Ovid 1560-1700* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984). There are also several excellent texts which examine the relationship of individual authors with Ovid and his work: Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and Richard J. DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) are the stand outs.

Ovid accompanies his descriptions of changes in physical shape with changes in the shape of the words used to tell the tale. Soundplay and wordplay do not simply occur in the *Metamorphoses*: they are the basis of its structure.⁵

In this passage, Ahl clearly links changes in the ‘shape’ of a word with ‘soundplay’ or ‘wordplay’. This concept sounds a little foreign to English ears, as some English puns involve a difference in spelling and an equal number do not involve a difference in spelling. The technique of matching the metamorphosis of a character’s physical shape with the metamorphosis of the word shape through puns, perhaps, was easier for Ovid since Latin was an inflected language and in Latin, ‘the basic unit of sense, for the purposes of play, is the syllable rather than the word’.⁶

Ahl elaborates on this difference between English and inflected languages.

Possibly such wordplay [sound-based syllable repetition] is more abundant in highly inflected languages, which make the listener more aware of the constantly shifting *shape* of the word as it changes person or case. In English, words have a more ‘fixed’ appearance than they do in Latin, Irish and Welsh. In English, furthermore, words are more studiously separated from one another than in those languages.⁷

This is why English examples of polyptoton have been described as ‘pseudopolyptoton’ by Walter Nash, he feels that the change in form of the word is not recognized or comprehended as wordplay by an English reading audience.⁸ An English reading audience, according to Nash, might not see ‘think–thinks–thinker–thinking’ as a series of puns. An inflected language audience, as Ahl argues it, would see this as a series of puns because the basis of meaning is not the word but the syllable — that is, ‘think’ appears to remain the same but, the attachment of ‘—s’, ‘—er’ and ‘—ing’ changes the

⁵ Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 10.

⁶ Jane McIntosh Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura* (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1980), p. 57.

⁷ Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets*, p. 21.

⁸ Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion*, p. 117.

meaning of the word thus enacting a small, subtle, but definite change in the meaning of ‘think’. The changing ‘shape’ of the word emphasizes the changing meaning of the word. Not all puns in English necessarily change their shape. Syllepsis, antanaclasis and asteismus are all puns that do not change the shape of the word. Paronomasia and polyptoton are the rhetorical pun techniques that can and do change the physical shape of the word on the page when they perform their pun operation.

Given the differences between English and Latin and, therefore, the differences in the presentation and experience of English and Latinate wordplay, how was it possible for Ovid to be an example of punning? Part of the answer is provided by William C. Carroll, who also highlights the shape changing properties of punning in his book *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy*.

Transformations in language, as the poets know, can be as powerful as any other shape-shifting [...] Metamorphosis and dissolving boundaries occur not only to people but also to their language; words can lose their shape as easily as lovers, and, like them, exchange identities with close cousins and unexpectedly trip up over the erotic. All of Shakespeare’s plays, but especially the comedies, rest on a semi-magical linguistic energy, in which words can shift sound, meaning and shape, malapropisms become mythopoetic, and puns perform triple duty. Two meanings in one word is the linguistic equivalent of Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, two identities in one name.⁹

Punning, as Carroll is arguing, is an act of metamorphosis. Punning highlights the language actively engaged in acts of metamorphosis and, to misquote Carroll slightly, two meanings in one word is the linguistic equivalent of the moment of metamorphosis, the moment Daphne is both Daphne and the laurel tree, but neither completely one or the other.

⁹ William C. Carroll, *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 32.

Paul Barolsky adds another element to this idea in his article ‘As in Ovid, so in Renaissance Art’, in which he claims that there is an Ovidian sense of metamorphosis as *non finito* — the idea that metamorphosis exists in unfinished moments.¹⁰ Barolsky concludes his article:

As one ponders Ovid’s place in Renaissance culture and its aftermath, it becomes increasingly clear that our cultural picture of the poet’s role in art history is itself *non finito*. This is so because Ovid’s contribution is far more than meets the eye, more than the sum of works that illustrate his themes, more than the poet’s ideas as they informed Renaissance theories of imitation, and far more than the sentiments expressed in elegiac painting. What Ovid bequeathed to the Renaissance was, at bottom, a spirit of play, the very play of the imagination as it gave birth to protean forms of art. It is difficult, if not impossible, to plumb fully the depths of what one might speak of as the Ovidian imagination, to measure its extent, but I hazard a guess that someday we may come to see more clearly than we do now that the poet’s inventions are fundamental to the Renaissance idea of art, and to the very idea of art itself as metamorphosis.¹¹

It is important to note that although Barolsky is interested in Ovid’s influence on Renaissance artists in the Italian city states, his central idea, that Ovid’s legacy in the Renaissance was the creation of an interest in ‘play’ and ‘protean forms of art’ holds just as well for the poets of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England.

The passage of the *Metamorphoses* that comes closest to outlining a philosophy of metamorphosis is delivered by Pythagoras in book fifteen. Here it is, translated by Golding and first published in 1567:

All things doo chaunge. But nothing sure dooth perish

[...]

The day would end,

And Phebus panting steedes should in the Ocean deepe descend,

¹⁰ Paul. Barolsky, ‘As in Ovid, So in Renaissance Art’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (1998), pp. 459-61.

¹¹ Barolsky, ‘As in Ovid, So in Renaissance Art’, p. 473.

Before all alterations I in wordes could comprehend
 [...]

 the heaven and all that under heaven is found,
 Dooth alter shape.¹²

According to Pythagoras, metamorphosis is a never-ending process that everything is continually undergoing. Pythagoras examines things ranging from physical changes in a man's life to the changing fortunes of city states amongst other evidence for his assertion. This is where the idea of *non finito* is found. If one were to take an individual myth from the *Metamorphoses*, for example that of Pygmalion or Arachne, then one does not get the sense of metamorphosis being *non finito*. An individual example tends to demonstrate metamorphosis having a definite end in one particular form — Arachne becomes an arachnid. This though, is not true for the *Metamorphoses* as a whole in which over two hundred and fifty myths, each figuring at least one instance of metamorphosis, are deployed over fifteen books. This means that one myth moves into another myth and on into another. The structure of the *Metamorphoses* is that of a continual metamorphosis. That is, metamorphosis *non finito*.

This idea of *non finito* is linked to the idea of a bad pun by Catherine Bates when she attempts, in a passage I have already partially quoted, to describe a good pun as opposed to a bad pun.

A good pun is one in which the polysemy intrinsic to language is allowed to play for a strictly measured amount of time before being sorted out and tidied away.

Bad puns, by contrast, are less amenable to such interpretative straightening, dividing not into two neat signifieds which combine with satirical effect but rather into a plethora of half-suggested meanings which, if adding nothing obviously relevant to the context in hand, are branded as altogether

¹² Arthur. Golding, *The Fifteen Books of Ovid's Metamorphoses*. ed. by R. Brazil (London: Willyam Seres, 1567), XV.183; 460-62; 505-06.

extraneous. This is the home of those troublesome halfway houses the subsumed pun; the stupid pun; the unmotivated, meaningless, gratuitous pun; puns that are dubious, accidental or unintended. Unlike its more tractable cousin, the bad pun does not suggest that wordplay can be contained but, on the contrary, offers an alarming glimpse of language gone out of control—of a perpetual play of signifiers yielding associations that threaten to impede understanding and to defy interpretation as they become increasingly disconnected and random.¹³

The bad pun as ‘language out of control’, as a ‘perpetual play of signifiers yielding associations’, is an instance of language being *non finito*, of words in the act of metamorphosing. The sobriquets that Bates has applied here are taken from contemporary jargon. In the terms of this thesis, what she is describing is not necessarily ‘good’ punning or ‘bad’ punning but what could broadly be described as eighteenth century habits of punning (‘good’) and Renaissance habits of punning (‘bad’).¹⁴ Renaissance poets were willing to explore the polysemous depths of words and language, and they, perhaps, allow the ‘alarming glimpse of language out of control’ but this in no way means that the language is out of control. The meanings are there and we can attempt to tie them down. This does not mean that we can definitively tie them down and to some extent, especially in Donne’s ‘A Hymn to God the Father’, we have to leave the different strands of meaning in the air together without opting conclusively for one meaning over another. The end of the poem is itself *non finito* because the puns are deployed in such a way that definitively pinning them down to one meaning is impossible, the puns are *non finito*. So Donne provides an extreme example of the language play authorized, for Renaissance lyric poets, by the practice of Ovid.

¹³ Bates, ‘The Point of Puns’, pp. 429-30.

¹⁴ I, and this thesis, do not subscribe to the value judgment inherent in Bates’ terminology. Eighteenth century punning is neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, it simply is. The same goes for Renaissance punning, it too is neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’.

A STAR IN HIS EYE

To find punning in Philip Sidney's poetic oeuvre, we need look no further than the title of his sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*.¹⁵ 'Astro' is from the Greek for 'star' while 'phil' is a form of 'phile' from the Greek for 'loving'.¹⁶ 'Astrophil' therefore means 'star-lover–star-loving' and this is compounded when we realize that 'Stella' is the Latin word for 'star'.¹⁷ From this most basic analysis of *Astrophil and Stella*, we have no indication of who 'Stella' is apart from the assumptions that it is, presumably, a female name and also the Latin word for 'star'. 'Astrophil', on the other hand, could also contain a paronomasia on 'Philip', a name descended from Greek via Latin.¹⁸

This particular paronomasia is partly the reason for Maria Prendergast's claim that most critics of the sonnet sequence follow the autobiographical threads to consistently link Astrophil with Sidney and, using other punning evidence from the text ('and now long needie Fame | Doth even grow **rich**, naming my *Stellas* name'¹⁹) to link

¹⁵ A recent edition edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones has modernized the spelling of the text. See Sir Philip Sidney, 'Astrophil and Stella', in *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). In this, she follows prior practice at Oxford including that of William A. Ringler who also modernized the text to some extent. See Sir Philip Sidney, 'Astrophil and Stella', in *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by William A. Ringler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). Other modern editions tend to normalize the spelling and typography as well. See Sir Philip Sidney, 'Astrophil and Stella', in *Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Poems*, ed. by Catherine Bates (London: Penguin Books, 1994). In the interest of attempting to get as close to the cultural and lexical treasury of when the text was written, this thesis will cite an edition which preserves the original typography as much as possible: Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella* (Menston: Scolar Press Limited, 1970). This edition is a facsimile edition of the first quarto edition of the sonnet sequence published by Thomas Newman in 1591. The sharper eyed will spot that I am refer to the sonnet sequence as *Astrophil and Stella* while the facsimile edition states that it is titled *Astrophel and Stella*. I follow the traditional interpretation, as clarified by Sherod M. Cooper, that 'Astrophel' is incorrect and that 'Astrophil' is the preferred spelling. See Sherod M. Cooper, *The Sonnets of Astrophel and Stella* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), note 11, p. 15.

¹⁶ *OED astro-* 2nd Edition 1989; *OED phil*, *adj.* and *prep.* Etymology. Draft Revision Dec. 2008; *OED – phile*, *comb. form*, Etymology. Draft Revision Dec. 2008.

¹⁷ *OED stella*, Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁸ *OED Philip*, *n.* Etymology. Draft Revision Mar. 2009.

¹⁹ Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet 35, p. 15.

Stella with Penelope Rich nee Devereux.²⁰ Robert Montgomery claims that, ‘Whether we should identify Astrophil with Sidney is a question that has pretty well been wrung dry’.²¹ Montgomery argues convincingly that ‘if Sidney is really talking about himself, he is doing so in a fictionalized form that allows him considerable ironic distance from the self he presents’.²² This ironic distance is achieved through movements in the sonnet sequence that Patricia Phillippy reads as ‘both affirming and denying the identification of its protagonist Astrophil with its author Sidney’.²³ The first instance of this affirmation and denial occurs in the paronomasia that links Astrophil to Sir Philip Sidney.

The two names are merging and separating, the selves thus indicated, the Protestant courtier who dies in Flanders and the lover of stars, seem connected but not, perhaps, exactly the same. That they share something — ‘phil’ — is obvious but one is *Astrophil* and the other is Sir *Philip* Sidney. To attempt to separate the two or join them together into an indivisible whole is perhaps to miss the point. The irony that Montgomery reads is there but it is physically enacted on the page in the paronomasia. There the metamorphosis begins but is not completed. The reader is left to flicker between identifying ‘Astrophil’ with Sidney and separating the two without any clear indication of where to draw the line. The entire process, instituted in the title, is a

²⁰ Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast, ‘The Unauthorized Orpheus of Astrophil and Stella’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900.*, 35 (1995), p. 20.

²¹ Robert L. Montgomery, ‘The Poetics of Astrophil’, in *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. by Dominic Baker-Smith M. J. B. Allen, Arthur F. Kinney with Margaret M. Sullivan. (New York: AMS Press, 1990), p. 145.

²² Montgomery, ‘The Poetics of Astrophil’, p. 146.

²³ Patricia Berrahou Phillippy, *Love's Remedies: Recantation and Renaissance Lyric Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), p. 138.

moment of grand Renaissance *non finito* self-fashioning that continues to this day no matter how ‘wrung dry’ the matter seems.²⁴

Astrophil and Stella: the first sonnet.

Judith Dundas claims that when Sidney uses paronomasia, he ‘makes sure that his punning does not replace argument but supports it’.²⁵ While her article is based on a reading of Sidney’s translations of the Psalms and her argument may be cogent in that context, it cannot be sustained in the face of Sidney’s sonnet sequence. The puns of the first sonnet drive the logic of that sonnet and, when read in combination with the title of the sequence, provide the framework for the sequence as a whole. That is, the puns of the title and the first sonnet are the argument of the sequence.

Loving in trueth, and **fayne my love in verse** to show,
 That she, deere *Shee*, might take some **pleasure** of my **paine**:
Pleasure might cause her **reade**, **reading** might make her **know**,
Knowledge might **pittie** winne, and **pittie** **grace** obtaine.
 I **sought** fit wordes to paint the blackest face of woe,
 Studying **inventions** fine, her wittes to entertaine,
 Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flowe,
 Some fresh and fruitfull showre, upon my Sunne-burnt braine.
 But wordes came halting out, wanting **inventions** stay,
Invention Natures childe, fledde Stepdame studies blowes:
 And others **feete**, still seem’de but straungers in my way,
 Thus, great with Childe to speak, and helplesse in my throwes,
 Byting my tongue and penne, beating my self for spite:
 Foole said My muse to mee, looke in thy **heart** and write. (Bold mine.)²⁶

²⁴ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). While Greenblatt does not mention this precise example, his text is important for understanding how Renaissance authors fashioned a literary self.

²⁵ Judith Dundas, 'a Light and Illuding Form': Sidney's Use of Paronomasia', *The Modern Language Review*, 92 (1997), p. 274.

²⁶ Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*, Sonnet 1, p. 1. I have normalized the *u*, *v*, and long *s* of the facsimile.

In the first line of the sequence, Sidney repeats a pun that appeared in his *Apologie for Poetrie*: ‘Xenophon excellently **feigneth** such another stratagem by Abradatus in Cyrus’ behalf. Now would I **fain** know...why you do not as well learn it of Xenophon’s fiction’.²⁷ The paronomasia links ‘feign’ with ‘fain’ to add weight to Sidney’s argument that pleasure and delight moved an audience better than ‘verity’ to the truth of the brazen world.²⁸ Dundas’ argument about paronomasia adding weight to an argument stands for the pun in the *Apologie*.²⁹ This paronomasia on ‘feign–fain’ in the sonnet sequence is doing something different though.

The line ‘Loving in trueth, and fayne in verse my love to show’ is capable of a number of readings. The *OED* states that the first meaning of ‘fain’ the adjective is ‘Glad, rejoiced, well-pleased’.³⁰ This provides us with the initial, surface meaning, that Astrophil is glad to write this sonnet and the following sequence. However, the second meaning of the adjective is ‘Glad under the circumstances; glad or content to take a certain course in default of opportunity for anything better, or as the lesser of two evils’.³¹ This meaning is further refined by the *OED* into ‘Necessitated, obliged’.³² There is a tension in the word ‘fayne’ as to exactly how Astrophil feels about having to write the sonnet sequence. It could simply be that he is happy, or that he is happy enough to indulge in the second best option of writing his love rather than indulging in acts of love, or that he is required to write his love because he is unable to engage with his emotions and the object of those emotions except through literary effort. Lines 2 to 4 of the sonnet sequence outline why Astrophil has put pen to paper — in an effort to win Stella’s

²⁷ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 111.

²⁸ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, p. 111.

²⁹ For more discussion of the ‘feign–fain’ paronomasia in the *Apologie*, see p. 7 of this thesis.

³⁰ *OED fain*, a. and adv. A.1. (c888-1876) 2nd Edition 1989.

³¹ *OED fain*, a. and adv. A.2. (c1330-1882) 2nd Edition 1989.

³² *OED fain*, a. and adv. A.2.b. (1513-1884) 2nd Edition 1989.

‘grace’. As the sonnet goes on, first meaning of ‘fayne’ (glad), becomes more and more ironic — it turns out that Astrophil is actually having trouble putting pen to paper and is not only biting his pen but beating himself for being ‘helplesse’ in front of the empty page. This turn, which is introduced in line 5 and clearly enunciated in line 9 (‘But words came halting forth, wanting **Inventions** stay’), allows us to see more clearly that ‘fayne’ is not only a subtle syllepsis on different meanings within the adjective ‘fain’ but is also a paronomasia on ‘fain–feign’. The *OED* is clear that ‘fayne’ is a variable spelling for both ‘feign’ and ‘fain’.³³ It could be argued that this makes the pun a syllepsis and not a paronomasia but the evidence from the *Apologie* demonstrates that with at least two separate spellings used this is more properly an instance of paronomasia. It is the meanings of ‘feign’ that really open up the *non finito* metamorphosis of Astrophil and the sonnet sequence.

The *OED* offers twenty-six distinct meanings for ‘feign’, but twenty-three of them are under the general definition of ‘to fashion fictitiously or deceptively’.³⁴ The knowing wink to the fictitious nature of the sonnet sequence serves to introduce the difference (perhaps we could say *différance*) between Sidney and Astrophil but also at the same time it inscribes a central anxiety into Astrophil’s rendition of the sonnet sequence. For, if Astrophil is acknowledging that his account is ‘fictitious’ in nature then how much can the reader trust him later in the sequence when he claims to have received a kiss and all that entails?³⁵ How can we be sure that what Astrophil–Sidney claims has occurred between himself and Stella–Penelope Rich? Is the love really fictitious or deceptive and if so, why so? Is it because the chaste love of writing sonnets is more worthy than the bodily love of a consummated relationship? ‘Loving in trueth’, begins

³³ *OED feign*, v. Spellings, 2nd Edition, 1989; *OED fain*, a. and adv. Spellings, 2nd Edition, 1989.

³⁴ *OED feign*, v. **II**. (1297-1862) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁵ See Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*, Sonnets 79-81.

Astrophil, but two words later the ‘fain–feign’ paronomasia inscribes a struggle that is to the centre of the sequence, the struggle between a ‘chaste’ love and a ‘bodily’ love.

The ‘fain–feign’ paronomasia also develops the poet’s concerns about representation, initiated in the ‘Astrophil–Philip’ paronomasia, when read as part of the complete phrase to which it belongs: ‘and fayne in verse my love to show’. ‘My love’ does not definitely refer to Stella or to Astrophil’s feelings for her; it can be either and the sonnet sequence will go on to oscillate between the two. ‘Fool, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write’, is how Astrophil ends the sonnet and Prendergast claims that the common critical gloss on this line is that ‘heart’ signifies Stella but goes on to point out that it could as easily ‘refer to the autonomous centre of the author’s inspiration — the desiring self’.³⁶ This is backed up by the first lines ‘my love’ because the *OED* allows a possible reading of ‘love’ as: a) a ‘person who is beloved of another: esp. a sweetheart’;³⁷ b) that ‘intense feeling of romantic attachment which is based on sexual attraction; sexual passion combined with liking and concern for the other person’;³⁸ and c) the specifically ‘Sexual desire or lust, esp. as a physiological instinct; amorous sexual activity, sexual intercourse’.³⁹ So, when we combine the ‘fain–feign’ paronomasia with the ‘love’ syllepsis, we arrive at a nexus of ideas which combine the sexual with the platonic, the chaste with the bodily, the self with the object of desire, the self and the written self, being willing and being required almost against one’s will, fact and fiction.

It is this nexus that has become the staple of critical investigations into *Astrophil and Stella*. Prendergast follows the depictions of Astrophil and Stella as allegories of

³⁶ Prendergast, ‘The Unauthorized Orpheus of Astrophil and Stella’, p. 23.

³⁷ *OED love*, n.¹ **I.6.a**, (c1225-1995) Draft Revision June 2009.

³⁸ *OED love*, n.¹ **I.4.a**, (OE-2000) Draft Revision June 2009.

³⁹ *OED love*, n.¹ **I.5.a**, (OE-1990) Draft Revision June 2009.

Renaissance debates on fiction;⁴⁰ while Tom Parker argues for a widening gap opening up between Sidney and his creation Astrophil as Astrophil enumerates throughout the sequence a fallen sexuality;⁴¹ Alan Sinfield demonstrates that Astrophil's sexual yearnings for Stella are present from the beginning of the sequence;⁴² Phillippy follows a reading inspired by the idea of a 'palinode' in which Sidney associates himself and Penelope Rich with Astrophil and Stella but oscillates between this position and that of disassociating himself and Penelope Rich from the fictional characters.⁴³ While this nexus in the first line of the sonnet is not completely *non finito*, the rest of the sonnet follows through various threads of the nexus to place some constraints upon it.

A syllepsis on 'pleasure' in the second line advances the sexual or platonic possibility in 'fayne in verse my love to show'. The second line reads: 'That she, deare Shee, might take some pleasure of my paine'. The construction 'take some pleasure' is a specifically sexual construction according to the *OED* which defines 'pleasure' as the 'indulgence of physical, esp. sexual, desire or appetites; sensual or sexual gratification. **to take one's pleasure**: to have sexual intercourse'.⁴⁴ That pleasure can also be had without carnal intent or interaction is also upheld by the *OED*:

The condition or sensation induced by the experience or anticipation of what is felt to be good or desirable; a feeling of happy satisfaction or enjoyment; delight, gratification. Opposed to *pain*.⁴⁵

This meaning highlights the irony inherent in having Stella's pleasure based on Astrophil's pain.

⁴⁰ Prendergast, 'The Unauthorized Orpheus of Astrophil and Stella',

⁴¹ Tom W.N. Parker, *Proportional Form in the Sonnets of the Sidney Circle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁴² Alan Sinfield, 'Sexual Puns in *Astrophil and Stella*', *Essays in Criticism*, 24 (1974).

⁴³ Phillippy, *Love's Remedies: Recantation and Renaissance Lyric Poetry*.

⁴⁴ *OED pleasure*, n. 1.b. (a1450-1992) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁴⁵ *OED pleasure*, n. 1.a. (a1393-1988) Draft Revision June 2009.

‘My paine’ is another syllepsis which could mean physical pain,⁴⁶ mental pain,⁴⁷ or the ‘trouble taken in accomplishing or attempting something’⁴⁸ and, in a moment of prefiguration, the ‘physical suffering experienced when giving birth; labour’.⁴⁹ The somewhat clichéd paradox of pleasure and pain is here delivered with courtly *sprezzatura*. This is undercut when Astrophil describes himself in line 12 as being ‘great with childe to speak’, the metaphor occurring after he has already gone into detail about the trouble he is having because, as he says in line 9, ‘words came halting forth’. The shift normally found in a Petrarchan sonnet is found in the usual place but it follows on from the possible logic introduced by the syllepsis on ‘pain’. ‘Pain’ could mean the mental agony of not being admitted to Stella’s presence, the mental and physical turmoil of unconsummated desire, the trouble that writing sonnets causes their writer, and, as mentioned above, the physical pain of childbirth and labour. All of the above are floating within the word and the phrase and the gradatio⁵⁰ that occurs directly after line 2 in line 3 focuses the meanings of ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ towards a sexual reading. The Petrarchan turn, which finds its apotheosis in the metaphor of being ‘great with childe’ (itself a result of the sexual act), is prefigured and anticipated in the submerged meaning of ‘pain’: ‘the physical suffering experienced when giving birth’. The denotations of the syllepsis on ‘pain’ open up threads of meaning that Sidney is able to use to structure the thought pattern of the sonnet.

If ‘fayne in verse my love to show’ is a description of the argument of the sonnet sequence then ‘paine’ is the argument of the first sonnet. When each pun occurs

⁴⁶ *OED pain, n.*¹ **3.a.** (c1330-1988) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁴⁷ *OED pain, n.*¹ **4.a.** (c1330-1998) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁴⁸ *OED pain, n.*¹ **5.a.** (c1330-1993) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁴⁹ *OED pain, n.*¹ **3.d.** (a1398-1990) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵⁰ I am aware that another term for this rhetorical technique is ‘climax’ but felt that such an obvious pun did not need to be belaboured in the body of this thesis.

(‘Astrophil–Philip’, ‘fain–feign’, ‘love’ and ‘pain’) it opens up a possible play of meaning that at its inception remains potentially *non finito*. The pun on ‘pain’ defines the motions carried out by the remainder of the sonnet. The first line institutes a potential play of meaning that is carried out throughout the sonnet sequence until Astrophil loses everything he set out to obtain. His very name with its reference to Sir Philip Sidney and also to his dependence on Stella, and her punning connection to Penelope Rich have instituted a seam of signification of self, subject and object that still fascinates critics today. This idea of play of self instituted through puns on names which initiate moments of metamorphosis that become, in some respects, *non finito* leads us into perhaps the most intensely and densely packed punning in English literature prior to Joyce: Shakespeare’s puns on ‘will’ in his sonnets 134-136.

WILL-I-AM

In ‘Sonnet 134’, William Shakespeare writes ‘So now I have confest that he is thine, | And I my self am morgag’d to thy will’.⁵¹ Here, ‘will’ is a syllepsis which means ‘desire’⁵² and, in a continuance of the financial definition ‘mortgaged’, ‘will’ could also denote ‘a person’s formal declaration of his intention as to the disposal of his property or

⁵¹ While there are several excellent editions that have recently been published (see William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets: With a New Commentary by David West* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2007); William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets: Updated Edition*. ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*. ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997)) there are two slightly older editions that serve the purposes of this thesis better because they have a modernized version of each sonnet and a facsimile version of the sonnet as it appeared in 1609. They are William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. ed. by Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and William Shakespeare, 'The Sonnets', in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. by Helen Vendler (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997). Vendler’s edition being the most recent of the two, it will be the edition cited throughout this thesis when I quote from any of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Vendler provides the reader with a facsimile version and a modernized version of each sonnet. When I cite, I cite from the facsimile but I have normalized *i* and *j*, *u* and *v*, and the long *s* where appropriate to do so. Shakespeare, 'The Sonnets', sonnet 134, ll. 1-2, p. 569.

⁵² *OED will*, n.¹ I.1.a. (a900-1896) 2nd Edition 1989.

other matters to be performed after his death, most usually made in writing'.⁵³ Throughout the remainder of the sonnet he uses 'will' a second time ('nor will he not be free'⁵⁴) and its cognate 'wilt' a total of three times ('Thou wilt restore'; 'thou wilt not'; and 'thou wilt take'). *The Norton Shakespeare* notes that 'Sonnet 134' 'links with 133'.⁵⁵ While this is no doubt true, it is also true that 'Sonnet 134' is linked to both 'Sonnet 135' and 'Sonnet 136' which both pun on 'will' in ways which deepen and explore the word in a much greater way than that demonstrated above.

We have already seen how Sidney used paronomasia to both link and distance himself from his creation Astrophil. William Shakespeare, in the 'will' sonnets, engages in a greater level of identification with the speaker and thus brings his own subjectivity into the wordplay.⁵⁶ Shakespeare's relationship with the puns of the 'will' sonnets is much more intertwined than that which Sidney allows himself between he and his poetic creation, Astrophil. Even in moments of quite close identification between Sidney and Astrophil, Sidney maintains an ironic distance. This comes about because the paronomasia that links Sidney to Astrophil is only part of *Astrophil's* name and Sir *Philip* Sidney's name. That is, only a part of Sidney is a part of Astrophil, leaving one to ponder which parts of Sidney were left out of Astrophil and which parts of Astrophil are unique to Astrophil. Shakespeare, however, uses syllepsis to forge a close link between himself and the poetic speaker of the sonnets. The first mention of 'will' in 'Sonnet 135' is both capitalized and italicized (admittedly an effect that could have created by the printer acting alone) in a move that shows the words ability to function as a proper noun

⁵³ *OED will*, n.¹ **IV.23.a.** (c1380-1858) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵⁴ Shakespeare, 'The Sonnets', Sonnet 134, l. 5, p. 569.

⁵⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997) 'Sonnet 134', note 1, p. 1968.

⁵⁶ Stephen Booth, *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 92; Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 289-96; Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 575.

— ‘*Will*’.⁵⁷ The distance between ‘*Astrophil*’ and ‘Sir *Philip* Sidney’ is greater than that between ‘*William* Shakespeare’ and ‘*Will*’. ‘*William* Shakespeare’ totally contains ‘*Will*’. The *OED* notes that ‘*Will*’ is the ‘Abbreviated pet-form of the Christian name *William* (cf. *Piers Plowman* B.xvi.148, Shakes. *Sonn.* CXXXVI)’.⁵⁸ The level of connection is therefore closer between ‘*Will*’ and ‘*William*’ than it is between ‘*Astrophil*’ and ‘*Philip*’. It is syllepsis that allows this close connection because syllepsis does not require a sound similarity, rather, it relies on a similarity of spelling. It is a homonym. One sound, one name, with the potential for multiple denotations — four to six denotations of which are utilized in Sonnet 135 according to most editors of the Sonnets.⁵⁹

Sonnet 135

Who ever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,
 And *Will* too boote, and *Will* in over-plus,
 More than enough am I that vexe thee still,
 To thy sweet *will* making addition thus.
Wilt thou whose *will* is large and spatious,
 Not once vouchsafe to hide my *will* in thine,
 Shall *will* in others seeme right gracious,
 And in my *will* no faire acceptance shine:
 The sea all water, yet receives raine still,
 And in abundance addeth to his store,
 So thou being rich in *Will* adde to thy *Will*,
 One *will* of mine to make thy large *Will* more.

⁵⁷ Shakespeare, 'The Sonnets', , Sonnet 135, l. 1, p. 573.

⁵⁸ *OED will*, n.³ (a1718-1888) 2nd Edition 1989. There appears to be a slight error in the *OED* when it refers to both *Piers Ploughman* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in its definition but only gives a date range which starts after both these were published.

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 466; William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and a Lover's Complaint*. ed. by John Kerrigan (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 365; Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 650; Shakespeare, *The Sonnets: Updated Edition*, p. 238; Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets: With a New Commentary by David West*, pp. 411-414.

Let no unkinde, no faire beseechers kill,
 Thinke all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

(Bold mine.)⁶⁰

Joseph Pequigney argues that the typography indicates that the first three uses of ‘Will’ signify the proper names and thus are an instance of antanaclasis as he argues that ‘Will’ starts as ‘Will the Handsome Youth’, shifts into ‘Will the Dark Lady’s Husband’ before finishing as ‘Will the Speaker’ or Shakespeare.⁶¹ This is suspect reasoning because it does not take into account the opening line and the deliberate balancing of ‘her wish’ with ‘thy *Will*’. ‘Wish’, according to the *OED* (and exemplified with extracts from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Cymbeline* and *Paradise Lost*), means ‘an object of desire; what one wishes for: = DESIRE’.⁶² The first meaning attributed to ‘wish’ by the *OED* is the similar but more explicit: ‘An instance of wishing; a feeling in the mind directed towards something which one believes would give satisfaction if attained, possessed, or realized’.⁶³ Whoever has ‘her desire’, whoever receives the attentions of her ‘desire’, ‘thou hast they *Will*’ and ‘will’ also means ‘Desire, wish, longing’.⁶⁴ That is, whoever has her wish, have their wish. The speaker creates a circle of desire where the desire of the person (who is the object of ‘her’ desire) is both created and justified by ‘her’ desire — at least in the speaker’s eyes. Complicating matters is the fact that while ‘wish’ is a relatively sexually innocuous word, ‘will’ is not because it can also bear a specifically

⁶⁰ Shakespeare, ‘The Sonnets’, Sonnet 135, ll. 1-14, p. 573.

⁶¹ Joseph Pequigney, *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 145-46. Pequigney mounts an unconvincing argument for the historicity of the Dark Lady and her husband, a man who Pequigney claims also shared the nickname ‘Will’. This seems to be stretching the plausibility of coincidence a little. Despite the inherent implausibility of his argument in relation to the opening lines of this sonnet, Pequigney makes two important points: 1) we should treat the 1609 edition as it appears in the manuscript; and 2) that italicizing and capitalizing ‘will’ does highlight its operation as a proper name. He shares this interest in the proper name function of the italicized and capitalized ‘will’ with Joel Fineman. See Fineman, *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*.

⁶² *OED wish*, n.¹ **3**. (a1300-1849) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶³ *OED wish*, n.¹ **1.a**. (1390-1876) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁴ *OED will*, n.¹ **I.1.a**. (a900-1896) 2nd Edition 1989.

sexual denotation. ‘Will’ can signify ‘carnal desire or appetite’.⁶⁵ While ‘wish’ does not carry this meaning according to the *OED*, it does belong to the Dark Lady whom we already know to be sexually promiscuous and, according to the speaker, has not maintained fidelity in their relationship. The first ‘will’ of the sonnet thus carries three significations: 1) a nickname derived from the name ‘William’; 2) ‘desire–wish’; and 3) ‘carnal desire–appetite’.

The first quatrain of the sonnet does not seem to be addressed directly to the Dark Lady, but rather seems to be addressed to the individual who ‘hath her wish’. This ‘whoever’ that the speaker is addressing would seem to be the person in possession of a ‘sweet will’ according to the fourth line of the quatrain. Pequigney reads this instance of ‘will’ as denoting both carnal desire and the female genitals.⁶⁶ This is, perhaps, not entirely a convincing reading because it presumes that the speaker is solely addressing the Dark Lady, but Pequigney is right to pick up on an explicitly sexual discourse. As we have seen, this discourse was opened up in the first two lines of the sonnet through the tripartite syllepsis on ‘will’. If Will the Speaker is addressing the person receiving the Dark Lady’s ‘wish’ then, according to tradition, he is speaking to the Young Man. This would mean that ‘sweet will’ refers not to the female genitals but to the male genitals.⁶⁷ Will the Speaker is claiming that the Young Man has ‘*Will* too boote, and *Will*

⁶⁵ *OED will*, n.¹ I.2. (971-1603) 2nd Edition 1989. Given that most commentators agree that the writing of the sonnets took place between 1594 and 1609, this date range does not preclude the meaning from being available at the time Shakespeare wrote the sonnets. Furthermore, the *OED*’s final example is from Shakespeare’s oeuvre (*Measure for Measure*) indicating that Shakespeare was aware of the sexual meaning of the word.

⁶⁶ Pequigney, *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 146.

⁶⁷ The *OED* does not recognize that ‘will’ can denote the male or female sexual organs. ‘Willy’ from which ‘will’ might reasonably derive does not occur in written form as a word meaning ‘penis’ until 1905. (*OED willy, willie*, n.² 2. (1905-1985) 2nd Edition 1989.) The context of the sonnet, however, clearly allows that the word ‘will’ signifies both ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ at different times as we will shortly find out. In other resources, there is no gloss of ‘will’ in Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance*, it is defined as ‘carnal desire’, ‘genitals, usually penis’ with a note that the ‘genital sense extends to include the woman’s organ’ in Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language*, pp. 337-38.

in over-plus' precisely because Will the Speaker is vexing the Young Man and the Dark Lady with his presence, turning a couple into a threesome that becomes his 'addition' to the Young Man's 'sweet will'. Alternatively, or concurrently, the Speaker's desire could be inflaming the Young Man's desire, the vexation causing the addition that is the result of tumescence to the Young Man's 'will'. Finally, one wonders if there is not a little backhanded compliment being given to the Young Man here — yes, his 'will' is 'sweet' but it requires the Speaker's 'addition' to become potent. Regardless, it is clear that Will the Speaker is conscious of the fact that his attempts to woo the Dark Lady are fanning the flames of her relationship with the Young Man.

The next quatrain sees Will the Speaker shift his address from the Young Man to the Dark Lady. The shift in focus is forced to the reader's attention when the poet explicitly forces the word 'will' to denote 'vagina'. The poet achieves this by giving the word 'will' a physical description as 'large and spacious'. While these adjectives can be used metaphorically to describe 'desire', they also have the effect of turning 'will' into a container in which Will the Speaker wants to 'hide' his 'will' in. By metamorphosing the word 'will' from 'penis' to 'vagina', the poet switches the subject of the Speaker's address. The switch is also highlighted by the polyptoton 'sweet will'-'wilt'-'will'. Vendler claims that 'will' is 'perhaps meant to be seen' in 'wilt'.⁶⁸ 'Wilt' here carrying the denotation 'expressing a request (usually courteous; with emphasis, impatient)'.⁶⁹ This makes 'wilt' a variant form of 'will'. Indeed, according to the *OED*, if we do not read it as a variant on the verb 'will' then we are left with 'wilt' as in to 'become limp or flaccid which has its earliest known usage in 1691⁷⁰ in reference to plants and was not

⁶⁸ Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 575.

⁶⁹ *OED will*, v.¹ **B.6.b.** (c1300-1878) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁰ *OED wilt*, v. **1.a.** (1691-1897) 2nd Edition 1989.

figuratively applied outside botany until 1787.⁷¹ Therefore, ‘to become limp or flaccid’ is an anachronism and, regrettably, an invalid reading according to the principles of economy. ‘Wilt’ is in this instance a variation of ‘will’ which makes it an instance of polyptoton and the transformation in the form of ‘will’ accompanies the shifting of the Speaker’s focus and address from the Young Man to the Dark Lady.

By giving the Dark Lady’s ‘will’ the physical characteristics of being ‘large and spacious’, Will the Speaker clearly implies that this ‘will’ is both her desire and her vagina. This is reinforced in the second line when ‘will’ metamorphoses into Will the Speaker’s sexual desire and his penis — ‘my will’. If her desire–vagina is as large as Will the Speaker is suggesting, then surely she could fit him in also. The mocking tone that carried over from the first quatrain transforms into a tone that seems to have a pleading quality even as it accuses. This shift also demonstrates that even though Will the Speaker sought to subsume both the Young Man and the Dark Lady into functions of himself in the first quatrain, the Dark Lady is too big for Will the Speaker to subsume and in actual fact she can subsume him if she so chooses should he get to ‘hide’ his ‘one will’ in her ‘will’. This, naturally, adds further irony to Will the Speaker’s claim to ‘add’ to the Young Man and Dark Lady. How much is he adding if his ‘will’ can be totally hidden inside her ‘will’?

The pleading continues in the next two lines: ‘Shall will in others seeme right gracious, | And in my will no faire acceptance shine’. The play seems to subside here as the poet retreats from genital contact to focus again upon desire. By describing the ‘will’ in the fifth line as ‘large and spacious’, Shakespeare allows a physical denotation and when her ‘will’ is expected to ‘hide’ his ‘will’, it is clear that the poet intends a sexual

⁷¹ *OED wilt*, v. 1.b. (1787-1920) 2nd Edition 1989.

double entendre to be read into ‘hide’ as well as ‘will’. The following couplet is not so explicit. ‘Shall will in others seem right gracious’ does not include any words that would hint at an overtly sexual reading. We have stepped back here from the nexus of physical and mental action to, on the surface at least, just mental action. Shall desire for you displayed by others seem right and, by extension, be accepted when my desire for you goes unaccepted and unfulfilled? The argument is that she accepts some who show desire for her and therefore she should also be accepting Will the Speaker’s desire. This echoes the opening line of the sonnet where ‘her wish’ is intimately bound up with ‘thy *Will*’. This couplet makes it explicit that, in the Speaker’s mind, it is ‘his’ desire that helps create and form ‘her’ desire for ‘him’; except, that is, in the case of Will the Speaker whose desire for the Dark Lady does not seem to be inspiring any kind of passion in response. Finally, though, since the explicitly sexual has been raised in the previous couplet, the genie is out of the bottle, and while this couplet does not specifically refer to sex, the Speaker is still in the sexual realm, and it is almost impossible not to read ‘faire acceptance’ euphemistically.

These ideas are further refined in the third quatrain. It begins by returning to the ‘large and spacious’ desire of the Dark Lady. ‘The sea all water, yet receives raine still, | And in abundance addeth to his store’, argues Will the Speaker. The Dark Lady’s desire metaphorically becomes the sea that is added to by the rain — the desire of men (and once again, due to the sexualized nature of the discourse, ‘rain’ quickly becomes euphemized). Her desire can increase by admitting the desire of other men, specifically Will the Speaker. If this is the case, then the Dark Lady is already full of ‘will–water–rain’ before she adds Will the Speaker or his ‘rain’ and consequently we get the lines ‘So thou being rich in *Will* adde to thy *Will*, | One will of mine to make thy large *Will*

more'. The proper name 'Will' which belonged, one presumes to Will the Speaker, is now revealed to be the property of the Dark Lady instead. And, in the 'will' competition — the 'sweet will' of the Young Man, the additive 'will' of Will the Speaker — it is the 'large *Will*' of the Dark Lady that wins out. To some extent, she has the biggest. Partly due to this, and partly because his name is hers, Will the Speaker is merely one 'will' in her '*Will*'. Throughout the sonnet Will the Speaker has been attempting to claim that it is the male desire for the Dark Lady which helps propagate her desire for the male; now, it is revealed that it is Will the Speaker's desire which is constituted, created, and ruled by her desire. In the same way that *Will* is only one constituent part of *William* Shakespeare.

The final couplet reinforces this very premise: 'Let no unkinde, no faire beseechers kill, | Thinke all but one, and me in that one *Will*'. The speaker's name is no longer his own; the speaker's relationship to his subjectivity has been reduced from controlling agency to bit player because he allowed his desire to become subservient to her desire (as it always has been). He is only a part of himself and his self is actually her desire. If we are all mirrors of your desire, then I am as good a mirror as the next man seems to be the argument. This is the complete reverse of the opening line which posits that the Dark Lady's desire is being composed by the Young Man's desire. Will the Speaker is placed in the position of having endangered his own subjectivity through his extensive playing on the word 'will'.

Sonnet 136

If thy soule check thee that I come so neere,
 Swear to thy blind soule that I was thy *Will*,
 And **will** thy soule knowes is admitted there,

Thus farre for love, my love-sute sweet fullfill.
Will, **will** fulfill the treasure of thy love,
 I fill it full with **wils**, and my **will** one,
 In things of great receipt with ease we prove,
 Among a number one is reckon'd none.
 Then in the number let me passe untold,
 Though in thy stores account I one must be,
 For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold,
 That nothing me, some-thing sweet to thee.

Make but my name thy love, and love that still,

And then thou lovest me for my name is **Will**. (Bold mine.)⁷²

This sonnet would appear to utilize ‘will’ through antanaclasis as compared to the multiple and rather *non finito* syllepses deployed in the previous sonnet. The first instance is another occasion where the typography suggests a proper name and the context insists upon it — ‘Swear to thy blind soule that I was thy *Will*’ — and this shifts from denoting a person to signifying desire when it becomes ‘And will thy soule knows is admitted there’. This is followed by another swift antanaclasis: ‘*Will*, will fulfill’ that is heightened by the thrice repeated ‘ill’ phoneme. ‘Will’ in that instance shifting from Will the Speaker to the verb when it is repeated. A polyptoton follows this in the next line where Will the Speaker states ‘I fill it full with wils, and my will one’. The two lines have a chiasmic formation: will–will–full–fill–fill–full–wills–will. The polyptoton, however, intrudes on this formation by insisting that the singular of the first line becomes a multiple in the second line before shifting back into the singular again. The effect is attempting to subordinate the multiple ‘wills’ into the speaker’s ‘will’ through polyptoton. It is not so simple though; the multiple ‘wills’ are also an effect of the ‘I’, so once again, the speaker is attempting the same maneuver he attempted at the

⁷² Shakespeare, ‘The Sonnets’, Sonnet 136, ll. 1-14, p. 576.

beginning of ‘Sonnet 135’. The desire of others is constituted by Will the Speaker even as he appears to be claiming that his ‘will’ is only one of many ‘wills’.

Vendler accurately points out that the third quatrain deliberately suppresses the words ‘will’ and ‘love’ (indeed, as she notes, quatrain analysis might not be best here since it is actually the second set of six lines in the poem that suppresses ‘will’ and ‘love’).⁷³ ‘Will’ triumphantly breaks through the embargo in the final line of the sonnet: ‘And then thou lovest me for my name is *Will*’. The entire exercise becomes one of finding the proper name; when it is a matter of penises, vaginas and desires, Will the Speaker loses out, when it becomes the love of a name then Will the Speaker triumphs. More than anything, this is the rebuttal to Pequigney’s claim that the Young Man and the Dark Lady’s husband were called Will. Will the Speaker’s note of triumph would be impossible if two other lovers of the Dark Lady bore the name ‘Will’. From being a part of the ‘Will’ at the end of ‘Sonnet 135’, Will the Speaker deliberately halts the play of signification, and attempts to curtail the word’s *non finito* potential, so that he can reclaim it to denote his identity.

Vickers highlights a danger inherent in incessant playing or repetition of a single word:

words are more charged with energy and meaning than in the work of any other sonneteer, except perhaps Sidney. The impression of density is gained because over and over again, words are repeated either in the same form, or in a variant, within the same sentence, the same line, the same clause. They are repeated in different forms, or with different meanings [...] Words become pockets of energy; or are parcels that can be taken apart, put back together in a new or different context...The play of words is so unremitting that after a certain point

⁷³ Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 577.

they begin to blur; we cannot sustain the pressure to which he subjects language.⁷⁴

This is why Will the Speaker must leave the word ‘will’ alone. He has crammed it so full of meaning, Will–desire–sexual desire–wish–penis–vagina–genitals, that what I argued for at the beginning of the analysis of ‘Sonnet 136’ is perhaps only a possible reading if one has not read ‘Sonnet 135’. That is, each instance of ‘will’ after the first lines of ‘Sonnet 135’ becomes an almost automatic syllepsis because the speaker has unleashed the various semantic energies and they congregate around the word, infecting each iteration of it. To sort them out at this point becomes an exercise in head scratching and befuddlement. It is not for nothing that Vendler calls ‘Sonnet 135’ a ‘perplexing, even maddening sonnet’⁷⁵ because once one has read it through and then re-reads it, the play of the word ‘will’ serves to make defining the word impossible. The cry at the end of 135, ‘and me in that one *Will*’ cannot properly be heard, it is drowned out in the desire ‘will’, the penis ‘will’, the sexual desire ‘will’, the vagina ‘will’, the wish ‘will’. The inability of the word to sit still and denote a person, a thing or a concept highlights the danger that people accused deconstruction of propagating — the unfettering of words resulting in an endless differing and deferring of meaning until all is meaningless. In order to reclaim his subjectivity, the speaker exiles the word for six lines. It is given a break so that the speaker can explicitly and exactly set up the context in which the word has to operate: ‘Make but my name thy love’ he says so that he can repeat the vital contextual word and add weight to his reiteration of ‘will’, ‘my name is *Will*’. In order to regain control of the word ‘will’ to refer only to ‘Will the Speaker’, the speaker has had to silence it and then carefully control the context into which it is reintroduced.

⁷⁴ Brian Vickers, ‘Rhetoric and Feeling in Shakespeare’s Sonnets’, in *Shakespeare Today: Directions and Methods of Research*, ed. by Keir Elam (Firenze: La Casa Usher, 1984), p. 65.

⁷⁵ Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, p. 574.

Joel Fineman insists that when the word 'will' is repeated in these sonnets we should view it as the poet naming his name. Fineman argues that

intoning the poet's name, the deliberate excess of its repetition, 'will' turns it into a kind of chant, a sound heard almost purely as sound, a signifier unrelated in its sounding to any particular signified.⁷⁶

This interpretation is based on experiencing the poem as a construct of sound, and therefore linear and temporally constrained. We listen to a sequence of sounds and we cannot return to interrogate them once we have moved beyond that sound. It is true that repeating a sound, such as 'will' as often as the poet does here can turn it into 'a sound heard almost purely as sound'. When read on the page, though, the effect is not of stripping meaning but of cramming meaning in. In both cases, it is the silencing of the chant and the exile of the word which allows the poet to construct and control the context that the word appears in and thus attempt to control the word.

The problem is, though, that the semantic cat is out of the bag. Fineman accurately describes the 'will' sonnets as

not the most universally admired of Shakespeare's sonnets. Indeed, for many idealizing readers these are the sonnets that show Shakespeare at his worst, prepared to let the whole world slide, as Johnson or Christopher Sly would say for the sake of a pun.⁷⁷

The final triumphalism of the couplet in 'Sonnet 136' is ironically undercut because the speaker's name is '*Will*' and that makes him his desire, her desire, his penis, her vagina, her wish, his motive. Everything and nothing. The gambit of silencing and exiling the word 'will' for six lines fails because of the polysemy indulged in throughout the previous sonnet. If what Fineman claims is true, that by repeating his name the poet allows himself a third person perspective on himself, that is the poet can refer to himself

⁷⁶ Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*, p. 290.

⁷⁷ Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*, p. 289.

as ‘I’ and ‘he’, then this is a strategy that embraces the loss of control over language that writing necessarily engenders. The poet can no longer fully control the signification of ‘will’ and therefore cannot sign himself in any secure concrete sense anymore.

As Howard Felperin says, the ‘relationship now represented — or is it generated — is as unstable, polymorphous, and perverse as the language which represents, or generates, it’.⁷⁸ In Felperin’s view the inability of language to control language is the point of the Dark Lady sonnets.

It is no longer possible to specify the erotic and ethical duplicities and disloyalties represented in the later sonnets, because the language in which they are represented so openly acknowledges its own duplicity and disloyalty. But neither is it possible to deny that anything is being represented at all. For the Shakespeare of the later sonnets, unlike Leontes, this condition of multivocality is neither a nightmare of anxiety nor a utopia or bliss — as their tone of detached engagement attests — but a kind of bemusement at the irrepressible power of language to keep on signifying beyond any particular significance, to work overtime, as it were, producing an overplus of signification that cannot be brought to rest in any definitive act of interpretation, either positive and humanist or negative and deconstructive.⁷⁹

Fineman claims that Shakespeare invented the split in subjectivity that became the focus of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis because of the way in which Shakespeare involves his own subjectivity through the puns on ‘will’.⁸⁰ This, though, is problematic because Sidney has utilized a similar technique to implicate yet distance himself from his poetic creation. While Shakespeare certainly does bind himself up in the play on the word ‘will’, he does not invent this play, rather he exploits his knowledge of it. The logic of the word ‘will’ allows him to discuss how desire is constituted and to ironically

⁷⁸ Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 195.

⁷⁹ Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory*, pp. 197-98.

⁸⁰ Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*. The title of the book itself makes this claim apparent.

subsume all the meaning of ‘will’ into ‘*Will*’ which is further subsumed into ‘William Shakespeare’. Once again, one wonders which aspects of ‘William Shakespeare’ were left out of ‘Will the Speaker’ in the same way that one wonders precisely which parts of Sir *Philip* Sidney were held back from *Astrophil*.

What makes both the arguments of Felperin and Fineman possible, along with the other more reductionist readings of Peguigney and Booth, is that the word ‘will’ is *non finito*. Despite Will the Speaker’s best efforts, he is unable to control the signification of the word ‘will’. The poet, standing outside the sonnets, has ironic control of the word because it is likely that the irony of Will the Speaker being unable to control his language is intended. But, that ironic knowing does not prevent the word from becoming uncontrollable. Vickers claims that the rhetorical technique *plote* (where a word is repeated) ‘creates an effect of insistence, pushing us back to look at and think a word again’.⁸¹ The same stands true for puns on one word. When we cast our mind back to the opening of ‘Sonnet 135’, we see that it is all there: ‘Who ever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*, | And *Will* to boote, and *Will* in over-plus’. Indeed, Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnets seek to investigate, exemplify, and follow the logic of the phrase ‘thy *Will*,—And *Will* to boote, and *Will* in over-plus’. The opening phrase opens up the word ‘will’, it defines the discourses to follow as those that will spring from the polysemy of ‘will’, that is, we experience ‘will in over-plus’.

THY WILL BE DONNE

Shakespeare and Sidney are not alone in punning on their own names, Donne plays the same game to different ends in his poem ‘A Hymne to God the Father’. The

⁸¹ Vickers, ‘Rhetoric and Feeling in Shakespeare’s Sonnets’, p. 73. For a brief discussion, please see Appendix 1.

paronomasia on 'done' and 'Donne' is famously encoded into the conclusion of each of the three stanzas. However, it does occur early on in the poem and once again this early instance helps open up and encode multiple threads of meaning throughout the poem.

I.

Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begun,
 Which was my sin, though it were **done** before?
 Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I runne,
 And do runne still: though still I doe deplore?
 When thou hast **done**, thou hast not **done**,
 For, I have **more**.

II.

Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I have wonne
 Others to sinne? and, made my sinne their doore?
 Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I did shun
 A yeare, or two, but wallowed in, a score?
 When thou hast **done**, thou hast not **done**,
 For, I have **more**.

III.

I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne
 My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;
 But swear by thy self, that at my death thy **sonne**
 Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
 And, having done that, Thou hast **done**,
 I feare no **more**.

(Bold mine.)⁸²

Knowing that this poem was written by John Donne opens up a possible paronomasia between 'done' and 'Donne'. The play of the paronomasia, the seam to use Derrida's

⁸² Most recent edition of Donne's poems modernize the spelling and typography of the poems. See Ilona Bell, ed., *John Donne: Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), John Carey, ed., *John Donne, The Oxford Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Donald R. Dickson, ed., *John Donne's Poetry, A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007). An older edition, John Donne, 'A Hymne to God the Father', in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, ed. by Charles M. Coffin (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), preserves a version of the original spelling. The *Donne Variorum* does also and it is from its internet database that the above poem is transcribed, from the 1635 poems, p. 388: John Donne, 'A Hymne to God the Father' (2010) <<http://digitaldonne.tamu.edu/>> [Accessed 14/05/2010]

terminology, is first found in the second line of the poem: ‘Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne, | Which was my sin, though it were **done** before?’. It is equally possible to read this line as meaning either ‘it was done before’ or it was ‘Donne before’, the poet’s father and mother engaging in the sin which resulted in the conception of John Donne.

The conclusion to the first two stanzas can be glossed into four separate strands of meaning. 1) When thou hast done, thou hast not done. 2) When thou hast Donne, thou has not done. 3) When thou hast done, thou hast not Donne. 4) When thou hast Donne, thou hast not Donne. All four are plausible readings and arguments could be mounted to prefer one over the others. This, though, is to deny the poem its play. The point of the paronomasia is that all four are not just possible but should be recognized and allowed to exist at the same time. To reduce the poem to one word one meaning is to deny the paronomasia its effect. Indeed, reinscribing it as I have above is incorrect, as the conclusion to the first two stanzas should be glossed not into separate strands of meaning but rather should be reinscribed as a pun: ‘When thou hast done–Donne, thou hast not done–Donne’. The poet opens up the play of meaning and a rhetorical reading and Derridean rigour demands that we let the paronomasia stand, with all its permutations and denotations available.

The third stanza attempts, as Shakespeare attempted, to bring the play under some kind of control. It replaces ‘When thou hast done’ with ‘And, having done that’, which becomes nonsense if read as ‘And, having Donne that’. Even as the grammatical structure denies the polysemy in this instance, it opens it up again for the final ‘Thou hast done–Donne’. This duality of the third stanza comes to retroactively dominate the entire poem, and attempts to force the previous two stanzas into the reading ‘When thou

hast done, thou hast not done—Donne’. Throughout the entire poem the play is highly controlled and while the various meanings of ‘done—Donne’ oscillate, the seam holds the play together without lapsing into paradox.

There is a second series of puns throughout this poem that critics have noticed. Given the tendency of critics to read Donne’s surname into the poem, it is interesting that some critics prefer to read a ‘more—*mort—mors*’ paronomasia than a ‘more—Anne More’ (Donne’s wife) reading.⁸³ The initial two lines open up a connection between sin and sex. ‘Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne, | Which was my sin, though it were done before?’. The sin where Donne started could be either a) original sin,⁸⁴ b) the sexual act committed by his father and mother (Donne before) during which John Donne was conceived, or c) his first sexual sin which he committed even though he was not the first human to do so — ‘it were done before’. If a specific sin is intended, by any use of the word ‘sin’ throughout the poem, then only John Donne knows what that sin is. The syllepsis on ‘more—More’ at the conclusion of each stanza would suggest that we are to read the sins as being instances of sexual misdemeanours with the woman who became his wife. This is, in fact, reinforced if we read each ‘more’ as linked through an intentional paronomasia with the French *mort* or the Latin *mors* — death. Renaissance literature abounds with sexual plays on ‘die’ because of the conceptual linking of orgasm with dying. The final argument of the poem is that the poet no longer fears having sex and therefore dying with his wife — he fears ‘no More’ because, either his

⁸³ See, for example, Robert N. Watson, *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 197-98 and Jonathan F. S. Post, *English Lyric Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 20-21. An exception to this strand of interpretation is provided by Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 218, where he argues for a ‘more-increase’ and ‘more-Anne More’ reading.

⁸⁴ A reading provided by both Ilona Bell and Charles M. Coffin in their notes to Donne’s poem. Ilona Bell, ‘Notes’, in *John Donne: Selected Poems*, ed. by Ilona Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 281; Charles M. Coffin, ‘Notes’, in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, ed. by Charles M. Coffin (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 661.

wife no longer holds any fear for him, or when he dies, he will be with God who continues to save the world through His Son.⁸⁵

Hyperbolic criticism has been applied to Donne's poetry as well as to Shakespeare and Sidney. Stanley Fish provides one such example when he argues that Donne discovered the 'drift' of language three hundred years before Derrida.⁸⁶ A more plausible rendition of this argument is rendered by James Baumlin in his book *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse*.

The Renaissance was perhaps the first age to glimpse fully, if fleetingly, the rhetorical dimension of culture, the way language provides the primary instrument of politics, science, philosophy, and religion as well as literature, the way language indeed constitutes these fields.⁸⁷

The claims that Renaissance writers 'discover', 'invent', or 'glimpse fully' the drift and rhetorical nature of language are disingenuous because it shifts the focus away from what they are doing when they utilize rhetoric, specifically punning rhetorical tropes, to compose their poetry. Baumlin goes on to note that 'polysemy discovers its own organization and systematic operation'.⁸⁸ This is another way of saying that Renaissance writers were able to mine the Derridean 'seam' of polysemy that exists within language to structure their poetry. As we know though, Ovid had done similar things in Latin and it is unlikely that he invented the process since he learnt at the feet of the Ancient Greeks (who may have invented and codified rhetoric but they did not invent language).

This, perhaps, is why Vendler called 'Sonnet 135' 'infuriating', because we instinctively seek to deny puns their polysemy, as Baumlin argues:

⁸⁵ We should also note the paronomasia on son-sun. While Donne writes 'sonne' his mind obviously allowed the pun because the son's effect on the world is that of the sun, He 'shines'. A small, but not insignificant, instance of a pun opening up a train of thought for the poet.

⁸⁶ Stanley E. Fish, 'Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power', in *John Donne*, ed. by Andrew Mousley (New York: Palgrave, 1999), p. 161.

⁸⁷ James S. Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), p. 1.

⁸⁸ Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse*, p. 14.

Over against the polysemy of language is a reader's need to choose a meaning; each reading, moreover, must remain limited in attention and singular in perspective, unfolding in and through time. But nothing prevents criticism from instituting a double or triple reading.⁸⁹

Perhaps what we as critics should be doing is not enacting a double or triple reading to follow the logic of each individual meaning, but an Ovidian reading in which we acknowledge each instance of metamorphosis. The ability of language to mutate meaning, to keep meaning shifting from one to the other, from 'done' to 'Donne' and back again, the ability of words to undergo metamorphosis both typographically — 'will' into '*Will*' — and semantically — 'desire' into 'carnal desire' into 'penis' into 'vagina' — is how these poems are structured and are operating. If there is such a thing as 'Ovidian language' or a 'language of metamorphosis' then it is the language of these Renaissance poets where they open up vistas of meanings within a word or words through the rhetorical techniques that let them metamorphose meaning and sound: antanaclasis, polyptoton, paronomasia, and syllepsis. The seams of thought that were constructed in the poems we have discovered and examined above are dependent on the ability of rhetorical pun techniques to develop, extend, and explore ideas and concepts while maintaining a connection from one idea to the next. In other words, the poems discussed this far follow with rigour the seam created by the logic of the pun.

MILTON

Just as Sidney, Shakespeare and Donne utilized puns to create discourses that their poetry explores, so too did that youth of the late English Renaissance, John Milton. In his *1645 Poems*, Milton published two poems written when he was a student at

⁸⁹ Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse*, p. 289.

Cambridge. ‘On the University Carrier who sickn’d in the time of his vacancy, being forbid to go to *London*, by reason of the Plague’⁹⁰ is the somewhat lengthy title of the first and the second is simply entitled ‘Another on the Same’. Roy Flannagan notes that in ‘On the University Carrier’ there are ‘puns or allusions to Hobson’s colourful language’.⁹¹ He goes on to claim that ‘Another on the Same’ ‘may suffer from the contagion of puns that infest it’.⁹² Flannagan’s gloss on the last line of ‘Another of the Same’ is a contemporary moment of Johnsonian exasperation: ‘Milton can’t stop punning’.⁹³ The reason for all this punning is that Milton was engaged in writing a joke epitaph for the recently deceased Hobson in competition with his fellow students and to prove ‘that he could, like Homer and Virgil before him, play with inconsequential subjects’.⁹⁴ Not only that, Milton is demonstrating that he has learnt and digested the lesson provided to him by such poetic predecessors as Sidney, Shakespeare and Donne — that puns, or a pun, could create, sustain, and drive the thought pattern of the poem — or, in other words, that puns could create, sustain and drive a punning logic.

On the University Carrier

Here lies old *Hobson*, Death hath broke his **girt**,
 And here alas, hath laid him in the **dirt**,
 Or **els** the ways being **foul**, twenty to one,
 He’s here stuck in a **slough**, and **overthrown**.
 ’Twas such a **shifter**, that if truth be known,
 Death was half glad when he had got him down;
 For he had any time this ten yeers full,
Dodg’d with him, betwixt *Cambridge* and the Bull.

⁹⁰ From here on it is referred to by its short title ‘On the University Carrier’.

⁹¹ Roy Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), note 2, p. 63.

⁹² Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, p. 63.

⁹³ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 12, p. 65.

⁹⁴ Hobson died in 1631 and the poems date from this time even though they were first officially published by Milton in the *1645 Poems*. Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, p. 62.

And surely, Death could never have prevail'd,
 Had not his weekly **cours** of **carriage** fail'd;
 Bute lately finding him so long at home,
 And thinking now his **journeys end** was come,
 And that he had tane up **his latest Inne**,
 In the **kind** office of a Chamberlin
 Shew'd him his **room** where he must **lodge** that **night**,
 Pull'd off his Boots, and took away the **light**:
 If any ask for him, it shall be sed,
Hobson has **supt**, and's newly gon to **bed**.⁹⁵

In the first two lines of the poem, Milton has two puns that open up the twin discourses that he wishes to exploit: the language of the carrier and the language of death. The word 'girt' means 'saddle-girth'⁹⁶ where 'girth' signifies a 'belt or band of leather or cloth, placed around the body of a horse or other beast of burden and drawn tight, so as to secure a saddle, pack, etc. upon its back'.⁹⁷ Both Flannagan and Le Comte read the clause 'hath broke his girt' as meaning both the literal saddle-girth Hobson would have used and, metaphorically, Hobson's own belly.⁹⁸ This is followed in the second line by the pun on 'dirt' meaning both the dirt road and Hobson's grave.⁹⁹ The *OED* offers as one definition of 'dirt': 'Unclean matter, such as soils any object by adhering to it; filth; *esp.* the wet mud or mire of the ground, consisting of earth and waste matter mingled with water'.¹⁰⁰ While the *OED* does not recognize the word 'dirt' as specifically

⁹⁵ Most modern editions modernize the spelling and—or do not include the original typography of the poem (see John Leonard, ed., *John Milton: Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), John Carey, ed., *Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*. 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), and Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, ed., *John Milton, The Oxford Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). This version is from an edition which preserves the original spelling and typography as much as possible: John Milton, 'On the University Carrier', in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 63.

⁹⁶ *OED girt*, n. 1. (1563-1867) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁹⁷ *OED girth*, n.¹ 1.a. (1377-1867) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁹⁸ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 2, p. 63; Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 77.

⁹⁹ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ *OED dirt*, n. 2.a. (a1300-1878) 2nd Edition 1989.

signifying ‘grave’, the poem clearly states that ‘Death [...] hath laid him in the dirt’. If the literal ‘girth’ breaks then Hobson would be lying in the ‘dirt’; if the metaphorical ‘girth’ breaks then Hobson would be lying in a grave. A final scatological reading of the opening two lines would utilize the first meaning the *OED* supplies for ‘dirt’ — ‘Ordure = excrement’.¹⁰¹ If Hobson’s belly has been broken, then he may very well be lying in his own excrement.

This coupling of death and the language of Hobson’s trade continues in the next line when Milton writes ‘Or els the ways being foul’. ‘Els’ is a variant spelling of ‘else’¹⁰² but it is also the plural of a variant spelling of ‘ell’.¹⁰³ ‘Else’ clearly fits into the poem as a possible reading; but, so does ‘ells’ because that was an old system of measurement.¹⁰⁴ We would use the word ‘mile’ or ‘kilometer’ in a similar sense today. This syllepsis is rapidly followed by another on ‘foul’. The *OED* lists multiple meanings for ‘foul’ extant during Milton’s time but the important ones are: ‘Dirty, soiled; covered with or full of dirt. Of ground, a road: Miry, muddy’;¹⁰⁵ and ‘Charged with offensive matter; ‘full of gross humours’ (J.). Of a carcass: Tainted with disease’.¹⁰⁶ Given that Hobson has sickened and then died, it is reasonable to assume that disease of some sort is to blame and the ‘ways’ of Hobson’s body have become ‘foul’. But, now that he is interred, Hobson is ‘covered with dirt’ and we should not forget that Hobson would have had to drive his cart through miry and muddy ground as part of his job.

The fourth line marries the two discourses in one word — ‘slough’. ‘Slough’ could mean ‘A piece of soft, miry, or muddy ground; *esp.* a place or hole in a road or

¹⁰¹ *OED dirt*, n. 1. (a1300-1830) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰² *OED else*, adv. Spellings. 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰³ *OED ell*, n.¹ Spellings. 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁴ *OED ell*, n.¹ 1.a. (a1000-1837) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁵ *OED foul*, a., adv. and n. A.II.2. (c1000-1889) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁶ *OED foul*, a., adv. and n. A.II.1.c. (c1400-1837) 2nd Edition 1989.

way filled with wet mud or mire and impassable by heavy vehicles, horses'.¹⁰⁷ That is, when the 'dirt' becomes 'foul' it becomes a 'slough'. Le Comte argues that 'slough' could also mean Bunyan's 'Slough of Despond' but while 'On the University Carrier' was written around 1631, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was first published in 1678 which makes it unlikely that Milton and his contemporary audience at Cambridge would have been aware of Bunyan's 'Slough of Despond'.¹⁰⁸ But, on a quite literal level, when Hobson is buried, he is 'stuck in a slough'. Hobson's own language ('slough' as impassable road that he needed to use), the discourse of death ('stuck in a slough' denoting burial), and the connotations of 'sickn'd' ('foul') all come together in the word 'slough'.

Nevertheless, it is the death discourse that dominates the entire poem. The word 'Death' in the first line is itself a pun. When a word is capitalized, like 'Death' is here, we tend to assume an anthropomorphic reading and see 'Death' as a character; but, we should always remain alert to the reality behind the verbal illusion. 'Death' is not a character, rather it is the moment where life and consciousness cease to exist. In this poem, any direct reference to 'Death' is anthropomorphized but the literal experience of 'death' is constantly juxtaposed with the anthropomorphized figure via various puns that connect the 'death' discourse to other discourses occurring in the poem. 'Death' begins as something that literally 'broke' Hobson and 'laid him in the dirt'. By the end of the poem, 'Death' has become a jolly innkeeper, fulfilling the 'kind office of a Chamberlin'.

¹⁰⁷ *OED slough*, n.¹ 1.a. (c900-1869) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁸ Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* while incarcerated between 1661 and 1672. It was not entered in the Stationer's Register until 1677 before being published in 1678. See Roger Sherrock, 'Introduction', in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners and the Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*, ed. by Roger Sherrock (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. vii-ix.

We should note the syllepsis on ‘kind’ meaning both ‘Natural, native’¹⁰⁹ and ‘Of persons: Naturally well-disposed; having a gentle, sympathetic, or benevolent nature; ready to assist, or show consideration for, others’.¹¹⁰ This jars somewhat with the initial shock of ‘Death’ overthrowing Hobson. I do not think we are to forget that initial shock because throughout the poem Milton deploys phrases that take on ominous second meanings when read in the context of ‘death’: ‘journey’s end’; ‘his latest Inne’; ‘his room where he must lodge that night’; ‘took away the light’; and ‘has supt; and’s newly gon to bed’. The phrases tend to turn on literal meanings of words that play against metaphorical meanings instituted by the play on ‘Death’ in the first line — making these phrases a series of syllepses: ‘journey’, ‘end’, ‘Inne’, ‘room’, ‘lodge’, ‘night’, ‘light’, ‘supt’, and ‘bed’.

This discourse, extended throughout the poem, is contrasted with localized instances of punning opening up a specific discourse for a limited amount of time. We have already seen one instance of such an effect with the ‘dirt–foul–slough’ series in the opening four lines of the poem. The next four lines depend upon the play between the words ‘shifter’ and ‘dodg’d’. The *OED* defines ‘shifter’ as: 1) ‘One who shifts something (in any sense of the vb.); *spec.* a scene-shifter’;¹¹¹ 2) ‘one who eludes, or sets aside’;¹¹² 3) ‘One who resorts to petty shifts or tricks, or who practices artifice; an idle, thriftless fellow; a trickster, cozener’.¹¹³ The *OED* has only one instance of the second meaning above and dates this from 1555. However, in its definition of ‘dodge’, the *OED* uses terminology that would support ‘shifter’ being allowed to mean ‘one who eludes’.

¹⁰⁹ *OED kind, a. I.* (c888-1694) 2nd Edition 1989; Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 100.

¹¹⁰ *OED kind, a. II.5.* (a1300-1849) 2nd Edition 1989; Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 100.

¹¹¹ *OED shifter, 1.* (1571-1887) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹¹² *OED shifter, 2.* (1555) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹¹³ *OED shifter, 3.a.* (c1562-1670) 2nd Edition 1989.

‘To use shifts or changes of position (*with* a person, etc.), so as to baffle or catch him’ is one of the *OED*’s definitions of ‘dodge’.¹¹⁴ Quite clearly, as the university carrier, Hobson had to shift material between Cambridge and London. While he was working, the poem argues, he was also dodging ‘Death’ and if Flannagan’s assertion that ‘twenty to one’ is a reference to Hobson being a gambler then he is also, to some extent, a ‘thrifless fellow’.¹¹⁵ This syllepsis with three meanings opens up a train of thought for Milton that allows him to extend the idea that Hobson kept evading ‘Death’, even when he was simply travelling from the university to the pub, through the pun on ‘dodg’d’ which also highlights a possible criminal side to Hobson.¹¹⁶ The overt meaning of both terms is that Hobson evaded ‘Death’ by working, the covert meaning of both terms is that Hobson kept tricking ‘Death’ the same way he took advantage of his human victims. The overt line of reasoning continues through the next five lines through syllepses on ‘cours of carriage failed’ and ‘journey’s end’ but the covert meaning of Hobson being a petty criminal is dropped to return the reality of ‘death’ to the poem. Edward Le Comte claims that ‘dodged’ could apply equally to ‘Death’ as it could to Hobson.¹¹⁷ What occurs through syntactical ambiguity here is that the discourse of Hobson’s actions and activities — ‘dodging’ — has been consumed and subsumed by ‘Death’. That is the characteristic action of this poem, as death consumed Hobson, so it will consume the language of ‘On the University Carrier’.

The word ‘Bull’ in line eight has opened up another discourse that Milton is happy to plunder, that of the inn or pub. Flannagan notes that the

¹¹⁴ *OED*, **dodge**, v, **1.b.** (1631-1816) 2nd Edition 1989. The first evidence of ‘dodge’ being used this way is actually taken from ‘On the University Carrier’ furthering the argument that the second meaning of ‘shifter’ could also be evidenced from ‘On the University Carrier’.

¹¹⁵ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 2, p. 63.

¹¹⁶ *OED* **dodge**, v, **2.a.** (1568-1763) 2nd Edition 1989; *OED* **dodge**, v, **2.b.** (1575-1859) 2nd Edition 1989; Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 5, p. 63.

¹¹⁷ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 48.

Bull Inn, Bishopsgate Street, London, the street being one of the main avenues through the city wall, at Bishop's Gate, from the north. The 1658 version reads 'Dogg'd him 'twixt Cambridge and the London-Bull'.¹¹⁸

It is the mention of the 'Bull' which prefigures the use of 'Inne' five lines later and this in turn opens up the string of syllepses that playfully remind the reader of the darker side of 'Death'. What is demonstrated in 'On the University Carrier' is Milton's ability to plunder polysemy for both localized humour and the overall argument. That is, the puns work to sustain a few lines of reasoning and other puns — the 'death' puns — form the foundational logic of the poem.

CODA

It is not the intention of this thesis to claim that all Renaissance poets mined seams of thought created by puns. It is not my intention to argue that 'Ovidian language' was the dominant poetic language of the time. What I am arguing is that it was a possible poetic language and one that poets felt comfortable in using. Ben Jonson, in his play *Poetaster* includes a small scene where a poetaster accosts Horace and makes him listen to his execrable verse:

Crispinus. Nay, gentle Horace, stay. I have it now.

Horace. Yes, sir. [*Aside*] Apollo, Hermes, Jupiter,
Look down upon me!

Crispinus. *Rich was they hap, sweet dainty cap,*

There to be placed:

Where thy smooth black, sleek white may smack,

And both be graced.

'White' is there usurped for her brow, her forehead, and then 'sleek' as the parallel to 'smooth', that went before. A kind of *Paronomasie*, or *Agnomination*: do you conceive, sir?

¹¹⁸ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 6, p. 63.

Horace. Excellent. Troth, sir, I must be abrupt and leave you.¹¹⁹

Sarcastic to Crispinus' face, Horace provides the audience with his real opinion of Crispinus' verse a few lines later, calling it 'worded trash'.¹²⁰ Horace, no doubt, is aware that what Crispinus calls a paronomasia is not an instance of paronomasia but of consonance. This makes Crispinus a bad poet and reader but it also implies that paronomasia is a technique that poetic idiots strive to deploy. This, of course, is a rather thorough condemnation of the technique on Jonson's part.

Jonson was not alone in this, with Puttenham claiming that paronomasia or 'the Nicknamer'¹²¹ was a technique primarily deployed for sport:

Now when such resemblance happens betweene words of another nature, and not upon mens names, yet doeth the Poet or maker finde pretty sport to play with them in his verse, specially the Comicall Poet and the Epigrammatist.¹²²

Throughout his definition of paronomasia, Puttenham deploys words such as 'jest' and 'derision', making it clear that the technique was not one of sublime beauty or power but something that operated in the 'manner of illusion'.¹²³ It is important to note that writers and poets of the Renaissance were aware of the problematic relationship between punning rhetorical tropes and the dictates of logic, reason and the English language.

At this point, it is worth reminding ourselves, that the use of the logic of the pun was not the only method that Renaissance poets used to create their poetry. As we know, Renaissance poets had access to many different organizational principles for their poetry — allegorical, Petrarchan, and dramatic soliloquies amongst others. This thesis is

¹¹⁹ Ben Jonson and T. G. S. Cain, *Poetaster, The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), III.i.83-93.

¹²⁰ Jonson and Cain, *Poetaster*, III.i.107.

¹²¹ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 202.

¹²² Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 202.

¹²³ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 202.

arguing that in both larger and smaller instances of some poetry, for whole collections or individual poems, the logic of the pun could be an organizational device from which the logical flow and argument of the poetry is derived. This is not a universalizing argument intended to demonstrate the dominance of the logic of the pun in Renaissance poetics but, rather, an argument which proposes that Renaissance poets would sometimes use rhetorical punning tropes as the foundation of their poetry. For the poets studied in this chapter, it is clear that punning held no taint of the modern stigma against puns; they were as comfortable thinking through puns as they were through metaphor, simile or any other rhetorical trope. In fact, the habit of using puns to both involve and distance themselves from their poetry, demonstrates that these poets found little in puns to be embarrassed about — if puns caused shame then one would be less likely to involve one's name in the process. But, for this thesis, the main concept that we have learnt from all the puns examined herein, is that they are capable of creating the thought process or logic of the poems and that on occasions Renaissance poets would engage in punning logic to construct their poetry.

4 PUNNING LOST

‘One word with two meanings is the traitor’s shield and shaft: and a split tongue be his blazon!’—*Caucasian Proverb*.¹

THE LOGIC OF THE PUN

The previous chapter demonstrated two versions of the logic of the pun that poets could use to structure their poetry. This is a description of the way in which a pun opens up particular avenues of thought that can be exploited by the poet. By following denotative associations of a pun, the poet follows its logic. This can work in either of two ways as exemplified in the previous chapter. Firstly, a single word and its multiple denotations are the central movement and structure of the poem; just as in Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnets and Donne’s ‘Hymn to God the Father’. Donne’s poem opens up parallel readings which remain open and valid through puns on ‘done’ and ‘more’. The poem attempts to enact a closure to the opened seams of thought but is only half able to do so. Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnets are much more extreme than Donne’s use of ‘done’ and ‘more’. The various dictionary definitions of ‘will’ are utilized by the poet, but he also moves beyond those denotations and euphemistically fills ‘will’ with meanings such as ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ that the *OED* does not recognize. However, the euphemistic meanings that the poet adds to ‘will’ do stem from the seams opened up through the syllepsis on ‘will’. The definition of ‘sexual desire’ contains within it the seeds for ‘will’ also meaning ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ — the tools of sexual desire. The thought process of ‘Sonnet 135’ is established and created by the various meanings of ‘will’. That is, the

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Alice Du Clos or the Forked Tongue: A Ballad’, in *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge*, ed. by Donald A. Stauffer (New York: Random House, Inc., 1951), p. 50.

logical movement of 'Sonnet 135' is determined by the syllepsis inherent in the word 'will' which the poet mines to create the sonnet.

Secondly, a pun and its multiple denotations are used to invoke two or more discourses. As the poem progresses, the two or more discourses are continued and expanded through the use of more puns which have possible denotations that fit those particular multiple discourses. Examples of this second use of the logic of the pun may be found in *Astrophil and Stella* and in Milton's 'On the University Carrier'. In the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney used a syllepsis on 'pain' to mean, among other denotations, 'childbirth'; through the Petrarchan twist, childbirth then became the dominant trope of the sonnet. In 'On the University Carrier', Milton starts with two different syllepses — 'girt' and 'dirt' — which open up a seam of meaning that combines the language of death with the language of the carrier's trade. In Sidney, the pun proleptically signals the Petrarchan twist that occurs in the second half of the sonnet. In Milton, two discourses are developed throughout the poem with thirteen of the eighteen lines containing puns that denote meanings relevant to both discourses.

Poetry often relies on different figures of speech to create more than one discourse; however, when using puns, poets are constrained by the meanings of the word, or words, as much as they are by their imaginative powers. The fact that poets are constrained by the denotations of their chosen pun means that they are then forced to follow the logic of that pun if they wish to use it in any greater way than as a one shot witticism. The associated denotations that constitute the logic of the pun are what Derrida has termed the 'seam';² moreover, Derrida asserted that the seam had to be followed with rigor and the logic of the pun provides that rigor in these cases. These

² Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', p. 64.

opinions about the possibilities of wordplay, of the denotative associations, of the seam, of the rigor of the logic of the pun, are not just a critical discovery of the twentieth century but long recognized aspects of the use of language.

While he did not define this phenomenon as ‘following the logic of the pun’, Samuel Johnson was clearly aware of it when he wrote his famous paragraph on Shakespeare’s relationship with punning.

A quibble is to *Shakespeare*, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures, it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra* for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.³

Putting aside the value judgments, Johnson uses some interesting phrases: ‘follows it at all adventures’; ‘to lead him out of his way’; ‘its fascinations’; and ‘he will always turn aside’. To ‘follow’ something that ‘leads’ him implies that the quibble has a thread that Shakespeare can pursue. That thread, or ‘luminous vapour’, operates as what I have defined as ‘the logic of the pun’. And, as we have seen, it is a feature not only of Shakespeare’s writing. Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton, all utilize the logic of pun in at least one of its two forms.

Interestingly, Johnson made a much shorter but equally condemnatory statement about Milton’s punning.

³ Johnson, ‘Johnson’s Preface to Shakespeare’, p. 74.

His [Milton's] play on words, in which he delights too often; his equivocations which Bentley endeavours to defend by the example of the ancients; his unnecessary and ungraceful use of terms of art; it is not necessary to mention, because they are easily remarked, and generally censured, and at last bear so little proportion to the whole, that they scarcely deserve the attention of a critick.⁴

With the 'logic of the pun' in mind, we shall now stoop from the lofty perch of 'critick' to examine how Milton made use of puns, and the logic of the pun, in the fallen context of *Paradise Lost*.

WAR IN HEAVEN

While We Discharge

It is the second definition of the logic of the pun (using puns to begin and extend two or more discourses) that Satan uses to confound and confuse the loyal angels for his, and his follower's, amusement. Language and puns become weapons in a power game where access to the multiple levels of discourse is denied to the loyal angels but granted to Satan and his followers who subsequently lord their superior understanding over the uncomprehending loyal angels.

On the second day of the war in heaven, the fallen angels bring the newly invented cannons to the battlefield and hide them within their ranks. Before they reveal them to the loyal angels, Satan makes a pre-battle speech that begins at line 558 of Book 6.

Vanguard, to Right and Left the Front **unfould**;
That all may see who hate us, how we seek
Peace and composure, and with **open brest**

⁴ Samuel Johnson, *Life of Milton, Johnson's Lives of the Poets* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1965), pp. 70-71.

Stand readie to **receive** them, if they like
 Our **overture**, and turn not **back perverse**;
 But that I doubt, however witness Heav'n,
 Heav'n witness thou anon, while we **discharge**
 Freely our **part**; yee who **appointed** stand
 Do as you have in **charge**, and briefly **touch**
 What we **propound**, and **loud** that all may hear.

(Bold mine. *PL* 6.558-67.)⁵

Satan's first syllepsis is on the word 'unfould'. Flannagan observes that the 'image is of wings unfolding; Milton is picturing elements of military strategy common in infantry movements in the seventeenth century'.⁶ Given that angels have wings, Flannagan would seem to be suggesting that there is a pun between an angel's physical movement and the movement of the entire army of fallen angels. Le Comte finds no pun in the word 'unfould' and therefore does not have an entry for it in his *Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*. This is a shame, because the word 'unfould' is vital to the entire speech in a way unaccounted for by Flannagan. The *OED* states that 'unfould' can mean to 'disclose or reveal by statement or exposition; to explain or make clear'.⁷ Therefore, the syllepsis combines the discourse of non-violent communication with the discourse of military action; an ironically violent yoking together of paradoxical discourses, one must admit. These two discourses are continuously intertwined throughout the speech and form the organizational principle of the speech. The irony is, of course, that the fallen angels are not going to 'explain' or 'make clear' their intentions through 'statement or exposition' but will remain silent (apart from Satan) until they reveal, and then fire, their cannons.

⁵ All references are to John Milton, 'Paradise Lost (1674)', in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

⁶ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 172, p. 524.

⁷ *OED* **unfold**, v.¹ **2**. (a1050-1875) 2nd Edition 1989.

The next pun, ‘Peace’, is a paronomasia with ‘piece’ and refers both to the false ‘peace’ that Satan claims he is offering to the loyal angels and also to the cannons. While Le Comte registers the ‘peace–piece’ paronomasia from this line as a pun, one of the major limitations of his work is that he often fails to register the way many puns in *Paradise Lost* work to reveal the epic voice’s unsettling remonstrations at the actions or nature of the speaker.⁸ This unsettling meaning is dependent on the sentiments of the ‘right reader’ who would feel that Satan using the word ‘peace’ is something akin to Gandhi advocating total war. In other words, a fallen angel can never have or offer ‘peace’ and is condemned to an eternity of damnation and suffering. This particular paronomasia works on three levels. The first level is that of ‘peace’ as the loyal angels would understand it — ‘Freedom from civil unrest or disorder; public order and security’.⁹ Secondly, following the seam of military discourse, Satan’s jeering use of a paronomasia indicates that he means his followers to understand ‘peace’ as ‘piece’ — a ‘cannon or similar large-calibre gun; *spec.* the barrel of such a weapon’.¹⁰ Thirdly, the other hearer of the paronomasia, the ‘right reader’, understands that as a fallen angel, Satan is in no position to achieve, or offer, ‘Peace’. This extends Satan’s relationship with the military and classical epic whereby ‘peace’ is sought through combat.¹¹ The ‘right reader’, educated in Christian theology, knows that war and cannons cannot truly

⁸ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 131.

⁹ *OED peace*, n. **I.1.a.** (a1160-1992) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁰ *OED piece*, n. **II.15.a.** (1512-1993) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹¹ See Katherine Calloway, 'Beyond Parody: Satan as Aeneas in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Quarterly*, 39 (2005); James A. Freeman, *Milton and the Martial Muse: Paradise Lost and European Traditions of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), esp. Chapter 3; Michael Murrin, *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 136; and while Robert Thomas Fallon, *Captain or Colonel: The Soldier in Milton's Life and Art* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984) doesn't explicitly link Satan to classical epics, he does argue that Satan embodies much taken from the contemporary military culture which surrounded Milton.

bring ‘peace’.¹² This paronomasia is therefore doing two jobs for Milton. On the one hand, it continues the work of the syllepsis on ‘unfould’ by combining the discourse of non-violent communication with the discourse of military terminology; on the other hand, it continues the epic voice’s task of ironically counter-pointing Satan’s language with Christian theology to highlight his sacrilegious and false nature.

Satan follows the paronomasia on ‘peace–piece’ with a syllepsis on ‘composure’. Le Comte claims that ‘composure’ has two meanings: ‘a) agreement, settlement. b) putting together of ingredients for explosion’.¹³ The *OED* records that one meaning of ‘composure’ extant at the time Milton was writing was ‘agreement, settlement’.¹⁴ Another meaning contemporary at the time *Paradise Lost* was written is not ‘the putting together of ingredients for explosion’ but a ‘composed fabric or structure material or immaterial; a made up whole, a combination, structure, composition’.¹⁵ In other words, the ‘Engins and thir Balls | Of massive ruin’ (*PL* 6.518-19) that the fallen angels have constructed. The two discourses are propagated through a punning rhetorical technique and the fallen angels can snigger with anticipation at the uncomprehending loyal angels.

¹² When I refer to the ‘right reader’ or Christian theology, I am only ever referring to the central tenets shared by most forms of Christianity. While much has been written about Milton’s theology, it is not a central concern of the thesis and consequently a general knowledge of Christian theology is the basis for most interpretations requiring knowledge of such ideas. Scholarship on Milton’s theology is both wide-ranging and multifarious. Several recent texts to tackle the issue in one way or another are: Ken Simpson, *Spiritual Architecture and Paradise Regained: Milton’s Literary Ecclesiology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007); Gary Kucher, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 1 examines how Milton parodies and transforms aspects of Catholic theology; A. D. Nuttal, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); the best general introduction to the variety of opinions on Milton’s theology is now a little dated but worth reading: Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich, ed., *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jr. Gale H. Carrithers, and James D. Hardy, Jr., *Milton and the Hermeneutic Journey* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); John Reichert, *Milton’s Wisdom: Nature and Scripture in Paradise Lost* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992); now over thirty years old but still worthwhile nonetheless is C. A. Patrides W. B. Hunter, J. H. Adamson, *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton’s Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1973).

¹³ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton’s English Poetry*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *OED composure*, I.4. (1640-1709) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁵ *OED composure*, III.11. (1609-1774) 2nd Edition 1989.

Again, for the third time in the one line, Satan finds another word that can carry on the seam of polysemy that he opened up with the syllepsis on ‘unfould’. Le Comte glosses the phrase ‘open brest’ as meaning both ‘exposed ranks’ and ‘open hearted, with cordiality’.¹⁶ The *OED* defines the compound adjective ‘open-breasted’ firstly as ‘Not concealing thoughts or feelings, frank’.¹⁷ This, ironically, argues for Satan’s honesty at a time when he is being devious. Once again, this is a meaning that the ‘right reader’ might feel a little uncomfortable about. Le Comte’s first definition of ‘exposed ranks’ does not quite fully convey the sinister, cannon based meaning of ‘open brest’. When the fallen angels ‘unfould’ their ranks, they will reveal to the loyal angels the cannon hidden in their midst. The *OED*’s second definition of ‘open-breasted’, when compared to the figurative first definition above, is a physically literal definition: ‘Having the breast exposed’.¹⁸ The inference one could draw is that the ‘breasts’ of the fallen angels are the cannons hidden in their midst. The main definition of ‘breast’, according to the *OED* is ‘Each of two soft protuberances situated on the thorax in females, in which the milk is secreted for the nourishment of their young’.¹⁹ The hideous echo of ‘brest’ is to compare the life sustaining female organ with the cannons of the fallen angels that will protrude from their ranks and not so much secrete milk as violently eject projectiles — a decidedly masculine appropriation of a normally feminine, nurturing image. The violence that is soon to swamp the loyal angels is first being practised on the language by Satan. This is compounded by the phrase ‘receive them’ in the following line. The fallen angels are not planning to ‘receive’ anything. It is the loyal angels who will be on

¹⁶ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 20.

¹⁷ *OED open-breasted*, *adj.* 1. (1594-1992) Draft Revision June 2008.

¹⁸ *OED open-breasted*, *adj.* 2. (1598-2002) Draft Revision June 2008.

¹⁹ *OED breast*, *n.* I.1.a. (c1000-1863) 2nd Edition 1989.

the receiving end. For some time now, we have been in the world of Realpolitick, a world that relies upon spin and Orwellian Doublespeak.²⁰

The word ‘overture’ signals a further development of the two discourses. So far, the military discourse has been reliant upon language that is not primarily related to cannon warfare; with the one exception of the paronomasia ‘peace–piece’. To understand it as related to the cannon, the reader or listener has to be aware that the fallen angels have created a new weapon, the cannon, that Satan is here referring to. One example of this from a previous line is ‘open-brest’. ‘Overture’, however, is first defined by the *OED* as an ‘aperture, a hole, an opening; an orifice’²¹ and this is a direct reference to the appearance of the cannons, which Raphael describes a few lines later as ‘thir mouthes | With hideous orifice gap’t on us’ (*PL* 6.576-77). The second meaning of ‘overture’ is an ‘approach or proposal, originally of a formal nature, made to someone with the aim of opening negotiations or establishing a relationship’.²² Once more, this is a word that refers to the appearance of the cannons and non-violent communication. Again, Satan’s pun is clear to his followers but the loyal angels remain unable to access the double nature of Satan’s language and hear only the discourse of peace.

The third possible denotation for ‘overture’ is from the world of music. The *OED* argues that 1667 is the year in which ‘overture’ was first used to mean:

An orchestral piece of varying form and dimensions, forming the opening or introduction to an opera, oratorio, or other extended composition, and often containing themes from the body of the work or otherwise indicating the character of it.²³

²⁰ This point is returned to shortly but someone interested in the way Orwellian Doublespeak might rely as much on the rhetoric of Milton’s Satan as it does the practices of propaganda sloganeering, could conceivably take the comparison well beyond the point reached in this thesis.

²¹ *OED* **overture**, *n.* **I.1.a.** (c1400-1891) Draft Revision June 2009.

²² *OED* **overture**, *n.* **I.2.** (1427-1989) Draft Revision June 2009.

²³ *OED* **overture**, *n.* **I.7.a.** (1667-2001) Draft Revision June 2009.

Given that this thesis applies Eco's concept of linguistic treasury by using the *OED* to provide the dating for any denotations to prove that the meaning in question was available to both author and reader, this meaning of 'overture' is a fringe case. *Paradise Lost* was first published in ten books in 1667.²⁴ It was reworked into twelve books in 1674.²⁵ This passage is included in both editions.²⁶ It is entirely possible that Milton had encountered 'overture' employed in this way but this definition's lack of an English history before 1667 means that we cannot be absolutely certain. I do not believe we can entirely rule out the option that Satan is also grimly comparing the sound of cannon-fire to that of a musical composition and the opening salvo would form the 'overture' of Satan's orchestra. If we include this meaning then 'overture' bears two cannon-related meanings and one non-violent communication denotation. As the speech progresses, Satan's words are becoming more and more loaded.

The second syllepsis in this line is 'back' and it continues the balance of the two denotative seams of the discourse. 'Back' could refer either to the loyal angels rejecting the offered peace proposal or to the physical action of turning tail and fleeing from the engagement.²⁷ This is compounded with the syllepsis on 'perverse' which Le Comte defines as a) 'unreasonably rejecting' or literally 'turned the wrong way (i.e. showing the 'back')'.²⁸ 'Perverse', though, is another instance of Satan 'styling' the language. He attempts to apply the word to describe the behaviour of the loyal angels. One definition of 'perverse' is 'Of a person, action, etc.: going or disposed to go against what is

²⁴ Roy Flannagan, 'Paradise Lost: Introduction', in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 312.

²⁵ Flannagan, 'Paradise Lost: Introduction', p. 312.

²⁶ John Milton, "*Paradise Lost: A Poem Written in Ten Books*": *An Authoritative Text of the 1667 First Edition*. ed. by John T. Shawcross and Michael Lieb (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 6. 558-67.

²⁷ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 14.

²⁸ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 134.

reasonable, logical, expected, or required; contrary, fickle, irrational.²⁹ In accordance with basic Christian theology, Satan is an explicit example of ‘perverse’ behaviour and once again, the word echoes incongruously in Satan’s mouth to highlight, perhaps unknowingly on his behalf, his own true nature.

Up until the seventh line of the speech, the discourse of non-violent communication is the primary discourse as indicated by the paronomasia on ‘peace’. With a syllepsis, the two meanings of the trope are in relative equality; it is the context that will determine which meaning could be construed as primary and which meaning could be secondary, hidden, or disguised. With a paronomasia, like ‘peace–piece’, the primary meaning is always the written word (‘peace’) as opposed to the homophonic variant word that the sound conjures to our ears (‘piece’). In this instance, the homophonic variant — ‘piece’ — is heard but is secondary to the written word on the page. The consequence of this is that the first syllepsis ‘unfouled’ sets up two roughly equal discourses, one of military terminology and a second of non-violent communication. The second pun is the paronomasia on ‘peace–piece’ and this establishes that the discourse of non-violent communication assumed the primary position. The loyal angels know this discourse to be false — how could they not? — but are unaware of the secondary sense of ‘piece’ and thus have no clue as to Satan’s actual intentions. About this, Neil Forsyth is right to claim that there is a schoolboy element to the humour because, for Satan and his crew, their feelings of superiority stemming from the newly invented cannons they are physically concealing, are verbally enacted through the puns that hide their superior access to the intentions of the speech.³⁰ However, the

²⁹ *OED* **perverse**, *adj.* **1.a.** (a1420-1987) Draft Revision June 2009.

³⁰ Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 221.

seventh line of the speech ends in a pun that moves the seam of polysemy towards cannon-based warfare becoming the dominant discourse.

The syllepsis on ‘discharge’ connotes three meanings according to Le Comte: 1) ‘carry out’; 2) ‘explode’; and, 3) ‘defecate’ (for which he references Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*).³¹ Once again, Le Comte does not go far enough in his definitions. The second definition is clearly supported by the *OED*: ‘To disburden (a weapon, as a bow or gun) by letting fly the missile with which it is charged or loaded; to fire off (a fire-arm)’.³² Le Comte’s first meaning is also included in the *OED*, to ‘relieve oneself of an obligation by fulfilling it. *to discharge oneself of*: to acquit oneself of, perform, fulfill (a duty or obligation)’;³³ but there is another *OED* definition which fits the pattern of the previous seam of meaning based on non-violent discourse — to ‘disburden oneself by utterance; to give vent to words, feelings, etc’.³⁴ I agree with Le Comte that a possible reading of ‘discharge’ should be that it refers to the fallen angels carrying out their battle plan. This why the word ‘discharge’ signals a turn from a primary discourse of non-violent communication to that of cannon-based warfare. One of the three denotations offered by the *OED* applies to non-violent communication compared to two denotations of a militaristic discourse: to ‘discharge’ your duty, and to ‘discharge’ your weapon.

The third meaning offered by Le Comte, that ‘discharge’ means ‘defecate’ is not substantiated by the *OED*. Indeed, in his reference to Empson, Le Comte notes that Empson is discussing a pun written by Crashaw. Empson quotes Crashaw’s verse and notes that the word ‘discharge’ becomes associated with the phrase ‘soft bowels’ from the previous line of Crashaw’s poem *Dies Irae*. Crashaw’s verse sets up a context in

³¹ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 45.

³² *OED discharge*, v. **I.1.b.** (1555-1872) 2nd Edition 1989.

³³ *OED discharge*, v. **I.2.b.** (1586-1705) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁴ *OED discharge*, v. **I.1.f.** (1523-1752) 2nd Edition 1989.

which a figuratively scatological reading of ‘discharge’ can be connoted.³⁵ Significantly, when the fallen angels are thrown out of Heaven, Milton uses the term ‘disburd’nd’ (*PL* 6.878) and not ‘discharged’. I do not deny that Milton engaged in scatological humour. The problem here is that the surrounding context of the speech does not seem to nudge the reader towards a scatological reading of ‘discharge’. It may be a sarcastic joke on Milton’s behalf, that the cannon fire of the fallen angels is the equivalent of defecation; but, if so, it is there only briefly as Satan continues to combine his two discourses of non-violent communication and cannon-based warfare.

Of more interest is that the word ‘discharge’ is identified by Forsyth as one in a whole series of ‘dis—’ puns in *Paradise Lost*. As Forsyth writes, ‘Milton was fond of using or making up negative words beginning with “dis—”, and this reliance on that one particular prefix begins to taint other, more neutral, ‘dis—’ words such as ‘discourse’ and here ‘discharge’.³⁶ Forsyth claims that this particular use of the word ‘discharge’ by Milton is ‘the most explicit play with a pun on “dis—”’.³⁷ The *OED* provides Forsyth with his basic definition of ‘dis—’ as meaning “two-ways, in twain”, and hence “apart”, “asunder”, or “separate””.³⁸ He also tracks ‘dis—’ back through French, Latin and Ancient Greek. This allows Forsyth to summarize the signification ‘dis—’ bears throughout *Paradise Lost*.

To sum up, then, ‘de—’ or ‘dis—’ are insistently the results of the Fall. The range of these words defines one of the informing plots of *Paradise Lost*, its Satanic movement from unity to separation and discord. The word ‘disobedience’, we may conclude, can carry such moral freight, however colourless it may seem, because Milton stands all these other words behind it.³⁹

³⁵ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp. 222-23.

³⁶ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 217.

³⁷ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 221.

³⁸ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 219. *OED* **dis—**, **I.1.** and **I.2.** (No dates provided) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁹ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 221.

This is not where Forsyth ends, he continues to track the meaning of the syllable ‘dis—’ through Virgil, Ovid, and particularly Dante. Virgil and Ovid both refer to the God of the Underworld as ‘Dis’ and Dante names the city in Hell ‘Dis’.⁴⁰ The consequence is that the prefix or syllable ‘dis—’ not only denotes ‘apart’, ‘asunder’, or ‘separate’, but it connotes, through the epic tradition, Hell and Satan himself.

Previously, ‘discharged’ has been examined as if it was a syllepsis. If, on the other hand, we view ‘discharge’ as a compound word, we get ‘dis+charge’. ‘Charge’ is a word that as a verb can denote either: to ‘put into (a fire-arm) the proper charge of powder and ball; to ‘load’;⁴¹ to ‘place (a weapon) in position for action; to ‘level’, direct the aim of’;⁴² or, to ‘rush against or upon, with all one’s force, in a hostile way; to spur one’s horse against at full gallop; to bear down upon, make a violent onset on, attack or assail with impetuosity’.⁴³ Most meanings for ‘charge’ can also be found in the *OED*’s entries for ‘discharge’. As such, the addition of ‘dis—’ does little but add a hellish, satanic, tint to the word. This, perhaps, is why Forsyth labeled ‘discharge’ an explicit use of the ‘dis—’ pun. It is already situated in a hellish, satanic, discourse and does little to surprise or change the reader’s perception of the word.

It may not change the reader’s perception of the word, but it does serve to remind the reader about who and what Satan is. Satan has been seeking to censure the loyal angels for not following him, especially Abdiel. If we combine the meaning of ‘lay blame or censure’ with ‘hellish’ we realize that this is an instance of fallen behaviour. Where God will ‘charge’ Adam and Eve, Satan can only ‘dis-charge’ the loyal angels. Once again, we have a third level of meaning which displays Satan’s fallen and

⁴⁰ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, pp. 228-34.

⁴¹ *OED charge*, v. **I.5**. (1541-1803) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴² *OED charge*, v. **IV.21.a**. (1509-1853) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴³ *OED charge*, v. **IV.22.a**. (1583-1882) 2nd Edition 1989.

perverted nature. Ultimately, this is where Forsyth's charge of schoolboy humour is somewhat incorrect. Throughout this speech Milton, or the epic voice, is making several grim jokes at the expense of Satan and his army. In its treatment of Satan through puns, the epic voice is always sardonic. By reaching past Satan's voice, through puns, to the epic voice and its ironic undercutting of Satan we reach a vital strand of the poem as a whole. At no point in this epic is Satan's voice ever free of neither the narrator's nor Milton's.

The next syllepsis is on the word 'part' and Le Comte provides two glosses — 'share, obligation' and 'conflict between two parties' which he attributes to Christopher Ricks.⁴⁴ The first meaning is supported by the *OED* which lists one meaning of 'part' as a 'person's share in some action; a duty; a business, concern, or affair; what one has to do'.⁴⁵ But, where Le Comte offers a militaristic second meaning, the *OED* offers a meaning, extant during Milton's time, that continues the thread of non-violence and combines it with the thread of warfare related discourse: 'A side in battle, dispute, question, contract, or other relation of opposing people or groups of people; a cause'.⁴⁶

'Part' is followed by 'appointed'. Once again, the *OED* provides greater levels of meaning than Le Comte allows. Le Comte defines this instance of 'appointed' as meaning both 'agreed' and 'assigned'.⁴⁷ The *OED*, however, offers three possible meanings for 'appointed'. 1) 'Fixed by agreement; settled beforehand'.⁴⁸ 2) 'Fixed by authority; ordained'.⁴⁹ 3) 'With qualifying adv. (*well, ill, etc.*): Provided with requisites,

⁴⁴ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 131.

⁴⁵ *OED part, n.*¹ **II.11.** (a1382-2001) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁴⁶ *OED part, n.*¹ **III.17.a.** (a1382-1991) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁴⁷ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ *OED appointed, ppl. a.* **1.** (1585-1850) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁹ *OED appointed, ppl. a.* **2.** (1535—1858) 2nd Edition 1989.

fitted out, equipped'.⁵⁰ Le Comte's first definition and the *OED*'s first definition confirm each other and indicates that Satan intends his troops to understand 'appointed' as 'what we have fixed to do beforehand', that is, continue their fight against the loyal angels. The second meaning supplied by the *OED* would seem, initially, to confirm Le Comte's second definition. The second *OED* definition quite clearly carries theological overtones that Le Comte's second definition also carries. Satan, once again, is 'styling' the affair. It is Satan who throughout the epic attempts to 'ordain' his followers as 'Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heaven' (*PL* 2.11) and is here attempting to take the power of God for himself. But, in reality, it is God who 'ordains' in *Paradise Lost*, not Satan.⁵¹ While the word 'appointed' here lacks a qualifying adverb, the fact that the fallen angels are equipped with a new and fearsome weapon ensures that this third meaning could be denoted by this particular instance of the word 'appointed' — 'you who equipped with cannons stand' makes perfect sense in the context of Satan's speech. It also continues the thread of cannon-related discourse and helps to indicate the semantic victory of this discourse over the discourse of non-violent communication which now, for the reader and fallen angels, takes the back seat. For the loyal angels, 'appointed' represents only blasphemy on Satan's behalf and nothing else. The discourse of parley, peace, and debate is not included in the syllepsis on 'appointed'.

The next pun is a syllepsis and a polyptoton. The word 'charge' has been discussed thoroughly above and all the various meanings imputed to it there are found here in the phrase 'Do as you have in charge'. This is an instance of polyptoton, though, because 'charge' is also the root word in the previous word 'discharge'. When the 'dis—

⁵⁰ *OED appointed*, *ppl. a. 3.* (1535-1859) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵¹ 'Ordain' is used three times in *Paradise Lost*, once by the epic voice to describe God's method of creation (*PL* 2.915); once by God when He is creating the sun, moon, and stars (*PL* 7.343); and lastly by Michael to describe God giving Moses the Ten Commandments (*PL* 12.230).

' is removed, the word remains unchanged in meaning as discussed above, but what does happen, for the attentive reader, is that Satan removes the tint of Hell from the word. As an instance of polyptoton, this stands as a classic instance of why Nash claims that all English instances of polyptoton should be properly described as 'pseudopolyptoton'.⁵² Nash considers this to be the case because in richly inflected languages, polyptoton utilizes the various word-endings to affect real change on how the root word is understood. In this case, the removal of 'dis—', has not occasioned a real change in the denotations of the root word. This instance of 'discharge—charge' has the appearance of being an instance of polyptoton but that is where it stops. Polyptoton is, as Nash points out, a hard technique to apply in English and this instance would seem to be a classic pseudo-polyptoton. The removal of 'dis—' may yet again indicate Satan styling language to suit his ends.

Of the last three puns in this speech, 'propound' is the most interesting. According to Le Comte it bears three meanings, 'propose(d)', 'put forward', and 'chemically compound(ed)'.⁵³ The first two meanings are also found in the *OED*: to 'put forward, set forth, propose, or offer for consideration, discussion, acceptance, or adoption; to put forward as a question for solution'.⁵⁴ Le Comte's third meaning is not supported by any of the definitions for the noun or verb 'propound' provided by the *OED*. I can only surmise that he is thinking of the word 'pound' (to 'break down and crush by beating, with or as with a pestle; to reduce to a pulp or powder; to pulverize'⁵⁵) which refers primarily to the action of a mortar and pestle. The strongest sense of the word 'propound' in this case is actually as a kind of polyptoton. 'Pound', the root word,

⁵² Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion*, p. 117.

⁵³ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, pp. 141-42.

⁵⁴ *OED propound*, v. 1.a. (?1531-2003) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵⁵ *OED pound*, v.¹ 1.a. (c1150-1988) Draft Revision June 2009.

could mean, during Milton's time, to 'strike hard with fists or a heavy instrument; to strike or beat with repeated heavy blows; to thump, to pummel; to kick'.⁵⁶ When we combine this meaning with that of the etymological Latin meanings of the prefix 'pro—' ('Forth from its place, away',⁵⁷ and 'Forward, onward, in a course or in time'⁵⁸) we arrive at a surprisingly accurate description of cannon fire: 'repeated heavy blows directed forth; forward in motion'. Once again, this is not a true polyptoton, because that would require the word 'pound' to either precede, or follow, the use of the word 'propound'. It is, for lack of a better definition, a polyptotonic paronomasia. While most Renaissance puns can demonstrably be pigeonholed as being one or another example of the five punning rhetorical techniques, it is also unsurprising that some examples blur the boundaries of such techniques. 'Propound' is one such case in point.

Two of the last three puns in the speech are examples of syllepsis. 'Touch', and 'loud' are terms linked to the cannons the fallen angels are about to unleash on the loyal angels. They also refer to the discourse of non-violent communication but by now the language of cannon warfare has become so dominant that it is really all one can hear. It takes Raphael's gloss on this speech — 'So scoffing in ambiguous words' (*PL* 6.568) — to remind the reader of what the loyal angels have heard throughout this speech, the language of peace, treaty, debate, and non-violent communication. The loyal angels suspect something is odd about Satan's discourse (his 'scoffing' tone and the 'ambiguous' nature of his words) but the important point is that at this stage they do not know what is coming. They suspect that Satan's troops are not going to try to talk peace but they don't know the true nature of what is to be loudly 'propounded' and so the words remain 'ambiguous'.

⁵⁶ *OED* **pound**, v.¹ **2.a.** (a1325-2002) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵⁷ *OED* **pro—**, *prefix*¹ **c.** Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵⁸ *OED* **pro—**, *prefix*¹ **d.** Draft Revision June 2009.

Forsyth, in his book *The Satanic Epic*, places a negative emphasis on this speech by Satan.

What makes these puns so tiresome is the school-boy knowingness that one hears in the speaking voice; one imagines the other devils tittering as the clever Satan delivers his taunting double-entendres: ... To this level has the Satanic literalism been reduced, a crude and labored joke that depends on one meaning being missed by half the audience.⁵⁹

Of the last few puns in the speech especially ‘touch’, ‘propound’, and ‘loud’, it is the case that there is a ‘school-boy knowingness’ nature to them. However, they also serve as the climax of the speech, and arrive at a time when Satan has followed the logic of the pun to its natural conclusion: firing the cannon. Given that cannon fire is a blunt, unmistakable event, it follows that some of the puns used should, perhaps, also be blunt and unmistakable.

William Empson is aware of the effects that Satan’s exploitation of the logic of the pun generates.

It is a bitter and controlled mood of irony in which Satan gives this address to his gunners; so much above mere ingenuity that the puns almost seem like a generalization. But here, as for ironical puns in general, to be put into the state of mind intended you must concentrate your attention on the ingenuity; on the way the words are being interpreted both by the gunners themselves and by the angels who have not yet heard of artillery; on the fact that they are puns.⁶⁰

The bitterness and irony, perhaps, exist not in Satan, but in Raphael who bore the brunt of the cannon fire and is now reliving the experience when he recounts the war to Adam. As Empson accurately notes, the mood is created by the reader’s knowledge of the effect such punning would have on the fallen angels who are in on the joke as compared to the unfallen angels not party to the humour until it is, painfully, too late. By asking us to

⁵⁹ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 221.

⁶⁰ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 103.

focus on the puns as puns, Raphael and Milton seek to highlight the perverse nature of Satan. He is displayed as a being who not only wants to be superior in every way he can, but a being that will seek to assert and demonstrate his superiority at every available opportunity. Moreover, Satan's demonstrations of his superiority are going to be true to his nature and so we should not be surprised when we discover a nasty element to his actions. However, to simply stop at that thought and not consider how Raphael and the poet are using these puns is to miss the point, and the 'bitter and controlled mood of irony' that Empson detected in the speech. Previously, I have noted that such puns as 'peace', 'open-brested', 'perverse', 'discharge', and 'appointed' not only serve Satan, but also ironically undercut Satan's discourses, the incongruity thus created serves to remind the 'right reader' of who he is listening to, thereby serving the poet and Raphael's ends. Once punning logic has been deployed to develop this piece of oratory, it exacerbates the inherent irony of the first pun because once Satan has established a seam of polysemy, the two discourses of non-violent communication and military language, the logic of the pun only serves to highlight Satan's fallen nature as the military cannon-based language usurps the non-violent discourse. As the punning seams are followed by Satan, the incongruity of his character and his language grows and grows so that by the final few puns Satan is indeed made lesser by his own actions. That this is so is testament to the poet's ability. Not only is he able to utilize the logic of the pun, he is able to utilize it in such a way that it furthers his own ends, badmouthing Satan (to put it crudely) to the point where readers feel that the great villain of the poem is little more than an insulting schoolboy.

Gamesom Mood

After the speech at lines 558 to 567 of Book 6, the fallen angels reveal the cannons and fire them at the loyal angels with the result that ‘down they fell | By thousands, Angel on Arch-Angel rowl’d’ (*PL* 6.593-94). The result of this is that Satan observes the loyal angels’ ‘plight’ (*PL* 6.607) and proceeds to unleash a second volley of puns.

O Friends, why come not on these Victors proud?
 Ere while they fierce were coming, and when wee,
 To **entertain** them fair with **open Front**
And Brest, (what could we more?) **propounded terms**
 Of **composition**, strait they chang’d thir minds,
Flew off, and into strange vagaries fell,
 As they would dance, yet for a dance they seemd
 Somwhat extravagant and wilde, perhaps
 For joy of offerd **peace**: but I suppose
 If our **proposals** once again were **heard**
 We should compel them to a quick **result**.

(Bold mine. *PL* 6.609-19.)

The interesting thing about this speech is the way in which it paraphrases Satan’s previous speech analyzed above and repeats a number of puns from that speech: ‘brest’, ‘propounded’, ‘peace’. Satan’s punning starts with a syllepsis on ‘entertain’. Once again, this word primarily indicates the discourse of non-violent communication. The *OED* states that ‘entertain’ could mean to ‘deal with, have communication with (a person)’.⁶¹ The word also had a military denotation around Milton’s time and this meaning continues the discourse of cannon warfare: to ‘give occupation to (an enemy’s forces); to engage’.⁶² Satan, it is clear, is finding new puns to fit the same joke established and sustained in his first speech. Clearly, the loyal angels now understand the joke for when

⁶¹ *OED*, **entertain**, v. **III.7**. (1568-1660) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶² *OED* **entertain**, v. **IV.9.c**. (1590-1654) 2nd Edition 1989.

Raphael glosses Satan's second speech along with Belial's, he repeats the word 'scoffing' but does not use 'ambiguous' (6.628-30).

Satan is attempting to continue with the logic of the pun that he instituted in the speech before the cannons were revealed and fired. This speech, and Belial's speech which follows it (*PL* 6.621-27), have been under fire from various critics since Addison. Addison wrote, 'This passage [*PL* 6.609-27] I look upon to be the most exceptionable in the whole poem, as being nothing else but a string of puns, and those too very indifferent'.⁶³ Ricks described Satan and Belial's wordplay as 'the most obvious puns in the poem'.⁶⁴ Thomas Corns described them as 'florid puns'.⁶⁵ He then went on to say that neither 'Milton nor Raphael suggests that the puns have any quality. Rather, with decorum, they indicate the unpleasantness of their perpetrators'.⁶⁶ That the puns in this speech of Satan's have been described as 'indifferent', 'obvious', 'florid' and, by implication on Corns' behalf, lacking in quality, may be ascribed to the fact that a joke, when repeated, loses its power. Added to this, the joke is now made clear to all who hear it: Satan, the fallen angels, the reader, and the loyal angels who now know through bitter experience the way Satan's language refers both to peace and cannon-based warfare. While one may debate the quality of these puns, it is clear that they do enhance the 'unpleasantness' of the punsters.

Besides the fact that Satan is repeating the same joke in this speech, another reason might aid our understanding of why the punning has become so obvious and laboured. Satan does not discover the ground for the joke in the same way that he discovered the joke through 'unfould' in the first speech. The first speech is ten lines

⁶³ Joseph Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 279, *Saturday, January 19, 1712*', in *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 589-90.

⁶⁴ Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 66-67.

⁶⁵ Thomas N. Corns, *Milton's Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), p. 107.

⁶⁶ Corns, *Milton's Language*, p. 108.

long and only three lines have no puns in them. This may seem insignificant but it is important. The first two lines of the speech include no puns so you do not have the opening pun which establishes the multiple discourses necessary for the process of following the logic of the pun. Lines 611-14 contain puns and then there is a two line break before the final three lines (617-19) which contain puns. In the first speech, when a pun-less line occurs it is followed by a line that includes a pun. This allows the slender seam of the logic of the pun to remain unbroken. In the second speech the puns are lumped together in two groups and divided by a discourse on the nature of dancing that interrupts the flow of the logic of the pun and makes the joke seem to be laboured over three passages instead of two: 1) in Satan's first speech; 2) in line 611-14 of the second speech; and 3) in lines 617-19 of the second speech. The second time is tedious enough and the third time adds to the tedium and by now Satan has become unavoidably 'obvious' in his humour. So, in repeating the joke, and then in breaking the logic of the pun, Satan does indeed become a labouring punster who demonstrates his self-indulgent character by reveling in the same joke three times.

Belial, in 'like gamesom mood' (*PL* 6.620) is quick to respond to Satan's humour with jokes of his own.

Leader, the **terms** we sent were **terms** of **weight**,
 Of hard contents, and full of **force** urg'd home,
 Such as we might perceive **amus'd** them all,
 And stumbl'd many, who **receives** them right,
 Had need from head to foot well **understand**;
 Not **understood**, this gift they have besides,
 They shew us when our foes walk not **upright**.

(Bold mine. *PL* 6.621-27.)

It should be noted, before we begin to discuss it, that the joke has now been made four times which could only add to the agony of the loyal angels, and demonstrates the

second-string nature of Belial's relationship with Satan. Belial begins with an antanaclasis where the non-violent 'terms' become, by the second use, a euphemism for 'cannon-balls'. Satan's first speech flowed from pun to pun, thus constructing his double discourse; but, Belial must labour the point by repeating the word 'terms'. Belial's puns are also looser than Satan's. That is, only the context of what has happened, combined with Satan's previous two diatribes, allow these words to be understood as puns. The *OED* lists no meaning for 'term', the noun or verb, that denotes cannon-balls, cannon-based warfare, or any other physical military application (beyond, of course, terms of surrender); the same stands for all the other words that Belial puns on. The crudity of Belial is that his puns are not literally puns; and, a better description of this passage would be to call it an exercise in euphemism. Belial is not able to play with language in the way that Satan does. This entire speech wants to be able to access the seam of polysemy, the two discourses that Satan has been playing with, but comes across as inept and blundering because Belial relies solely upon context to force the polysemy onto, or into, the words. Added to this is his perverse use of the word 'upright' in which he mangles the spiritual and physically literal together in a truly deplorable joke that only serves to demonstrate how bent and crooked Belial really is.⁶⁷

Satan, primarily in the first speech but also in the second speech, demonstrates the way in which he is able to create and continue two or more levels of discourse through puns. The speeches demonstrate that he is able to structure the speech by following the pun's logic and that he can also continue, deepen, and develop the seam of

⁶⁷ This euphemistic punning differs from the Shakespearean euphemistic punning on 'will' because Shakespeare begins with multiple meanings supported by the lexical social treasury which he then expands to include as much as he can through incessant repetition. Belial, on the other hand, moves from word to word, forcing each word to accept a second denotation through contextual pressure that is quite foreign to each word — where Shakespeare worked with the word 'will' to some extent, following its lead (desire-sexual desire-sexual organ), Belial does not work with any of the words he uses, nor does he follow the 'logic' of the word's possible polysemy to end up in euphemism. He simply thrusts the euphemism upon the word.

polysemy through punning. They are not crude, tiresome, indifferent, or obvious, until he begins to repeat himself. The way in which pun is piled on top of pun and yet all of them develop, extend and deepen his discourse demonstrate that Satan is a highly skilled employer of rhetorical pun techniques. When contrasted to Belial's euphemistic punning, Satan's first speech is an exemplary case of using punning thought to construct a speech. The final layer of complexity is created when Milton demonstrates the malformed nature of his fallen protagonists through their puns.

Evil Be Thou My Good

In line 611 of Book 6, Satan uses the word 'fair' to describe both his actions and those of his comrades: 'when wee, | To entertain them fair with open Front'. (*PL* 6.610-11.)

Flannagan notes that 'fair' is a term 'often used ironically in *Paradise Lost*'.⁶⁸

Ostensibly, by 'fair', Satan means:

Of conduct, actions, arguments, methods: free from bias, fraud, or injustice; equitable, legitimate. Hence of persons; Equitable; not taking undue advantage; disposed to concede every reasonable claim.⁶⁹

But, Satan is also styling the fallen angels' actions as characterized by another definition of 'fair': of 'character, conduct, reputation: Free from moral stain, spotless, unblemished'.⁷⁰ Therefore, the word 'fair' is another instance of a syllepsis, but this time it claims that the actions of the fallen angels, according to Satan, were both 'equitable' and 'free from moral stain'. The question — to what extent does Satan read the irony of 'fair?' — is an important one. Milton, and the right reader, would notice the discrepancy between both of the above definitions of fair and read the term ironically in light of

⁶⁸ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 191, p. 526.

⁶⁹ *OED*, **fair**, *a.* and *n.*² **III.10.a.** (c1340-1909) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁰ *OED* **fair**, *a.* and *n.*² **III.9.** (c1175-1892) 2nd Edition 1989.

Satan's role in Christian theology. Perhaps Satan, at this early stage of his rebellion, is already enacting the manoeuvre he makes explicitly in his well-known phrase 'Evil be thou my Good' (*PL* 4.110). If that is the case, behind 'fair' echoes the phrase 'foul be thou my fair' and Satan joins Milton and the right reader in acknowledging his true spiritual and moral condition.

When Michael faces Satan early in Book 6, he calls Satan 'Author of evil' (*PL* 6.262), where 'Author' means the 'person who originates or gives existence to anything'.⁷¹ Satan's response is to recast the terms of the debate: 'The strife which thou call'st evil, but we style | The strife of Glorie'. (*PL* 6.289-90.) This is the typical manoeuvre of Satan, to 'style' words to suit himself. The primary meaning of 'style' during Milton's time, according to the *OED*, was to 'give a name or style to; to call by a name or style'.⁷² Another, rarer meaning, with only two written examples in the *OED*, is to 'relate or express in literary form. With adv.: To express or phrase in a specified style'.⁷³ The *OED* has two examples of this denotation, but both date from the year 1605, three years prior to Milton's birth in 1608.⁷⁴ While Flannagan has correctly noted the syllepsis on 'Author' which links God and Satan,⁷⁵ he is reluctant to admit the possibility that 'author' could also mean 'one who sets forth written statements; the composer or writer of a treatise or book', a meaning that has a written history dating back to 1380.⁷⁶ What if Satan is writing the treatise of evil? A treatise that attempts to cast 'evil' as 'good', 'glorious' and 'fair'? Satan's ability to construct his speeches

⁷¹ *OED author*, n. 1. (c1384-1865) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷² *OED style*, v. 1.a. (1563-1894) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷³ *OED style*, v. 3. (1605) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁴ See Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 2; William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*. ed. by Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 6; and, John T. Shawcross, *John Milton: The Self and the World* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), p. 17.

⁷⁵ The second meaning for 'author' in the *OED* is simply 'the Creator'. *OED author*, n. 1.b. (c1374-1853). See also Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 81, p. 515.

⁷⁶ *OED author*, n. 3.a. (c1380-1880) 2nd Edition 1989.

through the rhetorical figures of invention and, more importantly, figures of speech, show that Satan is in one sense ‘writing the treatise of evil’. To accept this view, one must also be aware that Satan the treatise is somewhat spontaneous — Satan is making it up as he goes; because he is not God, Satan cannot create it all at once as God could. Instead, Satan creates a discursive ‘treatise of evil’ that is responsive to situations. As Satan progresses and encounters new situations and verbal constructions he reacts to them by rewriting them, renaming them, ‘styling’ them to use his definition of the process. That this necessitates what we today may recognize as the slogans of Orwell’s Big Brother (War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery⁷⁷) is perhaps as much an indictment of all political language as it is of Satan who would use such language to promote his own political ends.⁷⁸ The right readers, of course, are not meant to fall for such verbal wiles and if they do, as Fish has pointed out, Milton makes every effort to correct them.⁷⁹

In order to create a phrase like ‘Evil be thou my Good’ or ‘War is Peace’ where the phrase attempts to collapse into a singularity the opposite terms of an antithesis, Satan and Big Brother are attempting to bring about an instance of wordplay where none exists. That is, ‘evil’ and ‘good’ are logically opposed words. But, by phrasing ‘evil’ as ‘good’, Satan is striving to make the word ‘good’ capable of signifying ‘good’ and ‘evil’. That is, he is attempting to create a pun, be it antanaclasis, asteismus, paronomasia, polyptoton or syllepsis, it does not matter — none of them can possibly apply. The language cannot do what Satan wants it to do. While ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are

⁷⁷ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 25.

⁷⁸ Satan, in the end, is representative of all worldly rulers, from would-be democrats to the most brutal dictator. Satan’s political rhetoric is capable of being democratic one moment and tyrannical the next. The political ramifications of presenting God as an absolute monarch is somewhat different from Satan’s desire to be an absolute monarch. All earthly absolute monarchs are, strictly speaking, absolute in name only — that is, they can be removed should their security and enforcement measures fail *a la* Charles I. God, however, is logically and theologically totally absolute in His power and control. Hence the definition of God as omnipotent.

⁷⁹ Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) esp. see chapter 1.

diametrically opposed but also supplementary to each other, they are not related through either a similarity of spelling or a similarity of sound. No matter how much Satan tries this maneuver ‘foul is fair’, ‘evil is good’, it always explodes in his face — the right reader notices the incongruity of what Satan is saying and reads that incongruity in the light of the Christian myth.

The right reader is an idea that has its English literary genesis in Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*. In the *Apology*, Sidney discusses at length the idea of a ‘right poet’. But, Sidney is constantly providing examples of ‘right reading’ when he enacts readings or retellings of other texts throughout his own tract. Recent scholarship has linked Sidney’s hermeneutics to those of the prominent Protestant thinker Melanchthon.⁸⁰ Sidney, perhaps, marks the beginning of a concept of ‘right reading’ which becomes crucial by the time Milton is writing. If Fish is at all correct in his view that *Paradise Lost* seeks to actively and hermeneutically teach the reader how to read, then Milton had a concept of what ‘right reading’ was. Of course, once the idea that there is a ‘correct reading’ that is ‘right’ has entered, via Protestant hermeneutics, wordplay and punning become prospective scandals that have the potential to interrupt a ‘correct reading’. This, though, is to ignore the lesson that Satan’s ‘Evil be thou my good’ is teaching us: that paradoxical literalism is the problem that ‘right reading’ cannot accept. For the ‘right

⁸⁰ This idea was sparked by a comment by Peter C. Herman that the *Apology* relies upon a three step process, the last step of which is a construct of ‘the reader’. Peter C. Herman, *Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), p. 66. For how Melanchthon and Protestant hermeneutics came to prominence in Renaissance English literary theory, see: John Webster, ‘Introduction’, in *William Temple’s Analysis of Sir Philip Sidney’s Apology for Poetry* (New York: Mediaval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1984); Stillman, ‘The Scope of Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*: The New Hermeneutic and Early Modern Poetics’, ; Stillman, ‘The Truths of a Slippery World: Poetry and Tyranny in Sidney’s “Defence”’, ; Stillman, ‘Deadly Stinging Adders: Sidney’s Piety, Philippism, and the *Defence of Poesey*’, ; Mack, *Sidney’s Poetics: Imitating Creation; Kathy Eden, Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Kees Meerhoff, ‘Logic and Eloquence: A Ramusian Revolution?’, *Argumentation*, 5 (1991); and John R. Schneider, *Philip Melanchthon’s Rhetorical Construal of Biblical Authority: Oratio Sacra* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

reader’, ‘evil’ cannot be ‘good’. But, while the multiple denotations that wordplay and punning open up can lead to confusion, they can create a richness for the ‘right reader’ that, as we shall see in the next chapter, means that for Milton at least, punning was not a scandal where ‘right reading’ is concerned.

C.S. Lewis argued that ‘Evil be thou my good’ included the notion ‘Nonsense be thou my sense’, but this is not persuasive and Lewis has made a rare mistake.⁸¹ Satanic language is not ‘nonsense’. Through polyptoton, as we shall see in the next chapter, the link between ‘nonsense’ and ‘sense’ is much stronger than that between ‘evil’ and ‘good’. And, strictly speaking, a paradox is not ‘nonsense’. In the spirit of what Forsyth has termed ‘Satanic literalism’,⁸² Satan literally attempts to make the word ‘evil’ stand for, and denote, ‘good’. A paradox like this marks the point where the most stretched and strained wordplay snaps and ceases to be wordplay at all.⁸³ Instead, we are left with a paradox violating the normal operation of language. Satanic punning extends to levels beyond merely accessing two discourses, it extends to attempting to pun where no pun is possible and thereby Satan proves himself to be as fatally ambitious in his rhetoric as he is in heavenly politics.

‘DIS—’ AND ‘PAR—’

Already this thesis has mentioned Forsyth’s exploration of the use of the ‘dis—’ prefix throughout *Paradise Lost*. The greater reach of this network of wordplay, or quibbles as

⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 99.

⁸² Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 221.

⁸³ Another endpoint of wordplay is when sound similarity lapses into rhyme.

Forsyth terms the non-etymological section of his investigation into ‘dis—’, is that it allows him to assert a Satanic infection of Milton’s religious epic.⁸⁴

In fact, he [Milton] pushes the wordplay so far that an apparently neutral term like ‘discourse’ is drawn into the pattern of meanings, and so, too, is the power of making distinctions through which Milton figures God’s creative Word. One result is that he makes it much harder to tell God from Satan, and his serious play infects even his own discourse.⁸⁵

Forsyth concludes that just ‘as the serpent is there in *Proserpine*, as the mythographers remarked, so the Roman god of the dead is already there in *Paradise*’.⁸⁶ The impetus for the far-ranging and comprehensive examination of the ‘dis—’ wordplay by Forsyth comes from R.A. Shoaf’s explication of the language of duality and ambiguity in *Paradise Lost* in his book *Milton: Poet of Duality*. Shoaf’s investigation into wordplay is based on the syllable ‘par—’ and focused on words such as ‘paradise’, ‘pair’, ‘pare’, ‘apart’, ‘separate’. However, it is all based on a framework established at the beginning of the text which defines ‘ambiguity’ as being of the devil’s party and ‘polysemy’ being of heaven’s party.

AMBIGUITY: Duplicity, the vice of language, two intentions contend for the same semantic space; deceitful and designing, choice and liberty revoked.

POLYSEMY: Multiplicity, the virtue of language, one semantic space produces many intentions; innocent and designed, choice and liberty invoked.

UNISEMY: The end of language.⁸⁷

As John Leonard notes, Shoaf’s work ‘falls into an obedient and predictable line’.⁸⁸ This is due somewhat to Shoaf’s reliance upon deconstructive terminology, but it is also due

⁸⁴ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 224.

⁸⁵ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 217.

⁸⁶ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 238.

⁸⁷ R. A. Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. ix.

⁸⁸ John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 9.

to his prefatory framework. That framework involves language that returns us, as most Miltonic criticism returns, to the inexorable logic of the story that Milton is telling.

The inexorable logic is that at the most fundamental level of the poem, God is good and Satan is evil. Heavenly punning (and it exists) is not ‘deceitful’ while fallen punning is not ‘innocent’. Forsyth bluntly states that the ‘dis—’ wordplay ‘defines **one** of the informing plots of *Paradise Lost*’.⁸⁹ (Emphasis mine.) Indeed, Shoaf makes a similar point at the outset of his text.

To be sure, these results would not replace the findings of other studies of signification in Milton’s poetry — the typological, for example, or the reader-response-oriented or the psychogenetic — but they would certainly supplant them, adding, in particular, a heightened appreciation of the *textuality* of Milton’s verbal repetitions.⁹⁰

Both critics are aware that wordplay is only one facet of *Paradise Lost*. This, in part, is due to the pre-eminence of the Christian plot of *Paradise Lost*.

We are left with two questions: 1) do instances of ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ wordplay constitute instances of rhetorical punning? And, 2) do they constitute a following of the logic of the pun in the same way that ‘will’ and ‘done–Donne’ did for Shakespeare and Donne, that is the first method of following the logic of the pun as defined at the beginning of this chapter?

Does the ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ wordplay evidence the logic of the pun?

The answer to the second question is no. In the ‘will’ sonnets and ‘Hymn to God the Father’, the puns in question — the syllepsis on ‘will’ and the paronomasia on ‘done–Donne’ — are used in a focused and concentrated way. As has been shown above in the

⁸⁹ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 221.

⁹⁰ Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose*, p. 1.

discussion on Satan's second bout of punning in the war in heaven, an interruption to the flow or use of puns results in the logic of the pun being broken. As often as 'dis—' and 'par—' appear throughout *Paradise Lost*, and both are extremely common, they are not deployed in a continuous and uninterrupted manner. The logic of the pun is, for all intents and purposes, a technique that can be exploited in shorter poems. The longer a poem becomes, the more difficult the technique becomes to manage. Sometime sooner or later, the poet is going to run out of either denotative associations or additional words that fit the multiple discourses. The two epic-length texts of which it might conceivably be demonstrated that they follow the logic of the pun are Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.

Of particular importance for this thesis is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Frederick Ahl argued that punning tropes were the organizational principle behind the *Metamorphoses*.

My hypothesis, then, is that Ovid accompanies his descriptions of changes in physical shape with changes in the shape of his words used to tell the tale. Soundplay and wordplay do not simply occur in the *Metamorphoses*: they are the basis of its structure.⁹¹

Or, to put it another way:

Most of the verbal wit serves as a brilliantly concise summary into which Ovid crystallizes the paradoxical consequences of a given situation. This is the condensed manifestation of Ovid's interest in 'logical' incongruity that we discussed earlier.⁹²

In other words, the pun is the trope that best depicts metamorphosis and so it became the foundational technique of the *Metamorphoses*. Where other epic poems tend to have one central story or action, Ovid has had his place disputed in the epic canon because he

⁹¹ Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets*, p. 10.

⁹² G. Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p. 196.

does focus on one narrative story. He does, however, limit himself to one action: metamorphosis.

Ovid, beyond being a central influence on the Renaissance as outlined in the previous chapter, had a major influence on Milton, furnishing many of his classical similes and allusions.⁹³ I am not enough of a Latin scholar to prove that Miltonic wordplay in any way resembles Ovidian wordplay. I would suggest, though, that Milton's subjection of wordplay to the logic of the story that he fashioned does indeed indicate a response to Ovid's epic. Colin Burrow argues for the primacy of Ovid in Milton's experience as a poet:

John Milton stands at the end of this tradition of self-conscious imitations of Ovid. Ovid was one of the three works he most frequently wished to have read to him in his blindness (the others were Isaiah and Homer), and Ovid is the strongest classical influence on his writings.⁹⁴

He goes on to note a similarity in theme between Milton and Ovid.

But it is in *Paradise Lost* that Milton thinks most deeply about what it might be to re-embody Ovid, and, like so many of his predecessors, he works on those concerns through stories which explore both the vulnerabilities and the vitality of the body.⁹⁵

Burrow does not extend the similarities of themes to include wordplay but Browns makes the link explicit.

We have seen how Ovid enjoyed using puns to suggest that something remains the same after even the most dramatic transformation — Myrrha's medulla, for example, of the vena (veins) in the rocks which Pyrrha and Deucalion throw behind them which remain (linguistically) the same even after metamorphosis (I.410). Milton uses similar wordplay to link fallen and unfallen men. The

⁹³ See Browns, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes*; Burrow, 'Re-Embodying Ovid: Renaissance Afterlives', ; DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid*; and, Charles Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

⁹⁴ Burrow, 'Re-Embodying Ovid: Renaissance Afterlives', p. 315.

⁹⁵ Burrow, 'Re-Embodying Ovid: Renaissance Afterlives', p. 315.

lovely brooks in Eden roll ‘With mazy error under pendant shades’ (IV.239). The vocabulary contains ominous hints at what is to come; no taint has yet marred paradise, but we as fallen readers cannot help being aware of the negative potential of a word like ‘error’. Similarly Eve’s hair ‘in wanton ringlets waved’ (306). Although the word ‘wanton’ here certainly does not imply that Eve is in any sense sexually abandoned, we are encouraged to anticipate her fallen lasciviousness, transposing it onto her sinless state. The *Metamorphoses* has managed to insinuate its way within the pale of even this most Christian poem, donning an uncharacteristically serious guise in order to tempt Milton into indulging his taste for Ovidian play.⁹⁶

That ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ constitute component elements of *Paradise Lost* is, perhaps, a further link in the chain binding Milton and Ovid together. But, where wordplay is the foundation of the *Metamorphoses*, it is, as both Shoaf and Forsyth note, only a subordinate component of *Paradise Lost*. This represents, one could argue, yet another subjection of the classical to Christian theology by Milton.

Both Shoaf and Forsyth seem to extend the reach of their investigations beyond what might be considered, and definitely beyond what I have defined, as rhetorical punning. This is evident in the way that they begin to deal with ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ as syllables and not words. From the ‘dis—’ in *paradise* to the ‘par—’ in *separate*, both Shoaf and Forsyth reach a level of wordplay that is syllabic in nature and which provides a further link between Milton and the classical poets of antiquity. Ahl provides an example of syllabic play in Latin poetry to demonstrate what he means by syllabic play.

Another of Varro’s examples is less obvious: *inCURViCURVicum pecus*, ‘cattle with curving necks’. The juxtaposition of *CURVI* ‘curved’, with *CURVicum*, ‘necked’, suggests that there is curvature in the neck. But this sense is at odds with the usual notion of uprightness, even unbent haughtiness, in *CERVix*. In later writers, the adjective *CURVICosus* takes on the force of ‘stiff-necked, stubborn’. Bending the neck, or receiving the yoke upon it, is an admission of

⁹⁶ Browns, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes*, p. 122.

inferiority or slavery. Cattle, then, might appropriately be called *inCURViCURVicum pecus*, since they are trained to bear the yoke. We might also note that the long adjective contains, if we break it in a different way, *VICE*, which implies change, as in *VICE versa*.⁹⁷

While Ahl goes on to argue that Latin poets tend to indulge in syllabic wordplay more than English poets,⁹⁸ it is interesting to note his treatment of the passage is similar to both Shoaf and Forsyth's technique of artificially highlighting the syllable played on to help demonstrate that the wordplay exists. Much in the same way, it may be argued, as this thesis highlights puns in extracts from *Paradise Lost* and other primary texts. What all this perhaps helps to demonstrate is that Milton is an English poet with some Latin habits.

Such syllabic wordplay has been already come within the scope of this thesis; paronomasia is one rhetorical technique that can involve such wordplay as has already been exemplified by the punning between the name Sir *Philip* Sidney and *Astrophil*. At best, both 'dis—' and 'par—' could be described as instances of paronomasia. The larger problem then becomes that all rhetorical puns depend on a close proximity between words when they are being played upon. Antanaclasis and polyptoton both require that two words be used in close succession with each other for the effect to be noticed and anything beyond two or three lines is beginning to push the boundaries of 'close succession'. Syllepsis is a trope where the pun exists in one word. Paronomasia, as I have defined it in my second chapter, is a trope that can be either one word or two words repeated in close succession, in much the same way as antanaclasis or polyptoton operate.

⁹⁷ Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets*, p. 29.

⁹⁸ Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets*, p. 35.

That both ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ are objects of wordplay throughout *Paradise Lost* is clear. Indeed, they break through the boundaries of rhetorical punning and into the broader category of wordplay because of two important aspects: 1) they are diffused throughout the whole poem in a way that allows the Christian plot to override the logic of the pun; and 2) they can be submerged in syllabic play that English rarely admits due to its reliance on the word, not the syllable, as the primary transmitter of sense. I am reluctant to label moments of ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ wordplay as instances of paronomasia primarily because of Forsyth and Shoaf’s reliance on the epic wide nature of the wordplay. In the context of Forsyth and Shoaf’s work, the links between the words become very strong because the words containing the relevant syllables are brought together into proximity by their argument.⁹⁹ Our arguments often place constraints on us that mean we do not follow exactly the movements of *Paradise Lost* and we feel free to link a quotation from Book 2 to Book 10 in the matter of a sentence or two which brings the quotations into much closer proximity than actually exists in Milton’s text. This allows Forsyth and Shoaf to quickly demonstrate how pervasive the ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ wordplay really is. What it also suggests, is that while each instance of the two syllables constitutes an individual example of paronomasia, there is too much text between the instance to call it an example of extended rhetorical punning when rhetorical punning requires that words are repeated in close proximity.

While both Shoaf and Forsyth have conducted valuable research into Miltonic wordplay, they are of limited use to this thesis because their work treats wordplay as the

⁹⁹ The main passage in which we could view ‘dis—’ wordplay as being composed of paronomasias is from the poem to book 9.

‘I now must change
Those Notes to Tragic: foul distrust, and breach
Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
And disobedience: On the part of Heav’n
Now alienated, distance and distaste’.
(*PL* 9.5-9.)

widest possible category while this thesis, from the ‘Methodology’ chapter onwards, seeks to analyse puns that arose through the lens of rhetorical punning. The definition of the logic of the pun that arose from the examination of rhetorical punning requires that puns be used in close proximity to continue the seam of polysemy that punning logic creates. Both ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ are far too diffuse to withstand this test. What both ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’ demonstrate is the way in which Milton worked to dilute and diffuse the logic of the pun, even in the fallen context of *Paradise Lost*.

DILUTING THE LOGIC OF THE PUN

Having examined the ways in which *Paradise Lost* deploys what has been defined as the logic of the pun, we should ask, how does *Paradise Lost* use puns in general, beyond the submerged structuring of ‘dis—’ and ‘par—’? Given that the only one to engage with punning logic is Satan, the natural place to begin an investigation of rhetorical punning in general is with Satan. That Satan is one of most accomplished punster of all Milton’s characters is undoubted but we shall begin with his first speech and note how many of his puns — both intended and unintended — introduce the Satanic themes that will be extended throughout the entire poem. Although these themes are more diluted throughout *Paradise Lost* than either of the ‘dis—’ or ‘par—’ wordplay streams, it is worthwhile to note how puns are used to introduce and strengthen their presence in the poem.

Satan’s First Speech

Satan’s first words in *Paradise Lost* are remarkable for their rhetorical verve; moreover, they are remarkable because of the hidden paronomasia that opens the set speech and

immediately not only identifies Satan for the reader, but also fatefully and proleptically, echoes the scene of Eve's temptation in Book 9. Satan begins with the phrase 'If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! How chang'd' (*PL* 1.84) and the line can be read as an example of the basic iambic pentameter stress pattern.

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /

If thou beest he; but O how fall'n! How chang'd.

This ensures that the word 'beest' could not be read as 'be-est' because it is unstressed and run together, and so 'beest' has a remarkable homophonic likeness to the word 'beast'. According to Kökeritz, the 'ee' sound has remained unchanged since the fifteenth century and how we pronounce it is the way Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have pronounced it.¹⁰⁰ The sound for 'ea' that we have is generally that of 'ee' but during the Renaissance this was not the case. Apart from a few exceptions, Kökeritz asserts that during the sixteenth century the 'ea' and the 'ee' sounds began to combine into 'ee' with the process reaching its conclusion at the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁰¹ *Paradise Lost* was first published in the latter half of the seventeenth century and, therefore, it is reasonable to presume that most contemporary readers of *Paradise Lost* would be able to 'hear' the similarity between 'beest' and 'beast'.

Milton used the word 'be' a total of 332 times in *Paradise Lost*.¹⁰² Of more importance is that in the whole of Milton's poetic oeuvre the construction 'beest' appears only once, in this line of *Paradise Lost*.¹⁰³ The word is echoed once in the first Book at the beginning of the oft-cited leviathan simile: 'or that Sea-beast | *Leviathan*'

¹⁰⁰ Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*, p. 190.

¹⁰¹ Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*, pp. 194-197.

¹⁰² William Ingram and Kathleen Swaim, ed., *A Concordance to Milton's English Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 47-49.

¹⁰³ Swaim, ed., *A Concordance to Milton's English Poetry*, p. 53.

(*PL* 1.200-01). In this line, ‘beast’ is clearly linked to Satan. In the first extract, the typography of ‘beest’ and its place in the scansion of the line indicates an unavoidable aural echo with the word ‘beast’. The spelling indicates that Satan is addressing Beelzebub (‘if thou be-est he’) but the ironic echo — paronomasia — to the attentive reader is ‘thou beast he’.

‘Beast’ could mean both ‘Antichrist’¹⁰⁴ and ‘lower animals, as distinct from man’.¹⁰⁵ Flannagan notes that although Satan is ostensibly addressing Beelzebub in this speech he may also be talking about himself.¹⁰⁶ Flannagan bases his interpretation on the assumption that the phrase ‘Realms of Light’ (*PL* 1.85) is a link to Satan’s heavenly name of Lucifer. While the link between ‘Lucifer’ and ‘Realms of Light’ is probably there, we get a greater sense that Satan is talking about himself through the ‘beest–beast–antichrist’ paronomasia in his opening words. While Satan is always self-regarding when looking at others, through reflection and ironic puns, he reveals himself to the right reader.

If thou **beest** he; but O how fall’n! How chang’d
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
Cloth’d with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
Myriads though bright.

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.84-87.)

It is important to note that ‘beast’ does not fit the phrase grammatically but the echo of ‘beast’ in the reader’s ear is hard to miss when ‘beest’ is used in the context of the newly fallen angels waking in hell. Given that ‘beast’ can mean ‘Antichrist’, it helps heighten the solipsistic qualities of Satan’s speech that are further evidenced through the phrase ‘Realms of Light’.

¹⁰⁴ *OED* **beast**, *n.* **II.7.** (1382-1954) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁵ *OED* **beast**, *n.* **I.1.b.** (c1220-1780) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁶ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 42, p. 357.

These opening lines of Satan's speech demonstrate that he is aware that falling from heaven has come at the price of physical change. This too is implicit in the 'beest-beast' paronomasia. He does not understand, as the paronomasia makes clear to the reader, that he is now lower than a human being. Only in Book 10, when he is finally metamorphosed into a serpent, does Satan finally complete the true meaning of his first words in the epic. But, Satan does understand that in some way he is now 'lower' than he was before. The idea of change encapsulated in the 'beest-beast' echo dominates the first section of Satan's forty line speech. After this, the speech becomes an argument to claim that while there has been an outward change there has been no inward change—in effect, Satan admits the 'beest-beast' paronomasia, only to qualify it, and then dismiss it.

Crucially, the word 'beast' is one that re-occurs in Book 9 during the temptation scene. Eve is at first amazed that the snake can speak and she discusses as much when she decides to eat the apple.

...to us deni'd

This intellectual food, for **beasts** reserv'd?

For **Beasts** it seems: yet that one **Beast** which first

Hath tasted, envies not, but brings with joy

The good befall'n him, Author unsuspect,

Friendly to man, farr from deceit or guile.

(Bold mine. *PL* 9.767-772.)

As Eve uses polyptoton to move from the general 'beasts' to the singular serpent 'Beast' we cannot avoid the knowledge that 'Beast' can also mean 'Antichrist' and while Eve claims the serpent is 'farr from deceit or guile' we, the readers, have at all times the hideous echo of 'Antichrist' ringing in our ears to counter Eve's rashness and self-deception. The ironic revelation of Satan as the Antichrist through the paronomasia on

‘beest’ in Book 1 becomes, for the right reader, Eve’s tragic mishearing and ironic misuse of ‘beast’ through polyptoton in Book 9. Eve’s confusion is here a direct result of the polyptoton. While there can presumably be only one ‘Antichrist’, there can be many ‘beasts’ of the field. When one reduces ‘beasts of the field’ to ‘beast’, the dire echo of ‘Antichrist’ may become lost in the focus created by ‘beasts of the field’.

To return to Satan’s first speech, his thought previously focused upon the separation from Heaven, now switches to a continued ‘inner’ unity between Beelzebub and himself.

If he whom mutual league,
 United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
 And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize,
Joynd with me once, now misery hath **joynd**
 In equal ruin.

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.87-91)

The link between the two thoughts — separation from heaven and unity between Satan and Beelzebub — is not occasioned by a pun. Indeed, there is only one pun in this passage. The antanaclasis on ‘joynd’ clearly indicates that despite the interjection of misery, Satan thinks that something remains unchanged and that Beelzebub’s loyalty remains firm.

Despite this, the repetition of ‘joynd’ undercuts Satan’s own rhetoric. The spelling of ‘joynd’ allows a typographical play with the word ‘joy’. The ‘mutual league’, ‘united thoughts’, ‘equal hope’ and ‘hazard in the Glorious Enterprize’ (indeed the spelling of ‘Enterprize’ may indicate a pun on ‘prize’) all indicate that a certain ‘joy’ was hoped for and the spelling of ‘joined’ that Milton prefers indicated that ‘joining’ should contain ‘joy’. The word ‘misery’ is placed between the two uses of ‘joynd’ and this has the effect of stripping the second instance of the word ‘joynd’ of its latent ‘joy’.

The repetition of ‘joynd’ is an antanaclasis because the word undergoes a subtle change and qualification of meaning. The ‘misery’ attached to the second instance of ‘joynd’ ensures that the reader does not and cannot see any part of the word as being linked to or meaning ‘joy’. So, despite Satan’s protestations to the contrary, his mental state and Beelzebub’s mental state have changed from something involving ‘joy’ to something involving ‘misery’ in which they are both ‘joined’.

We now come to the moment when Satan gives his first version of what has resulted in this loss of outward, physical greatness that he observes in Beelzebub and also himself:

into what Pit thou seest
 From what highth fall’n, so much the stronger prov’d
 He with his Thunder: and till then who knew
 The force of those dire **Arms**? yet not for those,
 Nor what the **Potent** Victor in his rage
 Can else inflict, do I repent or **change**,
 Though **chang’d** in outward lustre;

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.91-97.)

Le Comte notes a minor syllepsis on ‘Arms’ where it could signify either ‘weapons’ or be an ‘anatomical reference] to what hurled the “thunder”’.¹⁰⁷ The inference is that ‘He’ — God, who is as yet unnamed by Satan — simply had better weapons than the fallen angels. The second inference is that God simply has larger and better biceps with Satan playing the unfortunate Hector to God’s Achilles. Both interpretations imply that the problem is physical in nature. This is, for the right reader, an obvious fallacy.

The antagonistic attitude towards God continues in the phrase ‘Potent Victor’. Satan admits his defeat but he is also anticipating his justification for rebellion and the continued defiance of God that will conclude his speech. The word ‘Potent’ can be both

¹⁰⁷ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 10.

a noun and an adjective; it is derived from the Latin stem *potent-*, which the *OED* defines as ‘powerful, influential, mighty, efficacious, effective, convincing, an influential person’.¹⁰⁸ During Milton’s time, as an adjective, ‘potent’ meant of ‘a person or thing: powerful; having great authority or influence; mighty’.¹⁰⁹ As a noun, it signified a ‘powerful person; a potentate’.¹¹⁰ The adjectival meaning is linked to the previous clause and its use of a physically combative language: ‘stronger’, ‘Thunder’, ‘dire Arms’. ‘Potentate’ is listed by the *OED* as a synonym for ‘potent’ and interestingly, ‘Potentate’ was first used *c*1475 around twenty-five years before the first written evidence for the use of ‘potent’.¹¹¹ ‘Potentate’ is defined by the *OED* as ‘monarch, prince, ruler, *esp.* an autocratic one’.¹¹² If the phrase ‘Potent Victor’ stands as a double-barreled name, that is, ‘Potentate Victor’, then it proleptically anticipates Satan’s later argument in this speech. Satan is setting God up as an autocratic ruler, so that his rejection of God could be viewed as ethically and spiritually correct. Satan is preparing the ground for a later thread of argument.

Even as he deploys clever and somewhat ‘neat’ syllepses to further his own agenda, Satan is not able to go long without tripping over his own tongue. Satan utilizes a polyptoton — ‘change–changed’ — that seeks to admit both his unchanging mind and his altered physical appearance. Polyptoton, in its physical representation on the page, requires that the root word remain unchanged but its exterior, through the addition of a prefix or suffix, should change. It would therefore seem to be the ideal rhetorical technique with which to figure both Satan’s constancy and his inconstancy. This is not quite as true as it sounds. The application of a prefix or a suffix to a root word alters the

¹⁰⁸ *OED potent*, *adj.*¹ and *n.*² Etymology. Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁰⁹ *OED potent*, *adj.*¹ and *n.*² **A.1.a.** (a1500-1994) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹¹⁰ *OED potent*, *adj.*¹ and *n.*² **B.2.** (1568-1704) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹¹¹ *OED potentate*, *n.* and *adj.* **A.1.** (c1475-1993) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

sense or definition of that root word. The root word is worked upon by the prefix or suffix and this produces the alteration of meaning. The polyptoton ‘change–changed’ therefore does indicate a change in Satan. Satan seeks to differentiate between the interior and the exterior but the polyptoton ironically undercuts his very point by drawing attention to the way in which ‘change’ physically metamorphoses into ‘changed’, from potential action to completed action, and, therefore, Satan once again misses the point that his rebellion has indeed altered his mental state which is reflected in his diminished physical glory.

One of Satan’s more infamous puns is a moment of self-delusion enacted via an illogical polyptoton. Addison drew attention to this particular pun because it demonstrates how Milton ‘affects a kind of jingle in his words’.¹¹³ While Addison highlighted four puns under this comment, only one is a polyptoton (one is a paronomasia, and two are examples of antanaclassis). Satan, after rousing his troops from their stunned state in Book 1, informs them of his decision to continue the ‘Warr’. (*PL* 1.661.) A major logical fallacy is committed in this speech when Satan implies that God himself tempted the fallen angels into rebellion and it involves the polyptoton that Addison disliked: ‘still his strength conceal’d | Which **tempted** our **attempt**, and wrought our fall (bold mine, *PL* 1.641-42). Shoaf explains the effect of this polyptoton at length.

Temptation is possible originally and only in and through a fallen creature — God tempts only after the Fall and tempts only men (Gen. 22:1, for example). Therefore, if God tempted the rebel angel’s attempt, he was, and if, according to Satan’s diabolic logic, no better than they, and they are no worse than he (this latter, obviously, a very important consequence for Satan the politician). Satan achieves this confusion by refusing the pun (the distinctions in the pun) to fuse

¹¹³ Addison, 'The Spectator: No. 297, *Saturday, Feb 9, 1712*', p. 63.

(and confuse) the senses of *tempt* and *attempt*: to express it typographically, it is as if he had claimed that their (at)tempt is the same as God's tempt(ation) — and their sin, as it were, was merely to prefix *at* to what God has already started. But that is to ruin two useful words at once — it is, of course, to do a good deal more than that. And the ruin is hackwork: the difference between *tempt* and *attempt* is hacked away, and the two words come too close together. Drawn into each other's orbit, as it were, their mutual gravitational fields cause them to collapse inward and implode. And where once there were two good words (duality in tension), there is now (in Hell) only hackwork.¹¹⁴

A point overlooked by Shoaf is that both 'tempted' and 'attempt' share the same etymological derivation from Old French and, ultimately, from Latin. 'Attempt' comes from the Latin *attemptāre* while 'tempt' derives from the Latin *temptāre*.¹¹⁵ The *OED* defines *temptāre* as 'to handle, touch, feel, try the strength of, put to the test, try, attempt'.¹¹⁶ Satan does not ruin two good words; instead he is here drawing on the Latin root word *temptāre* and demonstrating that 'attempt' does indeed derive from adding the prefix 'at—' to the Latin root. The use of that 'at—' indicates that this is an instance of polyptoton; and, as will be argued more explicitly and at length in the next chapter, polyptoton is a technique that binds words very closely together but clearly defines their relationship to one another and hence establishes a rigidly controlled separation of the two words. In this case, it literally means that Satan's temptation resulted in his 'attempt' on the throne of Heaven. Where Shoaf reads hackwork, one could read a bitter truth in Satan's words. The true confusion occurs when Satan argues that the temptation he faced existed because he was unaware of God's strength. The only reason that Satan does not know God's strength is because he has decided that God was not his creator and thus, for his intents and purposes, being self-created, what proof does Satan have in

¹¹⁴ Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose*, p. 67.

¹¹⁵ *OED attempt*, v. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989; *OED tempt*, v. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

¹¹⁶ *OED tempt*, v. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

God's greater strength?¹¹⁷ That is the hackwork in this passage. The two words do not implode, they closely circle each other with a defined relationship — 'attempt' is a different form of the root word 'tempt'. To utilize Shoaf's orbital metaphor, 'tempt' is the sun and 'attempt' is Mercury, the closest planet to the sun. The two are only separated by 'at—' but 'attempt' is reliant upon 'tempt' for its meaning which makes 'tempt' the stronger term of the two. Satan is right — the fallen angels 'attempt' to seize control of Heaven was the physical action, and result, of their temptation.

When we hear both of these polyptotons, 'change' into 'changed' and 'tempt' into 'attempt', the right reader also hears the voice of the poet warning us in the background. We know that Satan has changed and will change in both thought and form. We also know that for all his posturing about 'glory', Satan is the being who tempted himself and fell and consequently will cause our fall. To fall for his rhetoric is tempting; but as Fish and others have pointed out, perhaps that is the whole point.

The central concern of the first speech by Satan is to shore up his own belief in his own unchanged and unchangeable mind. He continues:

...that fixt mind
 And high disdain, from sence of injur'd merit,
 That with the mightiest rais'd me to **contend**,
 And to the fierce **contention** brought along
 Innumerable force of Spirits arm'd
 That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,
 His utmost power with **adverse** power oppos'd
 In dubious Battel on the Plains of Heav'n
 And shook his throne.

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.97-105.)

¹¹⁷ This logic begins (on the timeline) from Satan's speech to Abdiel in book 5.853-64.

The polyptoton on ‘contend–contention’ demonstrates that while Satan is addressing Beelzebub, he is in actual fact having a one sided conversation with himself. He correctly identifies his own psychology but the wording that he uses ironically undercuts his rhetoric. In his view, Satan was ‘rais’d [...] to contend’, that is, his decision to rebel against God elevated Satan towards Godhood. In its most basic definition, the *OED* defines ‘contend’ as to ‘strive earnestly; to make vigorous efforts; to endeavour, to struggle’.¹¹⁸ This meaning paints Satan as an Aeneas-like figure but other meanings of the word demonstrate what is actually happening. ‘To strive in opposition; to engage in conflict or strife; to fight’ is the second definition provided by the *OED*.¹¹⁹ This meaning, as we shall see, comes to dominate the sequence. A third meaning of ‘contend’ is ‘of the strife of natural forces, feelings, passions, etc’.¹²⁰ It is the feelings and passions of Satan that prompt him to rebellion as he himself acknowledges: ‘high disdain’, ‘injured merit’. A fourth meaning, though, may deserve some consideration: ‘To strive in argument or debate; to dispute keenly; to argue. Const. *with, against* (a person), *for, against, about* (a matter)’.¹²¹ The word ‘contend’ as used by Satan is a syllepsis, the first meaning paints Satan as someone who is trying to do the right thing whereas the second clearly shows that Satan is aware that he is in opposition to God and it opposition has resulted in conflict and strife. The third meaning demonstrates that Satan is aware of the role his emotions played in his fall. The fourth meaning, if coupled with the first meaning, makes it sound as if Satan simply wished to earnestly strive in a debate with God, and talk his way into Godhood.

¹¹⁸ *OED contend*, v. 1. (1514-c1820) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹¹⁹ *OED contend*, v. 2. (1529-1875) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹²⁰ *OED contend*, v. 2.b. (1602-1883) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹²¹ *OED contend*, v. 3. (1530-1860) 2nd Edition 1989. This meaning is also found to be applicable by Le Comte. See Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 35.

The syllepsis is deliberately left open even into the next line where the polyptoton that turns ‘contend’ into ‘contention’ does not resolve the question of what Satan means here. ‘Contention’ can mean either the ‘action of straining of striving earnestly; earnest exertion, effort, endeavour’¹²² or the ‘action of contending or striving together in opposition; strife, dispute, verbal controversy’.¹²³ Both of these meanings continue Satan’s posturing over the good intentions of his rebellion and the potentially verbal form of that rebellion — at this stage, he sounds more like a dissenting minister vying for the Prime Minister’s position than a cannon firing usurper. The adjective ‘fierce’ applied to ‘contention’ does lend the combative denotation credence, especially when combined with ‘Thunder’ and ‘those dire Arms’ from earlier in the speech. The deliberate opening up of meaning is not fully resolved until line 104 when Satan renames the ‘fierce contention’ as the ‘dubious Battel’. This retroactively operates on ‘contend’ and ‘contention’ to confirm that they do indeed signify ‘engaging in strife and conflict’. Satan is styling (a word we will visit again shortly) the war in Heaven as a ‘contention’ to imply that disagreeing with God is a reasonable course of action.

A further highlight of this opening speech, exemplified earlier by the word ‘adverse’, is the way in which Milton deploys puns in order to ironically undercut Satan’s version of events. The *OED* defines ‘adverse’ as ‘Acting against or in opposition to, opposing, contrary, antagonistic, actively hostile’.¹²⁴ This is precisely what Satan means in his phrase ‘with adverse power oppos’d’. The ironic meaning, as defined by the *OED*, is Opposing any one’s interests (real or supposed); hence, unfavourable, hurtful, detrimental, injurious, calamitous, afflictive’.¹²⁵ Satan’s power with which he

¹²² *OED contention* (c1580-1858) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹²³ *OED contention* (1382-1876) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹²⁴ *OED adverse, a. and n. A.1.* (c1440-1868) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹²⁵ *OED adverse, a. and n. A.2.* (c1374-1867) 2nd Edition 1989.

opposed God is in opposition to his own interests. Satan wishes that his power could be detrimental to God but in reality Satan's power has only worked to his own detriment. The physically damaging side effects Satan has already witnessed when he discussed Beelzebub's change; losing the war in Heaven was presumably also psychologically 'unfavourable', 'hurtful', 'injurious', and 'calamitous'. All of which serves the poet's intentions, not Satan's.

This brings us to the section of the speech which has been recognized as one of the great show pieces of Satanic rhetoric.

What though the field be lost?
 All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield:
 And what is else not to be overcome?
 That **Glory** never shall his wrath or might
 Extort from me.

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.105-111.)

Satan ends the speech with a syllepsis that seeks to reorient a word intrinsic to the Christian faith. Bentley picked it up when he sought to change 'Glory' to 'Homage':

Glory is improper here: what is *extorted from Satan*, should be something from within him, his own Act, his Submission to sue for Grace. But *Glory*, viz. of God, is extrinsecal to *Satan*, not *extorted from him*, but a remote Consequence of his Submission.¹²⁶

Bentley's desire to replace 'Glory' with 'Homage' does neatly sum up one meaning of the syllepsis. His gloss of the word indicates that 'Glory' seems to recall the phrase 'glory of God' which the *OED* defines as 'the honour of God, considered as the final cause of creations, and as the highest moral aim of intelligent creatures'.¹²⁷ Satan is here

¹²⁶ Richard Bentley, ed., *Milton's Paradise Lost: A New Edition* (London, 1732), note to V. 110, p. 6.

¹²⁷ *OED* **glory**, n. **2.b.** (1382-1715) 2nd Edition 1989.

reducing God's glory to that of Caesar's when Vercingetorix laid down his weapons at Caesar's feet. Or, as the *OED* defines it, 'Something that brings honour and renown; a subject for boasting; a distinguished ornament; a special distinction; a "boast and pride"''.¹²⁸ Whether Satan lays down arms or not, God's glory remains intact and the boast rebounds ironically upon Satan.

The denigration of God through puns continues.

To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deifie his power,
Who from the terrour of this **Arm** so late
Doubted his **Empire**, that were low indeed,
That were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall.

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.111-116.)

This next passage of Satan's opening speech contains nothing that Bentley objected to, or that Le Comte found necessary to comment directly upon. Previously in the speech, Satan had made reference to 'those dire Arms' (*PL* 1.94) which had cast him, and his crew, out of Heaven. The phrase here, 'terroure of this Arm', echoes that previous phrase and seeks to outdo or compete with God's 'Arms'. God's 'Arms' are 'dire' while Satan's 'Arm' — according to Satan — inspire 'terroure'. 'Dire' does not connote the same emotional reaction that 'terroure' does, but the Satanic gloss is undone by the reality of what has occurred. God's 'Arms' becoming Satan's 'Arm' is not an instance of polyptoton, the two words are too far apart to be defined as rhetoric techniques which requires that the words be in relatively close proximity. Thus, a potential strengthening of Satan's argument through a rhetorical technique is avoided here in another move that denigrates Satan and furthers the cause of the epic poet. Yet, it is a classic example of

¹²⁸ *OED* **glory**, n. 3. (1382-1874) 2nd Edition 1989.

Satanic reduction — the entire rebellion that he posited before, the ‘innumerable force of Spirits arm’d’ is reduced to the singular ‘of this Arm’ belonging to Satan.

The word ‘Empire’, as used by Satan, is an instance of syllepsis as the noun ‘empire’, according to the *OED*, bears two primary significations that neatly define the Satanic proposition about God in this speech. Firstly, it means ‘Imperial rule or dignity’.¹²⁹ The second definition is ‘That which is subject to imperial rule’.¹³⁰ Satan is implying that he made God sweat about His chances of retaining His rule and also that which He ruled, the angels and Heaven. It has the double effect of ensuring that the two meanings are bound together but also enacts a separation of them. To be an ‘Emperor’, one needs an ‘Empire’. And, by the same logic, an ‘Empire’ needs an ‘Emperor’. If one or the other is taken away, the other falls. So, Satan is attempting to make his job easier. Either he stages a coup to take the reins of leadership or he attempts to sway the ruled to his side. He attempted both and failed in each. Firstly, he only managed to convince a third of the angels that his cause was correct. Secondly, the Son defeated the rebellion on the third day. That this division of God’s omnipotence into emperor and empire is clearly specious is no hindrance to Satan who by now is used to ‘styling’ events to suit his own purposes. Again, it is designed, styled even, to support Satan’s contention that God’s divinity and rule is merely a political and military appointment. This syllepsis also strengthens the case for an instance of paronomasia that occurs in the next clause and is designed to boost Satan’s own argument for his right to replace God as Emperor of Heaven.

We have arrived at the conclusion of Satan’s first oration in *Paradise Lost*:

...since by Fate the strength of Gods

¹²⁹ *OED* **empire**, n. I. (c1325-1886) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹³⁰ *OED* **empire**, n. II. (1297-1967) 2nd Edition 1989.

And this **Empyreal** substance cannot fail,
 Since through experience of this great event
 In Arms not worse, in foresight much advanc't,
 We may with more successful hope resolve
 To wage by force or guile eternal Warr
 Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe,
 Who now **triumphs**, and in th'excess of joy
 Sole **reigning** holds the Tyranny of Heav'n.

(Bold mine. *PL* 1.116-124.)

Le Comte argues that the use of 'Empyreal' here denotes both 'heavenly' and 'fiery' (from the Greek root).¹³¹ He argues that this is an ironic pun because Satan is defining his constitution as heavenly but because he is a resident in Hell he is constituted by the flames of Hell. Later, in the lines 'th'Empyreal Host | Of Angels by Imperial summons call'd' (*PL* 5.583-84) Le Comte argues that there is a pun — more correctly a paronomasia — on 'Empyreal–Imperial'.¹³² The use of 'Empyreal' in this first Satanic speech also includes this paronomasia because its first syllable echoes that of 'empire' which occurred only three lines previous and 'imperial' is listed by the *OED* as a variant spelling of 'empyreal'.¹³³ While the overt meaning is that angelic substance is celestial in nature, the other inference is that Satan's own flesh is 'imperial' in nature. Satan's imperial ambitions are an integral part of his being and a large motivation for his continued defiance and rejection of God's rule.

Satan's obsession with empire and imperial language in his depiction of events continues in a Latinate syllepsis on 'triumphs'. The ostensible meaning is that God is simply indulging in the dominant meaning of the verb: "To rejoice for victory"; to be elated at another's defeat, discomfiture, or the like; "to insult upon an advantage gained"

¹³¹ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 54.

¹³² Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 54.

¹³³ *OED empyreal*, *a.* Spellings. 2nd Edition 1989.

(J.); hence, to rejoice, exult, be elated or glad; to glory'.¹³⁴ The Latin root of the word recalls the 'entrance of a victorious commander with his army and spoils in solemn procession into Rome'.¹³⁵ One of the consequences of the Satanic imagination which consistently utilizes the language of 'empire' and through the etymology of that word, the Roman empire, is to link Imperial Rome with Satan. This is achieved in many other ways throughout the poem — identification of Satan with Aeneas, the use of epic similes to compete with Virgil and Ovid throughout the first ten books¹³⁶ — but it begins here in Satan's first speech.

The speech finishes with a typically sardonic Satanic paronomasia. Never one to let a jibe pass him by, Satan says 'Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heaven'. The literal meaning is, of course, based on the word 'reign' — 'To hold or exercise the sovereign power or authority in a state'.¹³⁷ However, 'reign' is a homophone of 'rein' and the paronomasia 'reigning—reining' is brought out by the word 'holds' because when riding a horse one must 'hold' the 'reins'. Satan is reducing Heaven and its inhabitants to the horse on which God rides and whom he guides with a 'long narrow strap or thong of leather, attached to the bridle or bit on each side of the head'.¹³⁸ Throughout the entire speech, Satan has sought to recast and downplay God's nature and he finishes with a blackly humorous joke. Humour has yet to win a war but it does offer consolation to the participants.

Fish identifies Milton as guiding the reader's reactions to Satan through the corrective glosses placed at the end of Satanic orations.

¹³⁴ *OED triumph*, v. 4. (1535-1825) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹³⁵ *OED triumph*, n. 1. (c893-1838-42) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹³⁶ See esp. Martindale, *John Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic*.

¹³⁷ *OED reign*, v. 1. (1297-1871) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹³⁸ *OED rein*, n.¹ 1.a. (1375-1856) 2nd Edition 1989.

Paradise Lost is full of little moments of forgetfulness—for Satan, for Adam and Eve, and, most importantly for the reader. At I.125-6, the epic voice enters to point out to us the first of these moments and to say in effect, “For still you knew and ought to have still remembered”, remembered who you are (Paradise has already been lost), where you are (‘So spake th’Apostate Angel’), and what the issues are (salvation, justification).¹³⁹

To some critics, the epic voice’s glosses on Satan’s speeches have been read as questioning, doubting, and attempting to deny Satan the full power of his rhetoric.¹⁴⁰

This might appear so because some of the puns deployed in Satan’s rhetoric already perform the corrective move through an irony either unknown or ignored by Satan. For the alert reader, Satan’s own mouth condemns him, from the ‘beest–beast’ of the first line to the syllepsis on ‘adverse’, and on into the war in Heaven with such words as ‘perverse’, ‘peace’, and ‘appointed’. Fish contends that Satanic rhetoric lures us into forgetfulness and an act of sin — or, in his words: ‘In this poem the isolation of an immediate poetic effect involves a surrender to that effect, and is a prelude to error, and possibly to sin’.¹⁴¹ The syllepsis on ‘adverse’ and the paronomasia on ‘beest–beast’ both seem to be operating in opposition to Fish’s position. That is, if you isolate them, and examine the effect they create, then admit the potential readings thus enacted, the reader is not being led into error but being advised against it — and indeed, perhaps to laugh sardonically at Satan in much the same way that God will in his speech in Book 3.

¹³⁹ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ See Robert McMahon, *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*; Henry Weinfield, ‘Skepticism and Poetry in Milton’s Infernal Conclave’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 45 (2005).

¹⁴¹ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 14.

PARONOMASIA AS THE FIGURE OF THE FALL

It might have been Walter Landor who began this stream of criticism when he announced that it ‘appears then on record that the first overt crime of the refractory angels was *punning*: they fell rapidly after that’.¹⁴² Katherine Swaim states a critical commonplace when she claims that what ‘Landor intended to instance his own wittiness in fact turns out to capture a profound truth’.¹⁴³ The critical commonplace finds itself everywhere, even in book reviews: ‘Satanic discourse is, in a sense, the site where verbal play is born’.¹⁴⁴ Two instances of paronomasia have often been held up to scrutiny as evidencing the fallen nature of Adam and the fallen angels who give voice to them. Adam’s ‘Eve–evil’ paronomasia and the fallen angels’ ‘Sin–sign’ paronomasia are often held up by critics to exemplify the fallen nature of the speakers. These two puns, critical in any discussion of punning in *Paradise Lost*, require closer scrutiny than simply reiterating Landor’s witticism.

Eve–Evil

Robert Entzminger opens his book *Divine Word: Milton and the Redemption of Language* with the statement that when ‘Adam falls in *Paradise Lost*, so does his language’.¹⁴⁵ Entzminger gives a thorough summary of the consequences of this:

After the Fall, Adam complicates the effect, obscuring real difference with verbal similarity as Satan and Belial do. He immediately puns on ‘sapience’, and though he has lost the insight that allows him to name the creatures accurately,

¹⁴² Walter Savage Landor, ‘Southey and Landor’, in *The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor*, ed. by T. Earle Welby (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1969), Vol. 5, p. 258.

¹⁴³ Kathleen M. Swaim, *Before and after the Fall: Contrasting Modes in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 186.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Lieb, ‘Reviews: Neil Forsyth. *The Satanic Epic*’, *Milton Quarterly*, 39 (2005), p. 106.

¹⁴⁵ Robert L. Entzminger, *Divine Word: Milton and the Redemption of Language* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 1.

Adam invents etymologies to degrade Eve's character: 'woman' now means 'Man's woe' (xi.632). 'Eve' associated with 'evil' (ix.1067). And if before the Fall 'conversation' suggests all the kinds of proper, loving intercourse between man and woman, so after their sin love becomes fornication, verbal exchange only 'mutual accusation' (ix.1187). As a measure of his intellectual degeneration, Adam begins his most vitriolic tirade against Eve with the abusive and inappropriate epithet 'thou Serpent' (x.867). Thus the language Satan has invented in the war in heaven becomes current among human beings as well, words no longer existing in order to express and celebrate truth but only to attack and misrepresent.¹⁴⁶

The most well known of these Eve insults is after the first instance of fallen sex in Book 9 when Adam opens his speech with the phrase: 'O *Eve*, in evil hour didst thou give eare | To that false Worm'. (*PL* 9.1067-1068.) Daniel Fried accurately glosses the paronomasia:

Adam knows perfectly well the correct Hebraic etymology of *Eve* as 'mother'; when he puns on her name after the fall, he implies a false etymology for the sake of causing his wife pain.¹⁴⁷

This is the critical commonplace about the 'Eve–evil' paronomasia, that it was designed to hurt and humiliate Eve.

It is John Leonard who moves beyond this reading:

Before the Fall, Eve's name of Life tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even after the Fall, it tells the truth and nothing but the truth. The irony is that it no longer tells the whole truth.¹⁴⁸

The previous critics highlight the cruel nature of this paronomasia and they are right to do so. Leonard is also correct in asserting that Eve's name still tells the truth, and by extension, it still tells the truth when linked to the word 'evil' through Adam's paronomasia. Eve was evil when she listened to Satan and then ate the apple. When

¹⁴⁶ Entzinger, *Divine Word: Milton and the Redemption of Language*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Fried, 'Milton and Empiricist Semiotics', *Milton Quarterly*, 37 (2003), p. 133.

¹⁴⁸ Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve*, p. 50.

Leonard claims that the irony is that the paronomasia does not tell the whole truth, he is relying on a reading whereby the linking of 'Eve' through Hebraic etymology to 'mother' is obscured and hidden by the paronomasia which links 'Eve' to 'evil'. Alternatively, it could be that 'Eve' still means 'mother' and therefore 'life' but 'life' is no longer the whole truth of existence now that death has entered the world through the actions of both Adam and Eve.

But, importantly, Leonard errs somewhat. 'Eve' still tells the whole truth but it no longer tells the whole truth if one reads it with a simple one-word one-denotation hermeneutic. That is, prior to the fall, 'Eve' meant 'mother' through its etymological links to Hebrew. After the fall, however, 'Eve' is also capable of meaning both 'mother' and also 'evil'. Evil resulted in death, and so the link between 'Eve' and 'evil' becomes intertwined with 'Eve' and 'mother' because of the way in which death changes our connection to life and those who gave us life. The whole truth is multifaceted and interlinked and this is here represented through paronomasia.

Paronomasia forges both a connection and a distance between two or more words. 'Eve' is 'evil', but 'Eve' is also distinct from 'evil' because 'Eve' has an 'e' instead of the final 'il'. The connection admits Eve's culpability but the distance between 'Eve' and 'evil' allows for a space in which Eve can struggle against evil and seek to be redeemed. This redemption is going to be reliant upon 'Eve' being the mother of mankind. In the same way that 'Astrophil' and 'Philip' are linked and distanced through paronomasia, so 'Eve' and 'evil' are linked and distanced through paronomasia. 'Eve' does not, and never will, completely and entirely denote 'evil'. She will still fulfill the etymological definition of her name and become the mother of mankind. But, while she is capable of, and at least partly responsible for, 'evil', Eve is not entirely defined

and constructed by her evil act. Had there been a syllepsis that Milton could have used to completely identify ‘Eve’ with ‘evil’, he may have done so. The reality is that he did not, and the paronomasia that he did use allows Eve the space to avoid being completely defined by ‘evil’ and to reassert her role as ‘mother’ of the human race.

Sin–Sign

Fallen punning is designed to confuse the listener. In its most simplistic, and often derided formation, it is consciously designed to confuse a listener other than the speaker. At its most complicated it confuses the speaker who is listening to him or herself — in other words, it determines the thought processes of speakers who get caught up in their own verbal wiles, as Entzminger argues.

Unlike Edenic wordplay, demonic puns are intended both to mock and to deceive, and Satan’s rhetoric is adopted for its calculated effect on his hearers. Yet the result of using words to obscure things is to create a verbal reality capable of deluding even its authors.¹⁴⁹

As we have seen in the section on the puns made by Satan and Belial in the war in Heaven, demonic punning is used to confuse and deceive the loyal angels. As we have also seen in the section on Satan’s first speech, punning is also used to enable self-deception and thus confusion. The ‘Eve–evil’ paronomasia above also demonstrates these qualities as Adam seeks to reprimand Eve, but it also demonstrates his own, and our own, actualized confusion about what Eve’s name signifies.

The indicative example of a pun marking a moment of confusion occurs when Sin is born:

All on a sudden miserable pain
Surpris’d thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzie swumm

¹⁴⁹ Entzminger, *Divine Word: Milton and the Redemption of Language*, p. 53.

In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast
 Threw forth, till on the left side op'ning wide,
 Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
 Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
 Out of they head I sprung: amazement seis'd
 All th' Host of Heav'n; back they recoild affraid
 At first, and call'd me **Sin**, and for a **Sign**
Portentous held me.

(Bold mine. *PL* 2.752-61.)

Sin seems to state that Satan does not consciously create her, because her birth strikes him 'all on a sudden'. Whether this means that, in fact, God is responsible for her creation as a physical being and therefore, in some respects, responsible for the creation of sin, the text does not say but we should not be afraid to ask.¹⁵⁰ What Sin does recount is the fallen angels' reaction to her appearance: they name her 'Sin' and interpret her as a 'Sign | Portentous'. The qualifying adjective 'portentous' can mean either 'Having the nature or quality of a portent; ominous, threatening',¹⁵¹ or 'Prodigious, marvelous; monstrous, extraordinary'.¹⁵² The fact that the fallen angels 'recoild affraid' would indicate that 'portentous' is meant to convey primarily the first meaning of 'ominous' or 'threatening' but the syllepsis inherent in 'portentous' — that it can mean 'monstrous' as well as 'ominous' or 'threatening' — is ironically made available to the reader through the description of Sin's true form as 'Woman to the waste, and fair | But ended foul in many a scaly fould | Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd—With mortal sting'. (*PL* 2.650-53.)¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ To sidestep this problematic question, one approach has been to read this section of the poem as an allegory.

¹⁵¹ *OED portentous, adj. 1.* (c1487-1990) Draft Revision March 2009.

¹⁵² *OED portentous, adj. 2.* (1553-1879) Draft Revision March 2009.

¹⁵³ Note the paronomasia on 'waste' and 'waist' that indicates the infertility of Sin's womb (Death, her only child is perhaps the ultimate ironic embodiment of that infertility) and the way in which her lower half prefigures her father's own use of the serpent to tempt Eve and his final metamorphosis in book 10.

Sin uses a paronomasia to indicate the confusion of the fallen angels. They name her ‘Sin’ but interpret her as a ‘sign’ which also requires interpretation. What the fallen angels fail to do is to link the concept of ‘sin’ to the signification of ‘sign’ — in other words, so caught up in what the newly created being appears to mean, the fallen angels fail to comprehend what their newly given name actually signifies. ‘Sin’ should not require interpretation but a ‘sign’ does. Deconstructionist critics have been attracted to this paronomasia and the most thorough of those critics R.A. Shoaf, uses this episode to claim that this paronomasia establishes sin as ‘the precondition [...] the pretext — of the sign’.¹⁵⁴ If we accept his construction it would seem that ‘sin’ becomes the act that makes signification and therefore language possible; but only in a way that accords with the Derridean notion that language is the trace of *différance*. When Barbara Johnson defines *différance* as meaning ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’, she is describing exactly what fallen punning does.¹⁵⁵ This is what is happening when Satan declares ‘Evil be thou my Good’ but it does not describe exactly how paronomasia operates. It does describe one vital component of what a paronomasia does: it highlights the difference between the two words and it defers understanding until the ambiguity is recognized. To define the ‘defer’ aspect in a different way, Shoaf describes the pun as ‘a moment of confusion’ and that moment is the deferral of meaning while two or more meanings compete for our attention.¹⁵⁶ What the fallen angels do, is establish the *différance* between Sin’s name and her signification.

We find a similar proposition in Forsyth’s work.

Another occurs between ‘foul’ and ‘fould’ which highlights and doubles the ‘foul’ nature of her lower half.

¹⁵⁴ Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose*, p. 24.

¹⁵⁵ Barbara Johnson, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)p. ix.

¹⁵⁶ Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose*, p. 61.

But this naming of Sin, to make the pun with ‘sign’, is arbitrary, shifting language from a natural to a merely artificial or customary basis. There is no cognizance, only coincidence, in the pun. From now on that is how language will mean.¹⁵⁷

It is Stanley Fish, in spite of his opposition to those who follow Blake in viewing Milton as being of the devil’s party, who takes this pun to its logical extremes.

One might ask, ‘Sign of what?’ — but what makes her so monstrous, so unnatural, is that she is a sign of nothing, a self-referring sign who has emerged full-blown from another entity that signifies nothing but itself. (This is Satan’s wish, and to his endless detriment he gets it) Sin *is* the state of being a signifier without a signified, an agency with no inborn direction, a secondary thing no longer connected with that which would give it meaning, an entity severed from the ground of its being and therefore wholly empty. Its only recourse (one mired in self-delusion) is to forget what it doesn’t have — not to have it was the desire that eviscerated it — and pretend to be the originator of its own stability. This is done exactly as the rebels do it when they make their peace with Sin, now ‘familiar grown’ (761). That is, they get used to her — which is easy, since what they are getting used to is their own condition, the condition of being unattached to anything but themselves; and getting used to her and themselves is the same as getting used to a representation (sign) that does without anything to represent. This is the first step in the linked careers of sin and sign, becoming comfortable (‘familiar grown’) with the horror or abyss of total self-referentiality, of being without ground; and once that step has been achieved (an achievement that makes real achievement impossible), sin and sign embark upon the endless effort to derive a ground — a source of true being and power — from themselves.¹⁵⁸

The key problem with each of these three accounts of the ‘Sin–Sign’ pun is that they fail to take into account the nature of the rhetorical technique that ‘Sin–Sign’ is an example of: paronomasia.

¹⁵⁷ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, p. 207.

¹⁵⁸ Stanley E. Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 98.

We have already seen in a previous chapter how Sir Philip Sidney makes use of paronomasia to both forge a connection and at the same time a distance between himself, *Philip* Sidney, and the speaker of his sonnet sequence, *Astrophil*. Indeed, in the previous exploration of the paronomasia on ‘Eve–evil’ we have seen how paronomasia forges a connection and also encodes a distance between the two words. Where the critics read an irrevocable rift between ‘Sin–Sign’ that spirals into the deconstructive view of language as an endless play of self-referring signifiers, the ‘Sin–Sign’ paronomasia forges a connection between the two words even as it encodes the difference between them. The critics cited above admit the distancing effect, that it holds the two terms separate and distinct, showing the trace of *différance* between them and letting it play, on the fallen angels’ behalf, without recourse to anything outside the signifier. By separating the two words from each other, Milton makes the deconstructive reading possible and vindicates all three readings.

The other side of the coin is that paronomasia also forges a connection between the words involved. The primary term in the ‘Sin–Sign’ paronomasia is ‘Sin’ because we encounter that word first in the text — ‘call’d me Sin and for a Sign | Portentous held me’ — the play of this paronomasia is not unbound, it is bound by its primary term, ‘Sin’. That is, the play of signification and sound similarity is telling us something about the word ‘Sin’. It is reaffirming for us that ‘Sin’ is a ‘sign’. The fallen angels are marked as fallen angels because they cannot bridge the trace of *différance* they have instituted between ‘Sin’ and ‘Sign’ as argued by Fish, Forsyth, and Shoaf. What happens, though, if we admit the link, forged by paronomasia, between ‘Sin’ and ‘sign’?

Shoaf argues that:

This third occurrence of the word *sign* shadows all its other occurrences with the memory of its simultaneity with *Sin*. The *sign*, this moment suggests, would *sin* were it not for the *g*.¹⁵⁹

That this paronomasia casts a shadow on all subsequent uses of the word ‘sign’ might be a long bow to draw. The paronomasia is insisting, through the link that it forges with ‘sin’ that this ‘sign’ is, to some extent, ‘sin’. That is, the fallen angels’ description of ‘Sin’ as a ‘sign’ is itself a sin. ‘Sign’, as used in this passage, could be a Latinism on Milton’s behalf as one meaning for ‘sign’ proffered by the *OED* is an ‘act of a miraculous nature, serving to demonstrate divine power or authority. In Biblical use, after *L. signum*’.¹⁶⁰ On the one hand, the fallen angels seem to take it as a demonstration of Satan’s power and authority that he can now independently create a being. We know the truth of the matter because we know that Satan had no conscious control over the event. This then leads to the reverse of this view, and the somewhat surprising supposition, that God makes visible to the fallen angels the ominous, threatening, and monstrous quality of Satan’s condition as the first to fall by making him literally, and involuntarily, give birth to a figure that inwardly and outwardly expresses the nature of ‘sin’. The theological meaning of ‘sign’, as defined by the *OED* is ‘the outward and visible aspect which symbolizes the inward and spiritual aspect’.¹⁶¹ The fallen angels fail to interpret the portent of Sin’s birth as both indicating Satan’s inward spiritual nature and her inward nature.

In *Paradise Lost*, signs in all their occurrences are an important means of communication between God and His creation. The word ‘sign’ is used fifteen times throughout *Paradise Lost* and the plural ‘signs’ is used on twelve occasions. The

¹⁵⁹ Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁰ *OED sign*, n. II.10.a. (a1300-1876) 2nd Edition 1989

¹⁶¹ *OED sign*, n. II.7.d. (1553-1962) 2nd Edition 1989.

singular is predominately used to indicate an unfallen heavenly communication. In an unfallen context ‘sign’ is used to describe: the Tree of Knowledge (*PL* 4.428); the scales that God sets in Heaven to intervene in the dispute between Gabriel and Satan along with Gabriel’s reading of the manifestation of the scales (*PL* 4.998, 4.1011); in Adam and Eve’s prayer describing nature worshipping (*PL* 5.194); the pillar of fire and smoke indicating God’s wrath (*PL* 6.58); the Messiah’s standard (*PL* 6.776); Adam describing his interaction with the book of nature (*PL* 8.342); and importantly, Nature responding to the first act of unfallen sex (*PL* 8.514). After the Fall, ‘sign’ is used to describe Adam and Eve’s act of contrition (*PL* 10.1091, 10.1103); it is given a plural meaning by Eve (‘many a signe’ *PL* 11.351); and is used by Michael twice, first to relate the dove and olive branch episode from the story of Noah (*PL* 11.860), and later to describe how the sacrament of Baptism works (*PL* 12.442).

‘Signs’, on the other hand, is predominately used to indicate a fallen method of communication and occurs, crucially, in the description of the Fall itself: ‘Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat—Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe’. (*PL* 9.782-83.) Where before Nature ‘Gave sign of gratulation’ (*PL* 8.514) when Adam and Eve first made love, Nature now, importantly, gives ‘signs’. The word is used twice in connection with Satan — to describe how he looks on the fallen angels (*PL* 1.605) and his own discovery that the creation of Eden has taken place (*PL* 2.831). Tellingly, after the Fall, Adam can read ‘signs | Of foul concupiscence’ (*PL* 9.1077-78). Later, Eve expresses her hope to remain in the garden of Eden, and Nature responds in the negative through ‘signs’. (*PL* 11.182.) Adam then describes Heaven’s communication through nature as ‘mute signs’. (*PL* 11.194.) The final use of the plural ‘signs’ is when Michael

glosses the twelve plagues of Egypt (*PL* 12.175). The overall movement of the poem is to turn the word ‘sign’ into ‘signs’ after the Fall.

This pluralization of ‘sign’ in the fallen mind is not hinted at in the ‘Sin–sign’ paronomasia. The fallen angels regard Sin as a ‘Sign’ and a singular ‘sign’, as we have just found out, tends to bear a direct connection with God. Indeed, when Adam and Eve attempt to make reparation for tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam first states:

What better can we do, then to the place
 Repairing where he judg’d us, prostrate fall
 Before him reverent, and there confess
 Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
 Watering the ground and with our sighs the Air
 Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in **sign**
 Of sorrow unfeign’d, and humiliation meek.

(Bold mine. *PL* 10.1086-92.)

In a beautiful poetic move, after five intervening lines, Milton concludes Book 10 by repeating this passage as an action performed by Adam and Eve:

...they forthwith to the place
 Repairing where he judg’d them prostrate fell
 Before him reverent, and both confess’d
 Humbly thir faults, and pardon beg’d, with tears
 Watering the ground, and with thir sighs the Air
 Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in **sign**
 Of sorrow unfeign’d, and humiliation meek.

(Bold mine. *PL* 10.1098-1104.)

Even though God now communicates to them through the plural ‘signs’, Adam and Eve attempt the singular ‘sign’ form of communication. The opening up of *différance*, polysemy, and ambiguity is not actually occasioned by the ‘Sin–Sign’ paronomasia, but through the linking of ‘sign’ with unfallen communication and the plural ‘signs’ with fallen communication.

In fact, the ‘Sin–Sign’ paronomasia can be read as a moment of theologizing by Milton. A ‘sin’ is a ‘sign’ of one’s *différance* in relation to God. When God literally creates Sin out of Satan’s head (Satan does not control the birth which can be read as indicating divine intervention), God gives Satan and the fallen angels a physical sign of Satan’s fallen nature. As Shoaf, Forsyth and Fish point out, Sin has no reference other than Satan and herself from which to construct meaning. Out of that she and Satan incestuously engender Death. God also claims them as his creations in Book 10: ‘And know not that I call’d and drew them thither | My Hell-hounds’ (*PL* 10.629-30). When the fallen angels read Sin as a ‘Sign | Portentous’ they are correct, but not completely correct. They fail to connect that ‘Sign’ with ‘Sin’ because for them, the letter ‘g’ stands in the way. The reader, though, is free to connect ‘Sin’ with ‘Sign’ and accurately read the ‘sign’ in ‘sin’ because paronomasia allows both a connection as well as distance.

The devils fail to understand because they pluralize ‘Sin’ — they make her both ‘Sin’ and ‘Sign’. Their reaction mimics the pluralization of ‘sign’ that occurs with the Fall — ‘sign’ into ‘signs’. That is the true mark of Satanic language, that it is a pluralizing of the sign; and who can forget the blasphemous pluralization that Satan uses to lure Eve into the temptation: ‘Goddess amongst Gods’, (*PL* 9.547) and later ‘God’ (*PL* 9.700) becomes ‘ye shall be as Gods’ (*PL* 9.708), ‘ye should be as Gods’ (*PL* 9.710), ‘human Gods’ (*PL* 9.712), ‘putting off–Human, to put on Gods’ (*PL* 9.713-14), ‘what are Gods that Man may not become | As they’ (*PL* 9–716-17), and finally, ‘The Gods are first’ (*PL* 9.718).

Punning in any form, both fallen and unfallen, enacts both the slippage of meaning that deconstructionists seize upon but punning also enacts a connection between words and denotations. This duality allows puns to be both fallen and unfallen

— to demonstrate distance from God and a way back to God. It also allows for puns to convey both fallen and unfallen denotations at the same time and with various weight. Walter Landor was only half right when he linked punning to the fallen angels.

The result of this is to have shown that the paronomasias ‘Eve–evil’ and ‘Sin–Sign’ are not only indicative of fallen punning, they are also, at a level not reached by Sin, Satan, the fallen angels or fallen Adam and Eve, rectifying paronomasias that help point out to the reader a method of gauging their relationship with God. Milton once wrote ‘perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill’.¹⁶² That is precisely what the paronomasias on ‘Eve–evil’ and ‘Sin–Sign’ allow. By recognizing the ‘sign’ of ‘sin’ and the ‘evil’ of ‘Eve’ (and let us not forget Adam), one has the chance to move closer to God through repentance and future avoidance of ‘sin’.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that Satan does use the logic of the pun. No other character (including the narrator) in *Paradise Lost* does so, and Satan only does it once. There is a move in *Paradise Lost*, to subordinate the punning logic to the overall logic of the poem’s Christian plot. This institutes a diffuse style of punning where rhetorical puns are still serious and weighty but they have become adornments to speech rather than driving the speeches forward. Milton also uses puns to highlight, for the ‘right reader’, the perverse nature of fallen beings. Finally, it demonstrates that paronomasia, the most arbitrary of rhetorical pun tropes, entails a connection between words that reflects a connection with God. It is only when words cannot be punned upon that the

¹⁶² John Milton, ‘Areopagitica (1644)’, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 1006.

connection between them becomes so spurious as to defy all attempts at some kind of connection beyond that of paradox. So far though, we have only examined puns in the fallen context of *Paradise Lost*; it leave us with the important question: how do puns operate in the unfallen context of the poem? That, of course, is the subject matter of our next chapter.

5 PUNNING REGAIN'D

‘The Word in the desert | Is most attacked by voices of temptation’.¹

The previous chapter investigated punning in *Paradise Lost* and its relationship with Satan and fallen language. It argued that in *Paradise Lost* Milton subdued the logic of the pun to the dominant logic of the Christian plot. Furthermore, it asserted that even in the logically arbitrary paronomasia there was still a connection between the two or more words that Milton homophonically linked through paronomasia and this could reflect the connection between God and his creation. Indeed, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan’s language is rarely, if ever, free of the somewhat censorious voice of the epic poet. The flip side is, of course, that Satan’s language begins to infiltrate that of the epic poet, and through him, God, the Messiah, and the unfallen world.

The infiltration of Satanic language, or the ability of language to generate a logically arbitrary paronomasia, is commonly put down to the fact that Milton attempted an essentially paradoxical task: he undertook to write of a perfect God, God’s Son, unfallen human beings and a utopian unfallen paradise in an inherently fallen medium, in a language that was itself fallen and also post-Babel. This problem, and the logical incongruity of it, has exercised critics for many years. Christopher Ricks demonstrated one elegant solution when he argued that Milton was able to turn the fallen medium to his advantage by using puns to proleptically anticipate the Fall and thereby contrast what ‘wanton’ or ‘error’ could mean in an unfallen context with what they mean now in a fallen context.²

¹ T. S. Eliot, ‘Burnt Norton’, in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), V.19-20.

² Ricks, *Milton’s Grand Style*, pp. 109-17.

Fish takes Ricks' solution and switches the focus from the language to the reader.³

By confronting the reader with a vocabulary bearing the taint of sin in a situation that could not possibly harbour it, Milton leaves him no choice but to acknowledge himself as the source, and to lament.⁴

Or again, more powerfully this time.

Every time a reader is unable to limit his response to the literal signification of a word descriptive of Paradise or its inhabitants, he is in effect attesting to the speciousness of a programme that offers salvation in the guise of linguistic reform. If ambiguity and metaphor are the enemies because they are the basis of all distortion, then the enemies live within him, for it is beyond his power to withhold the metaphorical or ambiguous reading. Milton need not believe wholeheartedly in the ideal language in order to take advantage of his reader's belief in it. As long as the reader identifies Edenic perfection with a word-thing vocabulary, he must admit his distance from that perfection whenever he reads into the word more than is literally there, more than the thing. (It is Satan who scoffs in ambiguous words, ringing ingenious but frivolous changes on the terms of cannonry; while Adam and Eve pun etymologically, declining a word in its single significance and therefore not punning at all.) This would-be rational man is hoisted with his own petard, and it is the self-consciousness of his attitude toward language which enables Milton to teach him humility by the careful patterning of a few words.⁵

More recent attempts to grapple with ideas of representing perfection through a fallen medium have resulted in some interesting twists on the elegance of Ricks' solution and Fish's displacement of sin on, and into, the reader.

³ William Kolbrener claimed that Fish repeated Bentley's approach to *Paradise Lost* with the difference between the two that 'the 'sin' has been transferred from Bentley's Editor and Printer to the reader [by Fish]'. William Kolbrener, *Milton's Warring Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 130. While Kolbrener does not make the exact contention that I do here, he did inform my thinking on the issue.

⁴ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 136.

⁵ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 128.

The traditional view, as expounded by Fish, is that God's language is 'a philosophically accurate vocabulary, admitting neither ambiguity or redundancy'.⁶ Shoaf complicates this when he defines his critical terms at the beginning of his investigation into duality in Milton's poetry, already cited in this thesis, but repeated here.

AMBIGUITY: Duplicity, the vice of language, two intentions contend for the same semantic space; deceitful and designing, choice and liberty revoked.

POLYSEMY: Multiplicity, the virtue of language, one semantic space produces many intentions; innocent and designed, choice and liberty invoked.

UNISEMY: The end of language.⁷

The implication is, of course, that Satan's puns are ambiguous while God's puns merely invoke and utilize polysemy. One imagines that Shoaf's pun, unisemy as 'the **end** of language' (that language 'aims' for unisemy and that unisemy will 'finish' language), is an example of polysemy. Unfortunately, when discussing puns, the line between ambiguity and polysemy cannot be drawn so neatly as Shoaf attempts to draw it here; they are not separate but rather overlapping categories. Ambiguity, where a pun is concerned, can be a result of polysemy. Empson was aware of this when he argued that:

We call it ambiguous, I think, when we recognize that there could be a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading. If a pun is quite obvious it would not ordinarily be called ambiguous, because there is no room for puzzling.⁸

Empson goes on to highlight and further define this important point:

I do not deny that the term had better be used as clearly as possible, and that there is a use for a separate term 'double meaning', for example when a pun is not felt to be ambiguous in effect.⁹

⁶ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 65.

⁷ Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose*, p. ix.

⁸ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. x.

⁹ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. xi.

What Shoaf calls polysemy, Empson entitles ‘double meaning’. Crucially, Shoaf argues for a construction of polysemy and ambiguity that allows for puns to be made in heaven by unfallen beings.

Dayton Haskin extends this argument when he suggests that ‘Milton in *Paradise Lost* was working against the idea that verbal complexity had been ushered into the world with the Fall’.¹⁰ Further, Haskin claims that critics have not understood the fact that in *Paradise Lost* Milton represents unfallen language as possessing the ability to be ambiguous. Or, in Haskin’s words: ‘*Paradise Lost* not only allows that the world—as-book became more difficult to read after the Fall; it represents the world—as-book as having already been difficult to read before the Fall’.¹¹ Or, in Entzminger’s words:

In his presentation of unfallen language, Milton offers metaphor and pun where the linguists expect mathematical precision, opulent redundancy where they imagine terseness.¹²

Entzminger falls back into the common dichotomy when he later claims that:

Although wordplay is common in Edenic speech, it works before the Fall to emphasize the concord of words and their referents. In fallen speech, however, punning shows the distance that Satan’s calculation has introduced between *res* and *verba*.¹³

Haskin does not fall back on the critical crutch that supports Entzminger and this gives rise to a somewhat more radical construction of Miltonic ambiguity and its purpose.

Milton’s hermeneutics entailed a potentially negative criterion [...] this criterion — that readers must learn how not to pry further than was meant — appears in [...] the poet’s abstemious treatment of Jesus’ ‘sonship’ throughout *Paradise Regained* [...] and in his interpretation of the prohibition in *Paradise Lost*.¹⁴

¹⁰ Dayton Haskin, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 186.

¹¹ Haskin, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation*, p. 216.

¹² Entzminger, *Divine Word: Milton and the Redemption of Language*, p. 43.

¹³ Entzminger, *Divine Word: Milton and the Redemption of Language*, p. 70.

¹⁴ Haskin, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation*, p. 238.

When relieving the poet of what Leonard calls the ‘distinction between prelapsarian and postlapsarian language’,¹⁵ Haskin has had to replace it with a strong conception of ‘right reading’ which places Haskin under the larger rubric of Fishian thought on Milton which, in Fish’s words, works thus: ‘They fail [the readers] (unaccountably) to make a leap of faith’.¹⁶ That leap of faith requires the readers to limit their response to ambiguity.

Daniel Fried offers a recent examination of this view when he analyses Milton’s use of empiricist semiotics.

The ensuing fall does not corrupt language, for language was not perfect at Eden’s beginning. From the start, there were things unrepresentable in words (such as God) and words which described things with (as yet) no existence in the world (such as Death). It is true that both Adam and Eve only abuse language after the fall: in innocence they spoke mainly to do their work or to praise God, and in sin they mostly use their words as weapons against one another. But this change is due to their own corruption, not any corruption of language: in sin, they have learned to exploit the pre-existent ambiguities of language, just as Satan did in deceiving them. Adam knows perfectly well the correct Hebraic etymology of *Eve* as ‘mother’; when he puns on her name after the fall (‘O *Eve*, in evil hour’ 9.1067), he implies a false etymology for the sake of causing his wife pain. Later corruptions to language itself (most noticeably Babel, 11.38-62) are a consequence of sin, and not a parallel to it.¹⁷

In the last chapter we examined a number of these claims, including the ‘Eve–evil’ paronomasia. Fried, though, is repeating what is essentially a Fishian position: language has a ‘neutral status’ and ‘remains a site for proving virtue or vice’.¹⁸ He reiterates this point later on in the article: ‘what matters is not language’s flaws but angelic or human

¹⁵ Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 245.

¹⁷ Fried, ‘Milton and Empiricist Semiotics’, p. 133.

¹⁸ Fried, ‘Milton and Empiricist Semiotics’, p. 134.

responses to those flaws'.¹⁹ To some extent these debates about language in the context of *Paradise Lost* add weight to the previous chapter's assertion that even the most problematic puns can still provide a tenuous connection to God — that is, God allows for the existence of a pun and then the fallen reader has to decide what the appropriate response is.

What complicates matters is that the problem is not static. Many critics have noticed that a stylistic change occurs throughout *Paradise Lost*. The change in style extends into *Paradise Regained* and the change in style affects Milton's use of rhetorical puns. When Michael relates to Adam the story of the tower of Babel, in Book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, he furnishes an interesting example of the stylistic change that occurs in *Paradise Lost*.

But God who oft descends to visit men
 Unseen, and through thir habitations walks
 To mark thir doings, them beholding soon,
 Comes down to see thir Citie, ere the Tower
 Obstruct Heav'n Towrs, and in derision sets
 Upon thir Tongues a **various** Spirit to rase
 Quite out thir Native Language, and instead
 To sow a jangling noise of words unknown:
 Forthwith a hideous gabble rises loud
 Among the Builders; each to other calls
 Not understood, till hoarse, and all in rage,
 As mockt they storm; great laughter was in Heav'n
 And looking down, to see the hubbub strange
 And hear the din; thus was the building left
 Ridiculous, and the work **Confusion** nam'd.

(Bold mine. *PL* 12.48-62.)

¹⁹ Fried, 'Milton and Empiricist Semiotics', p. 135.

Le Comte claims that the passage contains two puns. The first is a syllepsis on the word ‘various’ which Le Comte defines as having three meanings: ‘a) causing differences, b) unstable, c) going in different directions’.²⁰ The second is another syllepsis, this time on ‘confusion’ which Le Comte claims is linked through false etymology to ‘Babel’.²¹ Flannagan, following Fowler, points out that “‘Babel’ in Genesis 11.9 was glossed in the Authorized Bible as ‘Confusion’. The Geneva Bible had also committed the etymological error’.²² With his enviable knowledge of ten languages,²³ Milton was better equipped than most to discover the etymological error noted by Flannagan and Fowler. But, given that both the Geneva Bible and the Authorized Bible made the same mistake, it is reasonable to assume that for Milton, it was not known to be incorrect and was the established etymology of ‘Babel’ at the time.

The interesting thing about the above passage, from the point of view of this thesis, is that Milton avoids the possible, indeed obvious, paronomasia that could be used to link ‘Babel’ with ‘babble’. Flannagan writes that ‘Words like *gabble*, *hubbub*, *jangling*, and *din* echo the babble of confused languages’.²⁴ Flannagan, whether knowingly or unknowingly, makes the link that Milton refuses to make. Milton uses the name ‘Babel’ earlier on in *Paradise Lost*:

The builders next of *Babel* on the Plain
Of *Sennaar*, and still with vain designe
New *Babels*, had they wherewithall, would build.

(PL 3.466-68.)

²⁰ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 201.

²¹ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 33.

²² Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 17, p. 691. Alastair Fowler, ed., *Paradise Lost* (London: Longman, 1998), note 62, p. 649.

²³ John K. Hale, *Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 7-8.

²⁴ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 17, p. 691.

In this prior use of a polyptoton on ‘*Babel*’, the paronomasia on ‘Babel–babble’, and especially ‘Babels–babbles’, is almost unavoidable. That the tower of Babel caused the beginning of different ‘babbles’, languages which sounded radically different, is here actively demonstrated through a polyptoton combining a paronomasia on its last term.

To return to the discussion of the Babel episode in Book 12, we have seen that Milton knew that the tower could be called ‘Babel’ but when describing the events surrounding it in detail, he opted to call it ‘Confusion’ instead. There is a conspicuous absence of a paronomasia. Compounding this, when we compare this passage to the Satan speeches examined in the previous chapter, compare it to Sin punning on her name and ‘sign’, and compare it to Adam starting his speech with the ‘Eve–evil’ paronomasia, this extract seems remarkably bare of rhetorical puns.

Robert McMahon argues that *Paradise Lost* makes use of the oral bard convention in the epic tradition so that Milton can present a narrator who learns spiritually and stylistically throughout *Paradise Lost*. This means that the bard, who narrates *Paradise Lost*, effectively becomes a character within the poem. In McMahon’s words:

Miltonists have traditionally emphasized the balance in the poem, whereas I emphasize the shift — a shift, that represents the Bard’s changed understanding of what his Christian epic truly requires. It reveals the growth of his mind as he comes to maturity in his vocation as a Christian poet. Milton represented this poetic progress as an improvement, simultaneously moral and aesthetic, in the Bard.²⁵

This conception of ‘the Bard’ allows McMahon to highlight the classical to biblical shift of *Paradise Lost* and therefore subtly enact a change on Fish’s theory. As the Bard learns, we learn, or are meant to learn.

²⁵ McMahon, *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost*, p. 20.

The later books of the poem, therefore, are presented as morally better than its first books, but not only that. Milton understood them also to be aesthetically better because more coherent artistically. Michael's discourse, for example, lacks the absurdities evident in Raphael's war. To be sure, these assertions run counter to the taste of the ages, which has preferred Milton's grand style to his lower, more didactic flights. Nevertheless, this argument about the Bard's progress in *Paradise Lost* is supported by *Paradise Regained*, which Milton presented as the Bard's subsequent song.²⁶

McMahon is speaking accurately when he states that his 'assertions run counter to the taste of the ages'. C.S. Lewis' description of *Paradise Lost*'s final two books has been trundled out *ad nauseam* but it does state concisely what McMahon calls 'the taste of the ages'.

Such an untransmuted lump of futurity, coming in a position so momentous for the structural effect of the whole work, is inartistic. And what makes it worse is that the actual writing in this passage is curiously bad.²⁷

Harold Bloom describes *Paradise Regained* as 'so subdued a poem [...] that we find real difficulty in reading it as epic'.²⁸ Perhaps the best, and gentlest, description is also the critically preferred description: that the final two books of *Paradise Lost* and the entirety of *Paradise Regained* are written in a 'plain style'.²⁹

One of the more extreme of all the views on the shifting style of *Paradise Lost* into *Paradise Regained* belongs to Fish. According to Fish, it is:

²⁶ McMahon, *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost*, p. 21.

²⁷ Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, p. 129.

²⁸ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Paradise Lost*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 8. This is echoed by Louis L. Martz when he describes the writing of *Paradise Regained* as 'more subdued'. Louis L. Martz, 'Paradise Regained: The Interior Teacher', in *Milton's Epic Poetry: Essays on Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 349.

²⁹ Steven Zwicker, 'Milton, Dryden, and the Politics of Literary Controversy', in *Heirs of Fame: Milton and Writers of the English Renaissance*, ed. by Margo Swiss and David A. Kent (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 277. 'The language is plain' is another description, found in Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 108. Another construction of the same point is the phrase 'spare style' found in Laura Lunger Knoppers, *Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 35. On a more negative note is John Carey's twist on the phrase: 'bleak style'. John Carey, *Milton, Literature in Perspective* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1969), p. 122.

A purging process [...] linguistically self-destructive [...] On the verbal level there is a progressive diminishing, first of complexity of language and then of its volubility, until finally, as the relationship between the self and God is specified, there is only silence.³⁰

This is echoed by Peter C. Herman in his book *Destabilizing Milton* when he claims that ‘Milton even banishes the interpretive plenitude of *Paradise Lost*’.³¹ This, though, seems to be taking the matter a little too far — as shown above the austere, plain style does include puns and puns can provide ambiguous and uncertain moments for the reader. How, then do puns operate in the unfallen context of *Paradise Lost* and how are they transformed when the stylistic change is enacted by Milton?

PUNS IN THE UNFALLEN CONTEXT

When God first speaks in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, he comments to the Messiah, ‘seest thou what rage | **Transports** our adversarie’ (bold mine, *PL* 3.80-81). ‘Transports’ is an instance of syllepsis. Le Comte suggests that ‘transports’ here means both ‘possesses’ and, literally, ‘carries’.³² Ricks claims ‘the words compress his [God’s] knowledge of Satan’s single motive with his observation of his escape from Hell. After all, it is literally true that rage *transports* Satan’.³³ The *OED* supports both of Le Comte’s definitions and cites Milton in support of the definition ‘To ‘carry away’ with the

³⁰ Stanley E. Fish, ‘Inaction and Silence: The Reader in *Paradise Regained*’, in *Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays on Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes in Honour of John S. Diekhoff* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971), p. 27. The chapter ‘The Temptation of Speech’ in *How Milton Works* is taken verbatim from ‘Inaction and Silence’. This sits uneasily with Fish’s assertion that he began writing *How Milton Works* in 1973 given that ‘Inaction and Silence’ was published in 1971. (See Fish, *How Milton Works*, p. viii.) However, it does bear testimony to Fish’s sustained and lengthy meditation on Milton as a monolithic author. I shall continue to quote from the original article throughout this thesis.

³¹ Peter C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" And the Poetics of Incertitude* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 157.

³² Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 190.

³³ Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 60.

strength of some emotion; to cause to be beside oneself, to put into an ecstasy, to enrapture'.³⁴ One type of pun defined by Empson is one that:

may name two very different things, two ways of judging a situation, for instance, which the reader has already been brought to see are relevant, has already been prepared to hold together in his mind; their clash in a single word will mirror the tension of the whole situation. The pun may then be noticed as a crucial point, but it will not separate itself from its setting, and will be justified by that.³⁵

This is a neat summation of how the 'Transports' syllepsis is operating. Where Ricks sees compression, Empson sees the reader holding two ideas together in his mind which on the page are held by the pun. God is not compressing two ideas but expressing two ideas through a technique ideally suited to presenting two ideas: a pun. Operating with what Empson would call 'double meaning' or what Shoaf termed 'polysemy', God's syllepsis is not really at Satan's expense, but is a neat psychological summation of Satan and his behaviour. That God can see through Satan and understand him so easily and completely is to be expected and is confirmed by the syllepsis.

Syllepsis, a trope which, more often than not, allows the poet to make learned etymological puns, a trope that allows for two or more meanings to be balanced and evenly treated, would seem the perfect trope in which to enact the 'polysemy' and 'double meaning' that an unfallen potentially ambiguous pun requires. This, in turn, would make it the best trope to allow God, Christ, unfallen angels and unfallen humans to play with words. In spite of this, syllepsis can be as emblematic of *différance* as paronomasia is, as Michael Riffaterre has argued:

To conclude, I shall modify (the better to adapt this trope to the concept of undecidability) the definition of syllepsis as follows: syllepsis consists in the

³⁴ *OED transport*, v. 3. (1509-1840) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁵ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 104.

understanding of the same word in two different ways at once, as *contextual meaning* and *intertextual meaning*. The contextual meaning is that demanded by the word's grammatical collocations, by the word's reference to other words in the text. The intertextual meaning is another meaning the word may possibly have, one of its dictionary meanings and—or one actualized within an intertext. In either case, this intertextual meaning is incompatible with the context and pointless within the text, but it still operates as a second reference — this one to the intertext. The second reference serves either as a model for reading significance into the text or as an index to the significance straddling two texts. Thus undecidability can exist only within a text; it is resolved by the interdependence between two texts. And now for a final rephrasing of my definition: *Syllepsis is a word understood in two different ways at once, as meaning and as significance*. And therefore, because it sums up the duality of the text's message — its semantic and semiotic faces — syllepsis is the literary sign par excellence.³⁶

What Riffaterre is claiming is that a syllepsis always encodes the play of *différance* that disrupts meaning — the semiotic–signified face always playing off against its semiotic–signifier (that it signs itself as a pun, a syllepsis) face. Because we recognize a pun as a pun, or a syllepsis as a syllepsis, we consciously view the 'double meaning' and this disrupts the unity we assume in the text. While paronomasia is also capable of this, syllepsis hides behind the veneer of erudite, rational, etymological connections to enact an aura of rationality that perhaps it does not deserve.

There is another punning trope that enacts polysemy and reduces ambiguity even more than syllepsis does. If we were to imagine a continuum with one end being paronomasia, then syllepsis would be the midpoint, and the far end would be occupied by polyptoton. As was noted at the beginning of this chapter and at the conclusion of the last chapter, even paronomasia enacts a connection — however tenuous — between the two or more denotations it refers to. On the continuum, though, paronomasia is the

³⁶ Riffaterre, 'Syllepsis', pp. 637-38.

technique which forges the logically and semantically weakest link between its two or more denotations. It is polyptoton to which Milton turns when he wishes to begin to exercise more control over the *différance* of language that was such a feature of the last chapter of this thesis; and it is to polyptoton that we now turn, in order to demonstrate why it is the rhetorical pun technique has been opposed to paronomasia.

POLYPTOTON

What is a polyptoton?

Polyptoton is an atypical trope amongst the punning tropes that were identified in the second chapter of this thesis.³⁷ All the other punning rhetorical tropes, antanaclasis, syllepsis, asteismus and paronomasia are clearly tropes that play on words. Polyptoton is a borderline case for reasons that we will now examine; essentially, it is a technique that requires that a root word be repeated but in a different inflexion or form. The typological change in the word indicates to the reader a change in denotation that is both the cause and effect of the typological change. Our first example is a simple one taken from Book 7 of *Paradise Lost* when Raphael is describing the creation of Adam to Adam: ‘a **Creature**...not prone | And brute as other **Creatures**’. (Bold mine. *PL* 7.506-07.) This constitutes an instance of polyptoton because it first uses the word ‘creature’ and in the second instance adds the suffix ‘—s’ which turns the word from the singular into the plural. The grammatical form of the word has changed through the addition of a letter and, moreover, the meaning of the word has changed. A modern reader would not view this as an instance of wordplay. The denotations of ‘creature’ and ‘creatures’ are so close to each other as to be almost indistinguishable beyond the fact that one is a plural and

³⁷ See ‘A Linguistic and Cultural Treasury of Punning Terms’, pp. 44-54.

one is a singular of exactly the same thing. That English is not a language that considers pluralizing a word as significantly affecting meaning is reflected by the practice of the *OED*, which does not offer separate entries for pluralized words to be compared with the singular entries.

A second example of polyptoton can be found in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost* when the Messiah says to God: ‘with th’ innumerable **sound** | Of Hymns and sacred Songs, wherewith thy Throne | Encompass’d shall **resound** thee ever blest’. (Bold mine. *PL* 3.147-49.) Here the addition of the prefix ‘re—’ changes the meaning of the word dramatically. So far apart have the words moved that a modern audience could read this as a pun. ‘Sound’ has changed into ‘resound’. The *OED* definition of ‘sound’ that best suits Milton’s use of it here is ‘The auditory effect produced by a special cause’.³⁸ Compare that to how the *OED* defines ‘resound’: ‘To proclaim, repeat loudly (one’s praises, etc.); to celebrate (a person or thing)’.³⁹ This meaning has a variation, ‘With complement’ and under this definition it lists the above citation from Milton as evidence.⁴⁰ Also, one could argue, the first meaning the *OED* gives ‘resound’ could also apply in this instance: ‘Of places: To ring or re-echo *with* (or *of*) some sound. Also with *to*’.⁴¹ The *OED* offers an intriguing definition of ‘resound’ under the heading ‘re-sound’ which it defines as meaning ‘To sound again’.⁴² Is this meaning present in Milton’s use of ‘resound’? Perhaps, but the *OED* identifies a typological difference between the two words and it also claims that ‘re-sound’ was first used in 1897 which introduces at least two hundred years between when Milton wrote and when ‘re-sound’ was used to mean ‘sound again’. The principle of economy would argue against admitting this meaning in

³⁸ *OED sound*, n.³ 2.a. (a1297-1839) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁹ *OED resound*, v.¹ II.4. (1561-1856) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁰ *OED resound*, v.¹ II.4.b. (1600-1667) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴¹ *OED resound*, v.¹ I.1. (c1386-1867) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴² *OED re-sound*, v.² (1897-1899) 2nd Edition 1989.

this instance. Whether you read ‘resound’ as meaning either ‘to ring’ or ‘to complement’ or both meanings simultaneously, it is clear that the addition of ‘re—’ has changed the meaning of the root word ‘sound’ considerably. The rhetorical technique being used is polyptoton but on this occasion it has resulted in what a modern reader would recognize as an instance of wordplay.

These two examples highlight the two extremes of polyptoton, at one end there is an exceptionally subtle change in meaning and at the other there is quite a large change in meaning, sufficient change to argue that it does indeed constitute a recognizable play on words. This is why Nash wrote that when polyptoton

is deliberate it is often a form of word-play. Strictly speaking, this figure is proper to richly inflected languages like Greek and Latin, with their variety of word-endings denoting case, tense, mood and so on. The English examples are approximations, and might be described as pseudopolyptoton.⁴³

Gideon Burton defines polyptoton as ‘Repeating a word, but in a different form. Using a cognate of a given word in close proximity’ and lists figures of wordplay under the heading ‘Related Figures’.⁴⁴ As English words are capable of changing form, or being cognates of each other, I am unwilling to allow that English polyptotons are necessarily ‘approximations’ and that we should call them ‘pseudopolyptotons’. While English may not have the range of prefixes, suffixes, cases, tenses, moods, genders, that other languages may possess, it still utilizes these syntactical aids to enact meaning and so English is capable of polyptoton. The technique may have had a greater prevalence in Latin and Ancient Greek because they are highly inflected languages, but as we shall see, Milton was able to use make much of polyptoton in English.

⁴³ Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion*, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Burton, ‘*Silva Rhetoricae*’ polyptoton.

A ‘pun’ is defined, in part, by the *OED*, as ‘two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings’.⁴⁵ Because of the way a polyptoton requires that two words share the same root word, a poet is guaranteed to get a similarity in sound between the two words for they will both involve the same root ‘sound–word’. We have become accustomed to viewing Groucho Marx’s ‘irrelephant’ as two words of nearly the same sound with two different meanings.⁴⁶ What we forget is that ‘creature’ and ‘creatures’ are also two words of nearly the same sound with two different meanings. That is, ‘creature–creatures’, as used by Milton above, is a homophone, the two words sound alike. Previously, I have defined the word ‘pun’, within the context of this thesis, as referring to those rhetorical figures that rely upon homophony or homonymy to generate their effects. What I am now doing, is stretching our concept of ‘wordplay’ or ‘pun’ to include all examples of polyptoton because they are kinds of homophony.

It is worth noting two points: 1) as we continue throughout this chapter we will see that polyptoton is a critically unknown, or ignored, technique. One consequence of polyptoton not being recognized as such by critics on a regular or irregular basis, is that there has never been a resolution to the question of whether or not polyptoton is a punning technique. 2) The word ‘pun’ is an anachronism when deployed to discuss the poetic practises of Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne, and Sidney. There is no evidence that Milton used the word ‘pun’ in his poetry or prose.⁴⁷ Both Dryden and Pope — the subjects of our next two chapters — used the word ‘pun’ to mean ‘wordplay’. So, if polyptoton is indeed a figure of wordplay as Burton argues, then it is reasonable to

⁴⁵ *OED pun*, n.¹ (1644-1992) Draft Revision June 2008.

⁴⁶ Sauer, *Pundemonium: The Step-by-Schlep Guide to Humour's Lowest Form*, p. 199.

⁴⁷ Swaim, ed., *A Concordance to Milton's English Poetry* and Harold H. Kollmeier Laurence Sterne, ed., *A Concordance to the English Prose of John Milton* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1985).

assume that the poets this thesis concentrates upon, all educated in rhetoric, would have known of polyptoton and considered it a figure of wordplay.

So far, this discussion has delved into two examples of what constitutes a polyptoton and argued that all instances of polyptoton are puns. This, though, has been a relatively superficial discussion thus far; moreover, we are left with some pertinent questions: how does Milton utilize polyptoton and what are the ramifications of defining all polyptotons as puns when reading Milton? To begin with, and to follow from the previous chapter, we shall examine polyptoton not just as a trope to be identified as above, but as a poetic technique, as a means of creating poetic beauty and depth of meaning. We shall begin with a passage from *Paradise Lost* that has always been renowned as one of the epic's most beautiful poetic moments — the Proserpine simile.

Polyptoton as a Poetic Technique

Not that faire field
Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* **gathering flours**
Her self a fairer **Floure** by gloomie *Dis*
Was **gatherd**.

(Bold mine. *PL* 4.268-70.)

F.R. Leavis realized what it was that gave the passage its power and beauty.

It is in the repeated verb that the realizing imagination is irresistibly manifested; it is the final 'gathered' that gives concrete life to a conventional phrase and makes Proserpin herself a flower. And to make her a flower is to establish the difference between the two gatherings: the design — the gathered gatherer — is subtle in its simplicity. The movement of the verse seems to be the life of the design, performing, in fact, in its suggestive appropriateness, something of the function of imagery.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ F. R. Leavis, 'Milton's Verse', in *Milton's Epic Poetry: Essays on Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 31.

The verb is not strictly repeated, but it is changed through the use of polyptoton, and as the verb is changed so the tense is changed from present to past. The reader is with Proserpine ‘gathering’ the flowers and then she is taken away but we are made aware she has already been taken away because we are told she was ‘gatherd’. The ‘movement of the verse’, which according to Leavis is ‘the life of the design’, is made possible and initiated through the movement inherent in polyptoton. Perhaps unnoticed by Leavis is a second polyptoton that intertwines and interacts with the ‘gathering–gathered’ polyptoton. Proserpine was gathering ‘flours’ when she became the ‘flore’ gathered by Dis. The polyptoton enacts a change from the plural to the singular which enables the verse to move its focus from the field of flowers to the fairest flower of them all, Proserpine. The delicate irony of Proserpine collecting flowers then being collected as a flower herself is created by the polyptotons on ‘gathering–gathered’ and ‘flowers–flower’. Form is adding to, and reinforcing, content.

The initial instance of polyptoton cited in this chapter, ‘a **Creature** [...] not prone | And brute as other **Creatures**’ (bold mine, *PL* 7.506-07) establishes a subtle distinction while allowing a great deal of similarity. It is a reminder to us sons and daughters of Adam and Eve that we are indeed creatures but we are different beings from ‘prone | And brute Creatures’. Our bestial nature, which will become a liability after the Fall, is highlighted because mankind is only an ‘s’ away from being lumped in with all the other earthly beings created by God. But, crucially, it does establish a hierarchy in the mind of the reader that echoes an accepted human commonplace throughout the ages — we are more important than other animals.

This use of polyptoton to establish a hierarchy and figure subtle logical distinctions between things is one that Milton makes liberal use of throughout *Paradise*

Lost and Paradise Regained. We shall return to this point in the later structural polyptoton discussion, but for now, a few examples may serve to hone the point. After relating the actions of the six days of creation, Raphael narrates that God ‘up returned | Up to the **Heav’n** of **Heav’ns** his high abode’ (bold mine, *PL* 7.552-53). In Raphael’s narrative, by the time he utters the above quote, God has already created the ‘expanse in which the sun, moon, and stars are seen, (esp. in earlier use) regarded as having the appearance of a vast vault arched over the earth; the sky, the firmament’.⁴⁹ So, Milton must differentiate between the earthly ‘Heav’ns’ and what the *OED* defines as:

In the Christian tradition (and hence more widely): the abode of God and of the angels and persons who enjoy God's presence, traditionally regarded as being beyond the sky; the final abode of the redeemed after their life on earth; a state or condition of being or living with God after death; everlasting life. Opposed to *hell*.⁵⁰

Because the universe is still unfallen, it is a paradise and therefore a heaven of sorts. That, however, does not in Milton’s theology, get in the way of there being a hierarchy of perfection as this polyptoton proves, the ‘Heav’n’ in which God resides is different and better than all the other created ‘Heav’ns’ in the same way that man is a ‘Creature’ above other ‘Creatures’.

Furthermore, polyptoton is a technique that allowed Milton to attempt to express the ineffable.

Him [Satan] God **beholding** from his prospect high,
Wherein past, present, future he **beholds**,
Thus to his onely Son foreseeing spake.

(Bold mine. *PL* 3.77-79.)

⁴⁹ *OED heaven*, n. 1. (*OE*-2004) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵⁰ *OED heaven*, n. 5.a. (*OE*-1990) Draft Revision June 2009.

This was Milton's attempt to express the paradox of a God who is able to watch the present as we experience it while also viewing the present, past and future as one continuous present. The way in which Milton communicates this ability is through a polyptoton on 'behold'. The *OED* claims that 'beholding' can be either a participial adjective or a verbal noun. It defines the participial adjective as obsolete in all sense with the dominant meaning being 'Under obligation, obliged, indebted, BEHOLDEN; in late use often: Dependent'.⁵¹ Clearly, this is not how Milton is using 'beholding'. The main verbal noun definition of 'beholding' is the 'action of looking at; contemplation, sight'.⁵² The result of this is that God is presented in a specific situation action, that of looking at and musing on Satan's flight from Hell.

'Beholds' is a verb, and the question is whether it is an active or passive verb.

The *OED* defines it thus:

a. To hold or keep in view, to watch; to regard or contemplate with the eyes; to look upon, look at (implying active voluntary exercise of the faculty of vision). *Arch.* This has passed imperceptibly into the resulting passive sensation: **b.** To receive the impression of (anything) through the eyes, to see: the current ordinary sense. (It is not easy to show the beginning of sense b, as nearly all the early instances have some suggestion of the former: the earlier quotations under b, must therefore be treated as merely introductory.)⁵³

The *OED* provides references for this use of the active process from 971 through to 1718 with one quote from the 1667 edition of *Paradise Lost*.⁵⁴ The word was moving through the active sense into the passive sense as Milton was writing. If we allow that Milton has used the verb in either or both of its passive and active senses in the extract under

⁵¹ *OED beholding*, *ppl. a. 1.* (a1450-1719) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵² *OED beholding*, *vbl. n. 1.* (a1225-1702) 2nd Edition 1989. A second obsolete meaning is 'Mental contemplation; consideration'. This definition is only exemplified with quotes from a1520-1540 which means that it is perhaps too removed to argue that Milton could have intended it. Since the word is not Latin in origin, it cannot be argued that an older use is being resurrected on etymological grounds.

⁵³ *OED behold*, *v. I.7.a.* (971-1718) **b.** (c1175-1860) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

examination, it would seem that the language has helped explain the paradox of a God who can see everything at once but also be able to observe time, place and actions as we do.

Milton starts the sentence by describing a single action on God's behalf: 'Him God beholding'. This specific action is then qualified with a passive caveat to remind the reader that God sees everything at once: 'Wherein past, present, future he beholds'. The movement of the central term 'behold', the way in which the change in the form of the word mirrors the change in the action described adds to the effect of a dramatic pulling back from a close up to the widest wide shot humanity has ever imagined. But the next sentence reinforces the idea that God actively uses His vision as He 'to his onely Son foreseeing spake'. Foreseeing breaks the strict continuity established by the polyptoton on 'beholding-beholds' but does continue the idea that God's experience of time and place is visual in nature. The human mind is not at this stage, and perhaps never will be, capable of experiencing space and time in the way that an omnipotent omniscient being is thought to. Even our language obstructs Milton's efforts to entirely describe such an experience. But, the use of polyptoton to establish the idea of that faculty also establishes the fact that viewing the particular as we do, and viewing everything, are not a divided sense but the same sense capable of different but contiguous activities. What polyptoton cannot do is demonstrate how that faculty can operate at the same time. But, that precise point is what makes it a paradox from the human viewpoint because we cannot see two different things at once. Perhaps Milton could have used a syllepsis or a paronomasia to provide that paradoxical moment for the reader but it would not have resolved the paradox. Polyptoton allows Milton to step by step anthropomorphize God's experience of space and time for his temporally and spatially challenged readership.

Polyptoton is also the rhetorical technique that Milton employs to describe the moment that Adam is given life as related by Raphael.

This said, he formd thee, *Adam*, thee O Man
 Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils **breath'd**
 The **breath** of Life;

(Bold mine. *PL* 7.524-26.)

The polyptoton moves from the past tense verb into the noun denoting the ‘faculty or action of breathing, respiration. Hence, breathing existence, spirit, life; so *breath of life*, *breath of the nostrils*’.⁵⁵ The change from action to thing mirrors the way in which God’s action creates a new thing, Adam. It is a landmark moment in Christian history, the creation of mankind, and it is figured forth in a polyptoton that links the creator to the creation. Again, as occurred above, this polyptoton utilizes a single faculty, that of respiration. The polyptoton, which relies solely on the removal of ‘—’d’ to occur, demonstrates how human life is reliant upon the breath of God.

Later, in Book 8, Adam describes how God made Eve and again Milton places an instance of polyptoton in the unfallen speaker’s mouth.

And took
 From thence a Rib, with cordial spirits warme,
 And Life-blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,
 But suddenly with flesh fill’d up and heal’d:
 The Rib he **formd** and fashiond with his hands;
 Under his **forming** hands a Creature grew,
 Manlike, but different Sex, so lovly faire,

(Bold mine. *PL* 8.465-71.)

This polyptoton is doing two things. Firstly, it connects the two clauses across the semicolon. The clause ‘The Rib he formd and fashioned with his hands’ can be interpreted in two different ways: a) as applying to the earlier phrase ‘a Rib [...] The Rib

⁵⁵ *OED* **breath** 5.a. (a1300-1850) 2nd Edition 1989.

he formd'; or b) as describing what God did with the rib once he had removed it from Adam. By using a polyptoton to link the line 'The rib he formd and fashiond with his hands' to the next line 'Under his forming hands a Creature grew', Milton ensures that the potential ambiguity of the line is removed through the close denotative connection forged by using a polyptoton.

Secondly, the sense of movement inherent in a polyptoton, the metamorphic nature of the technique, gives the reader a sense of the rib being changed. The word 'formd' changing into 'forming' echoes the transfiguration of the rib into Eve. It has been argued previously in this thesis that punning rhetorical tropes are an ideal form for poetically enacting a metamorphosis as the poetry describes that metamorphosis. If this is so, then polyptoton is surely the most subtle at conveying that metamorphosis, so subtle that English readers and critics rarely comment upon it, preferring instead to notice and discuss the more obvious paronomasia. This is so, I believe, because we do not view a polyptoton like 'formd-forming' or 'breath'd-breath' as actually constituting a large enough semantic shift to be counted as a pun. Yet, the word has changed meaning, and it has changed spelling. And it has done this as the subject matter of the text changes making this an exemplary metamorphic technique. Simply stated then, a polyptoton is a pun. As we shall see, because of this subtlety and because of a logic of its own, the polyptoton becomes an oft used technique in Milton's poetry.

The Logic of Polyptoton

In chapter 3 and chapter 4, this thesis expounded a concept called the logic of the pun. The phrase seeks to explain how a poet would follow the semantic links a language offers through the sound similarity or the polysemy of words. Shakespeare, Sidney,

Donne and Milton all shaped individual poems using punning logic. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan, and through him Milton, constructs a speech using the logic of the pun during the war in heaven. Milton does not use polyptoton in this way within either *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*.

When Adam asks Raphael to enlighten his understanding of the universe and its movements during the early stages of Book 8, Raphael responds with a speech that seems in part to be a sardonic comment on Milton's behalf directed at the debates then going on about the construction of the universe and what revolved around what.

When they come to model Heav'n
 And calculate the Starrs, how they will weild
 The mightie frame, how **build, unbuild**, contrive
 To save appeerances, how gird the sphear
 With **Centric** and **Eccentric** scribl'd o're,
Cycle and **Epicycle**, orb in orb:

(Bold mine. *PL* 8.79-84.)

Of the three instances of polyptoton here, two are true polyptotons in the English language, 'build–unbuild' and 'cycle–epicycle'. With the 'centric–eccentric' polyptoton 'ec—' is not a prefix recognized by the *OED*, nor is it recognized by the common reader. However, if one goes back to Latin, and from there to Ancient Greek, the two words are the same root word but 'eccentric' has a prefix attached in Ancient Greek. But even to the eye not as tutored as Milton's was, 'centric' and 'eccentric' do look and sound like an instance of polyptoton. Given that we allow Milton to be capable of etymologizing puns, then it stands to reason that he was capable of producing etymologizing polyptotons. What, though, are these three polyptotons doing here?

Because the semantic shifts that take place within an instance of polyptoton are quite small compared to those that take place between 'sin' and 'sign' or 'will' and

‘*Will*’, the technique closely binds words together and highlights their inherent similarity even when they are saying the exact opposite to each other, as is the case in the ‘build–unbuild’ polyptoton. Here, Raphael sketches the twin activities of constructing an astronomical theory. One builds one’s own theory to unbuild someone else’s theory. One unbuilds an opposing theory to add weight to one’s own theory. The two processes go hand in hand and actually spur each other on. Satan at one point attempts to make the word ‘evil’ signify ‘good’. The attempt fails. Raphael does not attempt to demonstrate that ‘build’ and ‘unbuild’ signify the same thing but he utilizes the connection between them — that they are based on the same root word — to demonstrate that they are part of a process that looks trivial and somewhat silly from Heaven’s perspective.

The same applies with ‘cycle’ and ‘epicycle’. And in this case, the word ‘epicycle’ actually spells out the procedure. The prefix ‘epi—’ is defined by the *OED* as:

In words derived from compounds which either were, or might legitimately have been, formed already in Greek. Also in mod. scientific terms after the analogy of words derived from Gr.; chiefly with sense ‘placed or resting upon’.⁵⁶

That is, ‘epicycle’ means ‘placed upon or resting upon a cycle’. In the astronomical terms of the time, these of course constitute different ideas about the movement of the heavenly bodies, the earth, the planets, the stars, the sun and the moon. Raphael, by mocking such attempts and the language of such practices, demonstrates further how much each system is indebted in some way to the other. The polyptoton ‘Centric–Eccentric’ works in exactly the same way. Two astronomical terms are taken and made to demonstrate that they share a common root and a common aim. The arguments over models of the solar system are, generally speaking, now over; but, for the moralizing Raphael (and through him one cannot but help hear Milton) such pursuits and arguments

⁵⁶ *OED* **epi—**, *prefix*. **1**. (No date range provided.) 2nd Edition 1989.

are in vain. No matter how the universe is constructed and moves, surely the fact that it is there and it is moving is testament to the creative power of God.

The larger point is that the repetitive use of polyptoton ensures that the entire little set speech within Raphael's larger speech is not just thematically bound but trope bound. It makes a repeated point through a repeated trope thus adding another level of repetition to the repetitive actions that Raphael is describing. It is another example of content and form merging, as it were, and where form becomes content. This is not to say that Raphael is using polyptoton to construct the logic of the piece. The logic of the piece was determined and then Raphael uses the punning trope best suited to his purpose to make his point. In unfallen language, language is generally subservient to content. This is an important point. The introduction demonstrated that most commentators see form being subservient to reason in the unfallen context. This may be correct, but perhaps it is more correct to argue that form is subservient to content in the unfallen context. Content does not necessarily have to be logical or follow reason, it may be paradoxical or deliberately ambiguous depending upon the situation. As demonstrated in the last chapter, Satan is willing to let the language almost think for him. When he is not engaging in the logic of the pun, he is attempting to make the language serve his own perverse ends. The end result of this process is that Satan is enmeshed in a paradox, with evil being his good. Raphael seeks to unite content and form but content always wins out — Raphael would rather get his message across and will sacrifice a pun for clarity. Satan, on the other hand, is willing to let form subvert his content.

The second outcome of an extended or multiple use of polyptoton is that it allows Milton or the speaker to highlight certain words through the repetition of a root word in different forms. The way in which polyptoton allows a poet to highlight a word

is seen in the first words of the Messiah in *Paradise Lost*: ‘O Father, **gracious** was that word which clos’d | Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find **grace**’. (Bold mine. *PL* 3.144-45.) God the Father’s speech had finished with the sentence:

The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
Self-tempted, self-deprav’d: Man falls deceiv’d
By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav’n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.

(*PL* 3.129-34.)

By using a polyptoton on ‘grace’, Christ asserts what is most important in his Father’s speech: ‘Man therefore shall find grace’. The Messiah could have simply repeated the phrase as he does in the second line of his own speech but instead he introduces the word ‘gracious’ to describe the word that closed God’s speech. That word is ‘Mercy’ which becomes subsumed under a sense of God’s graciousness that results in His mercy. While praising God’s mercy, Christ draws attention to what will be the subject of the last three books of *Paradise Lost* and the entirety of *Paradise Regained*, the process through which mankind ‘shall find Grace’.

When highlighting a word in this way, the poet or speaker can attempt logical argument through the use of polyptoton. The changing nature of polyptoton means that the positive and negative aspects of a word can be looked at as well as different tenses, and word forms (adjective, verb, noun). In one of Christianity’s thorniest theological problems — whether God’s foreknowledge and omnipotence means that he is ultimately responsible for humanity’s fall from grace — Milton has God use polyptoton as the trope with which to best convey His innocence of this charge.

They therefore as to right belongd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse

Thir **maker**, or thir **making**, or thir Fate,
 As if predestination over-rul'd
 Thir will, **dispos'd** by absolute **Decree**
 Or high **foreknowledge**; they themselves **decreed**
 Thir own revolt, not I: if I **foreknew**,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
 Which had no less prov'd certain **unforeknown**.

(Bold mine. *PL* 3.111-19.)

The first polyptoton used by God in this passage occurs between ‘maker’ and ‘making’. It is used to qualify and expand what might seem to be essentially the same point. If we blame our ‘maker’ for our tendency to sin then by definition, our ‘making’ was faulty. A perfect ‘maker’ should perform the act of ‘making’ perfectly, but, as the polyptoton admits, this is not necessarily the case. A perfect ‘maker’ may intentionally create a being that is not perfect. The created being may then reason that its ‘making’ was imperfect. God, by using a polyptoton, admits the similarity of the points by using the same root word; but, at the same time God ensures that the created beings will not be able to split hairs in such a way as I have just demonstrated, thus removing a potential argument against him.

The speech then moves into a syllepsis on ‘dispos’d’. The *OED* first defines ‘disposed’ as meaning ‘Arranged, appointed, prepared, suitably placed, or situated’.⁵⁷ But, according to the *OED*, ‘disposed’ can also mean:

Inclined, in the mood, in the mind (*to do* something, *to* or *for* something). Also with adverb, in a (particular) mental condition or mood; *well* or *ill disposed*: favourably or unfavourably inclined (*to, towards, for*).⁵⁸

The over-riding meaning of the phrase ‘dispos’d by absolute Decree’, in the context of God’s speech, is to define the argument that fate has ‘arranged, appointed, [and]

⁵⁷ *OED disposed*, *ppl. a. 1.* (1526-1867) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵⁸ *OED disposed*, *ppl. a. 4.* (c1340-1892) 2nd Edition 1989.

prepared' by absolute decree mankind's fall. The submerged meaning explodes the false argument asserted by the over-riding meaning of the phrase.⁵⁹ The only absolute Decree that rules over Adam and Eve is that they should have free will. This naturally means that they can be 'inclined, in the mood, in the mind' to fall. The faculty of free will demands that there be a choice and when one has a choice, one can be 'dispos'd' towards either option. Both Adam and Eve begin by being opposed to eating the apple but through the serpent's ministrations on Eve and Adam's love for Eve, both become 'dispos'd' towards eating the apple.

This reading of 'dispos'd' is further developed when God uses a polyptoton to change 'absolute Decree' into 'they themselves decreed'. What is wrongly viewed to be an external influence is actually an internal, intrinsic influence. The *OED* states that the theological meaning of 'decree' is 'One of the eternal purposes of God whereby events are foreordained'.⁶⁰ Of course, this is a meaning that God is seeking to avoid in his speech, so he metamorphoses the noun 'Decree' into the verb 'decreed'. The verb 'decreed' means 'To determine, resolve, decide (*to do* something)'.⁶¹ By physically changing the word at the heart of the matter, God uses a punning rhetorical trope to add weight to his argument that the fall is not unavoidable. Since God has not 'decreed' that humanity should fall, it stands to reason that humanity decided, or 'decreed', that they should fall. This polyptoton constitutes a neat bit of side stepping by God. He uses the polyptoton to change a key word in the argument and, as that word changes, so the recipient of blame in the matter changes from God or Fate to Adam and Eve.

⁵⁹ There is an element of mockery in God's use of this pun in particular. The censorious nature of God's humour is evident from his first pun on 'transports' (*PL* 3.80-81; see also p. 198 of this thesis). Behind all of God's mocking is the sense of 'knowingness' that omnipotence has given him. It is what allows him to mock but at the same time is what, perhaps, turns the stomach of the modern reader, who views the humour as unsporting, aimed at those that cannot fully defend themselves, and operating from a position of power and strength against those who are weak and relatively defenceless.

⁶⁰ *OED decree*, n. 3. (1570-1860) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶¹ *OED decree*, v. 4. (1526-1871) 2nd Edition 1989.

The speech ends with multiple polyptotons on ‘foreknowledge’ — ‘foreknowledge’ into ‘foreknew’ into ‘foreknowledge’ into ‘unforeknown’. The first use of ‘foreknowledge’ occurs in between the ‘Decree–decreed’ polyptoton and seems to prompt the final three uses of words based on ‘foreknowledge’. This is the closest that God comes to using the logic of the pun to construct a speech and, instead of the pun being developed or explored over ten or more lines, God limits it to four lines. Because it has been limited to four lines, J. B. Broadbent declares that this ‘is the most concise statement of the problem [God knowing that man would fall before He created man] and one of its ‘solutions’ ever written’.⁶² Broadbent goes on to write:

Within the sentences argument depends upon traductio of the ‘foreknowledge-foreknew-unforeknown’ type. The words accelerate into a continuous sound. This effect is appropriate in a way for it represents the Father’s speech as Logos, Alpha, and Omega, I AM. Milton has got the better of language [...] but by desecrating its nature. Ultimately his triumph is in vain for he leads us into a corridor of verbal mirrors in which unbodied concepts are defined by their antithesis so all we can do is mark time with our lips.⁶³

What Broadbent misses is that while it is a traductio, the traductio is created through the use of polyptoton. It is by manipulating the different forms of ‘foreknowledge’ that Milton can state the problem ‘concisely’ but I disagree that the words ‘accelerate into a continuous sound’. We have seen this phenomenon before where repetition of a sound has resulted in what Broadbent describes as ‘mark[ing] time with our lips’ — in Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 135’ where the word ‘will’ is repeated so often that it is reduced to a repeated sound that loses its meaning. There, though, ‘will’ was repeated fourteen times in fourteen lines. God stops at four times in four lines. Also, God uses ‘foreknowledge’ only twice. The other sounds are similar but ‘foreknew’ and

⁶² J. B. Broadbent, ‘Milton’s Heaven’, in *Milton’s Epic Poetry: Essays on Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 142.

⁶³ Broadbent, ‘Milton’s Heaven’, p. 144.

‘unforeknown’ are sufficiently different in sound for the difference to be recognized by the ear and mind.

A third interesting polyptoton from *Paradise Lost* is made by Eve during the temptation scene. Many critics have noted that Eve makes a peculiarly noticeable pun on ‘fruit’ before she decides to eat the apple. What no critic has noticed though, is that the pun takes the form of a polyptoton: ‘Serpent, we might have spar’d our coming hither, | **Fruitless** to mee, though **Fruit** be here to excess’. (Bold mine. *PL* 9.647-48.) Flannagan notes that it is ‘One of many buried and often serious puns in Milton’s poetry’ and he goes on to suggest that the punning ‘may indicate Eve’s uneasiness — joking to cover fear — or her unwariness’.⁶⁴ Shoaf uses the word ‘fruit’ to discuss ideas of obedience and proving (in both the ‘testing’ and ‘growing’ (i.e. proving the bread) senses) but does not mention this particular instance of its use by Eve. King argues that this pun demonstrates ‘flippancy in character with her vulnerability to temptation’.⁶⁵

‘Fruit’ denotes, according to the *OED*, the ‘edible product of a plant or tree, consisting of the seed and its envelope, *esp.* the latter when it is of a juicy pulpy nature, as in the apple, orange, plum’.⁶⁶ ‘Fruitless’, on the other hand, denotes ‘Yielding no profit or advantage; producing no effect or result; inefficacious, ineffectual, unprofitable, useless; empty, idle, vain’.⁶⁷ Le Comte supports this definition.⁶⁸ At its most basic level, it is an unfallen joke equivalent to ‘transported’ and ‘bent’ that accurately sums up the situation from Eve’s perspective. Then, there is the inherent irony no reader can escape because we know that Eve will eat the fruit and consequently will not literally be ‘fruit-

⁶⁴ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 194; p. 605.

⁶⁵ John. N. King, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 158.

⁶⁶ *OED fruit*, n. 2. (a1225-1837) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁷ *OED fruitless*, a. 2. (1340-1878) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁸ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. 73.

less' ('Devoid of fruit'⁶⁹) although the action of eating the fruit will yield her absolutely 'no profit or advantage'. Polyptoton relies on the use of the same root word and the technique assumes a synchronicity of meaning in that root word so that the addition of a prefix or suffix, or a change in gender, tense, or form, can effect a change upon the root word. What such a reliance means in this case is that 'Fruit' becomes infected somewhat with the terms that apply to 'Fruitless'. This of course is doubly true of the fruit. It is, as pointed out already, 'fruitless' to eat. However, it is also 'fruitless' to eat not because of any property of the 'fruit' itself but because not eating it is God's 'sole Command, | Sole pledge of his obedience'. (*PL* 3.94-95.) As Flannagan points out, the fruit is the token of obedience to God and it is the obedience to God's command that is important, not the 'fruit'.⁷⁰

The question remains, just how much of all this does Eve understand? As Fish makes clear, 'Eve is 'yet sinless' when she talks with Satan and follows him to the forbidden tree'.⁷¹ When Eve says 'Fruitless to mee, though Fruit be here to excess' she confirms for Satan that the thrust of his temptation is the right one. In order to convince Eve that eating the fruit is worthwhile, Satan must make out that the fruit holds intrinsic qualities, that eating it will be a fruitful endeavour. Earlier, Satan has described how he ate the fruit and his narrative centres on the fact that he consumed it:

to pluck and eat my fill
I spar'd not, for such pleasure till that hour
At Feed or Fountain never had I found.
(*PL* 9.595-97.)

But, Eve clearly knows that consuming the fruit is not necessary for the consequences of breaking God's sanction to take effect and she says so to Satan.

⁶⁹ *OED fruitless*, *a.* Head definition that is unnumbered and undated. 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁰ Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 35; p. 419.

⁷¹ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, p. 13.

Of the Fruit

Of each Tree in the Garden we may eate,
 But of the Fruit of this fair Tree amidst
 The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eate
 Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, least ye die.

(*PL* 9.659-63.)

Flannagan notes that when Eve cites God the words are taken from Genesis.⁷² What Flannagan fails to note is that Eve has added the clause ‘nor shall ye touch it’ to the quote from Genesis. In Genesis, God says:

Thou shalt eat freely of everie tree of the garden, But as touching the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for whensoever thou eatest thereof, thou shalt dye the death.⁷³

The Miltonic refinement to the Biblical quote ensures that Adam and Eve know that it is not the fruit which will bring about death but disobeying God’s prohibition. It is not the consumption of the fruit but the reaching, touching and plucking of the fruit with the intention of eating that will bring about the fall. Satan’s victory over Eve is that he manages to undo the polyptoton on ‘fruitless–fruit’. The fall becomes inevitable when Eve accepts that the fruit has intrinsic qualities as the opening of her speech, before plucking and eating the fruit, makes clear: ‘Great are thy Vertues, doubtless, best of Fruits’. (*PL* 9.745.)

So far I have been arguing that polyptoton is a technique primarily used by unfallen beings, God and the Messiah in particular. However, to argue that polyptoton is only used by unfallen beings would be simplistic. We have already seen in the previous

⁷² Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, note 199; p. 605.

⁷³ Genesis 2:16-17. Geneva Bible (William Whittingham, 'The Bible and Holy Scriptures Contained in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated According to the Ebrue & Greke, & Conferred with the Beste Translations in Diuers Languages. With Moste Profitable Annotations Vpon All the Hard Places of the Holy Scripture, and Other Things of Great Importance, Mete for the Godly Reader' (1579) <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au>> [Accessed 12 October 2009]).

chapter that Satan uses polyptoton,⁷⁴ and that usage is not an isolated case. Like all the other rhetorical tropes, Satan makes free use of it throughout *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Notably, he begins his temptation of Eve with a polyptoton designed to play to her narcissistic qualities when he describes her as ‘Fairest resemblance of thy Maker faire’ (*PL* 9.538) and later in the same speech Satan uses polyptoton to bestow divinity upon Eve, calling her ‘a Goddess among Gods’, (*PL* 9.547) and thereby forcing plurality onto a term that in a monotheistic context cannot be pluralized. It is this manoeuvre that Christ will rob of its sting in *Paradise Regained*. Unfortunately, Eve does not sufficiently fight Satan’s pluralizing. It is worth noting that Eve also uses polyptoton repeatedly during the speech which results in her decision to eat the fruit: ‘Speech–speak’; ‘forbids–forbidding’; ‘die–dies’; ‘Beasts–Beast’. (*PL* 9.749; 753; 763-64; 769.)

Polyptoton is a technique used by the narrator in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* and the narrator, whether Milton or a character created by Milton,⁷⁵ is also a fallen being. Indeed, in *Paradise Regained* the narrator is responsible for what Raleigh called ‘the atrocity of his [Milton’s] worst pun’.⁷⁶

the **Ravens** with their horny beaks
 Food to *Elijah* bringing Even and Morn,
 Though **ravenous**, taught to abstain from what they brought.
 (Bold mine. *PR* 2.267-69.)⁷⁷

By now, we can see that while this is a pun, it is also clearly a polyptoton.⁷⁸ The problem that critics have with this pun is that it argues for an incorrect etymology because

⁷⁴ See pp. 113-123 of this thesis.

⁷⁵ See McMahon, *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost*.

⁷⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh, *Milton* (London: Edward Arnold, 1915), p. 211.

⁷⁷ All references are to John Milton, ‘*Paradise Regain’d*’, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

‘ravenous’ and ‘raven’ do not share the same root word. Corns defends this pun against its negative critical history:

I doubt whether the pun is quite so atrocious as editors pretend, nor need we invoke changes in literary aesthetic to defend it. Milton is defining the points of similarity and distinction between, on the one hand, Christ, and, on the other, both Elijah and the lower creatures. Since Elijah ate of the bread, it must be that Christ in his dream declines to eat of the food: he, not Elijah, has been ‘taught to abstain’. Thus Christ shares with the ravens (and by implication with Elijah) the characteristic of feeling hunger, but transcends them by his election to abstain. If Milton thought ‘raven’ and ‘ravenous’ to be etymologically cognate, then he erred — the one is from Old English, the other from Old French — but it was an error that persisted in English lexicography at least into Dr Johnson’s *Dictionary*. Other examples seem no more (nor less) than neat turns of phrase. Thus, Satan’s malice prompts him ‘cruelly to afflict [Job]—With all infliction’ (i.425-6).⁷⁹

Corns’ defence does not resuscitate the ‘raven–ravenous’ pun from the critical doldrums it has so far been forced to inhabit. And, though I am now going to offer a defence of the ‘raven–ravenous’ polyptoton, I do not expect my defence to change its critical reception.

‘Raven–ravenous’, as already noted, is an example of polyptoton because ‘raven’ can be turned into ‘ravenous’ with the addition of the common English suffix ‘—ous’. The *OED* defines ‘—ous’ as ‘Forming adjectives with the sense “abounding in, full of, characterized by, of the nature of (what is denoted by the first element of the compound)”’.⁸⁰ While ‘ravenous’ and ‘raven’, as distinct words, were current prior to Milton’s use of them, we should not discount Milton’s ability to neologize. While Milton was no Shakespeare when it comes to the number of neologisms he produced, he was no slouch. Corns notes that:

⁷⁸ If any polyptoton examined in this thesis can be termed a pseudo-polyptoton, it is this one, because ‘ravenous’ is not using ‘raven’ as its root word.

⁷⁹ Corns, *Milton’s Language*, p. 67.

⁸⁰ *OED* –ous, suffix. Draft Revision December 2008.

New words are, however, markedly less frequently coined in *Paradise Lost* than in *Comus*. I have noticed fewer than twice as many in his masque, though it is ten times the length. Milton's rate of coining appears closer to that of *Samson Agonistes* or *Paradise Regained*. We may only guess, but I suspect that the reasons, in so far as they are open to surmise, lie not in an atrophy of Miltonic creativity but rather a shift both in rate at which words were entering the language in general and a change in the prevailing poetic aesthetics away from an Elizabethan exuberance to a neoclassical austerity.⁸¹

If we believe John K. Hale that Milton was proficient in ten languages, including French,⁸² then we might assume that Milton knew that 'raven' and 'ravenous' were not etymologically linked. What Milton does is create that link because the technique he used was polyptoton and it argues that 'raven' is the root word of 'ravenous'. So, both words take on each other's meanings and, in effect, Milton coins a new adjective: 'raven-ous'. While 'ravenous' does mean 'Originally: (of an animal) given to seizing other animals as prey; predatory; ferocious. Later: (of an animal or person; also of the appetite, hunger, etc.) voracious, gluttonous',⁸³ here it also bears the meaning 'characterized by, of the nature of a raven'. What is the nature of a 'raven'? It has a 'ravenous' nature. The two terms are bound together by polyptoton into a tight embrace. And Milton, through polyptoton, has produced a new English meaning for an old French word: 'ravenous' — characterized by, of the nature of a raven.

Corns' second example in his defense of the 'raven–ravenous' polyptoton is another polyptoton, although Corns merely terms it a 'neat turn of phrase'.⁸⁴ Corns quotes the passage 'then cruelly to afflict him—with all inflictions'. (*PR* 1.425-26.) The *OED* argues that 'afflict' is descended from 'aflit:—L. *afflīct-um* pa. pple. of *afflīg-ĕre* to

⁸¹ Corns, *Milton's Language*, p. 84.

⁸² Hale, *Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style*, pp. 7-8.

⁸³ *OED ravenous*, *adj.* (and *adv.*) **1.a.** (?1387-2003) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁸⁴ Corns, *Milton's Language*, p. 66.

dash against, to throw down, to distress'.⁸⁵ 'Inflctions', according to the *OED*, is descended from 'L. *inflict-*, ppl. stem of *infligĕre* to dash or strike (one thing on or against another), to inflict (punishment)'.⁸⁶ So, Milton's 'neat turn of phrase' is actually a Latinate polyptoton on the root word '*fligĕre*'.

It is perhaps imprecise to argue that polyptoton is a form of 'logic', but it does have logical effects. It is an effective technique for highlighting hierarchies within a term, and for allowing the speaker to make subtle and fine distinctions between different senses of the one root term. Paronomasia, antanaclasis and syllepsis do not allow for these distinctions between terms. They unite sometimes quite disparate denotations into one sound. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, this has raised the ire of logicians throughout the ages. Polyptoton on the other hand is the tool of the logician as God demonstrated in his speech on 'foreknowledge'.

Polyptoton as a Structural Technique

Importantly, both of Corns' examples ('raven-ravenous', 'afflict-inflctions') come from *Paradise Regained*; this is not a surprise in the context of his work, however, as he considers 'sportive use of language' to be 'powerfully present in *Paradise Regained*'.⁸⁷

When discussing the extent of wordplay in *Paradise Regained*, Corns writes:

We find word-play in the narrowest sense, plays or puns upon the alternative significance of words or even at times, though usually in muted fashion, plays on homonymic ambiguity. The ludic element extends to quibbles and neat distinctions about alternative meanings of words and to some more interesting

⁸⁵ *OED afflict*, ppl. a. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

⁸⁶ *OED inflict*, v. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

⁸⁷ Corns, *Milton's Language*, p. 65.

of the neologisms, semantic shifts and extensions, and the collocational abnormalities already discussed.⁸⁸

Corns has noticed an important element of punning in *Paradise Regained* — the ‘semantic shifts and extensions’. One way of achieving a semantic shift or extension is through polyptoton because a root word is combined with different prefixes or suffixes or moved through different forms. And *Paradise Regained* is the poem in which the polyptoton becomes the central rhetorical pun technique. That is, in *Paradise Regained*, it replaces paronomasia, antanaclasis, and syllepsis as Milton’s preferred method of punning. Le Comte lists, in total, seventy puns in *Paradise Regained*; these seventy instances are made up of paronomasia, antanaclasis, syllepsis, and five polyptotons.⁸⁹ I have counted at least another thirty-eight instances of polyptoton in *Paradise Regained*. This makes a grand total of one hundred and eight puns in *Paradise Regained*, although, like Le Comte, I admit that, no doubt, I have missed some puns and my count is more than likely not an exhaustive one.⁹⁰ However, if we crunch my approximate numbers, a total of forty-five polyptotons out of one hundred and eight puns means that polyptotons alone constitute forty per cent of the punning in *Paradise Regained*. So, antanaclasis, paronomasia, and syllepsis count for the other sixty per cent. On these admittedly somewhat loose numbers, polyptoton is the single most frequently utilized rhetorical pun technique in *Paradise Regained*.

So, polyptoton becomes the central pun technique of *Paradise Regained* and this is initiated in the opening lines of the poem.

I Who e’re while the happy Garden **sung**,
By one **mans disobedience** lost, now **sing**
Recover’d Paradise to all **mankind**,

⁸⁸ Corns, *Milton's Language*, p. 65

⁸⁹ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, pp. 236-37.

⁹⁰ Le Comte, *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*, p. vii.

By one **mans** firm **obedience** fully tri'd
 Through all **temptation**, and the **Tempter** foil'd
 In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,
 And *Eden* rais'd in the wast Wilderness.

(Bold mine. *PR* 1.1-7.)

The opening invocation of *Paradise Regained* is a complex web of four intertwining polyptotons that enact the entire plot of *Paradise Regained*. The first polyptoton on 'sung-sing' replaces *Paradise Lost* with *Paradise Regained*. That is, the poet has 'sung' *Paradise Lost*, the performative action is in the past tense and so, *Paradise Lost* itself is now in the past. Indeed, it is being superseded and drowned almost by the verb 'sing' which is performative in the present. The poet is singing *Paradise Regained* and is continuing to 'sing' it. At least one critic has argued that Milton thought his audience should prefer *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost*⁹¹ and the 'sung-sing' polyptoton enacts and attempts to enforce this preferential bias.

The second polyptoton is the three way 'mans-mankind-mans' where 'mans' is the singular possessive (man's). The movement of the polyptoton is from Adam, to man in general, to the Messiah. There is an obvious undercurrent of sexism in the polyptoton. The disobedience is not Eve and Adam's, but Adam's only. That is, if Eve only had fallen, perhaps humanity would not have fallen. But, because Adam fell, humanity fell. The second individual man referred to by the polyptoton, Christ, was also a male human being. Due to the surrounding 'mans' aid, the term 'mankind' suppresses female human beings. Much has been written about Milton's representation of women, and in particular Eve.⁹² To some extent this polyptoton is a blunt demonstration of the worst

⁹¹ Carey, *Milton*, p. 122.

⁹² See: Elizabeth Hodgson, 'Mourning Eve, Mourning Milton in *Paradise Lost*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 11 (2005); Elisabeth Liebert, 'Rendering "More Equal": Eve's Changing Discourse in *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Quarterly*, 37 (2003); Joseph Wittreich, 'Milton's Transgressive Maneuvers: Receptions

excesses of Milton's gender politics: women do not matter. If we read the polyptoton through typology, the result is a strengthening of the typological link between Adam and Christ (that Adam is a type of Christ); more importantly, it links humanity to Adam (as we are all his descendants if the myth is to be believed) but it also links humanity to Christ and reinforces that fact the Messiah shared in our humanity. This is achieved through the linking of man to mankind through polyptoton. Once again, it enacts a movement from *Paradise Lost*, where Adam condemned mankind with his eating of the apple, to the saving of mankind through the actions — or, importantly the lack of actions — of Christ.

This is further emphasized by the polyptoton on 'disobedience–obedience'. Where the central theme and action of *Paradise Lost* is 'Of mans First Disobedience', (*PL* 1.1) *Paradise Regained* figures the restitution of mankind through Christ's obedience in the same way that its opening invocation changes, through polyptoton, Adam's 'disobedience' into Christ's 'obedience'. The polyptoton strips the 'dis', and all that that particular prefix connotes, from 'obedience', cleansing the word of the stain of hell and perversion with which *Paradise Lost* had so thoroughly infected it with. Just as mankind is saved by the Messiah in *Paradise Regained*, so too is language saved in *Paradise Regained*.

Critical opinion is divided upon the question of whether *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are, in fact, related works. The debate is between whether *Paradise Regained* should be viewed as being closer to *Samson Agonistes* with which it was published or *Paradise Lost* with which it shares, among other things, a similar title. Gordon Teskey views the two poems as constituting 'despite their stylistic differences

(Then and Now) and the Sexual Politics of *Paradise Lost*', in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. by Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[...] a single historical vision'.⁹³ Barbara K. Lewalski, in her landmark work *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained*, states that she 'has approached *Paradise Regained* as companion poem to *Paradise Lost* rather than as sequel or postscript'.⁹⁴ Some thirty-four years later, Lewalski views *Paradise Regained* as a 'complement' of *Paradise Lost*.⁹⁵ Tillyard denied that *Paradise Regained* is the sequel to *Paradise Lost*.⁹⁶ However, he did argue that there is a stronger connection between *Paradise Regained* and *Paradise Lost* than there is between *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*.⁹⁷ There are critics to this day who continue to argue that *Paradise Regained* should not be read in conjunction with *Paradise Lost* but in conjunction with *Samson Agonistes*.⁹⁸ What Milton thought on the question is, perhaps, not to be known; but, one effect of the initial polyptotons in *Paradise Regained* is to bind *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* together. The polyptotons of the first seven lines add weight to the other evidence that the two paradise poems should be read as being related.

Finally, *Paradise Regained* utilizes a polyptoton on 'temptation–Tempter' to bind Satan and his works together so that when Christ resists one he is also resisting the

⁹³ Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, p. 156.

⁹⁴ Barbara K. Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1966), p. 325.

⁹⁵ Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*, p. 443. For others with the same view, see: C. A. Patrides, 'Preface', in *Milton's Epic Poetry: Essays on Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 9; Roy Flannagan, *John Milton: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 98; Ann W. Astell, *Job, Boethius, and Epic Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁹⁶ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 252.

⁹⁷ Tillyard, *Milton*, p. 255.

⁹⁸ See: Walter S. H. Lim, *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006); Katsuhiko Engetsu, 'The Publication of the King's Privacy: *Paradise Regained* and of *True Religion* in Restoration England', in *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*, ed. by Graham Parry & Joad Raymond (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002); Joan S. Bennett, 'Asserting Eternal Providence: John Milton through the Window of Liberation Theology', in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. by Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

other. To resist Satan is to resist temptation and to resist temptation is to resist Satan.

The conclusion of the poem also features this polyptoton:

Angelic Quires
Sung Heavenly Anthems of his victory
Over **temptation** and the **Tempter** proud.
(Bold mine. *PR* 4.593-95.)

The polyptoton ‘temptation–Tempter’ indicates Satan’s true nature. ‘Tempt’ is the root word of both ‘temptation’ and ‘Tempter’ and it means:

To make trial of, put to the proof, or test, in a way that involves risk or peril. **a. to tempt God:** to put to the test, or experiment presumptuously upon, His power, forbearance, etc.; to try how far one can go with Him; hence sometimes passing into ‘to provoke, defy’.⁹⁹

Where *Paradise Lost* offers multiple versions of Satan (Satan as Aeneas, Satan as Odysseus, Satan as noble or foul rebel, Satan as the leviathan, the toad, the cormorant, the serpent) *Paradise Regained* strips Satan of his various guises and pares his role back to that of tempter. Critics have often noted that *Paradise Regained* bears many similarities to the Book of Job and the Satan of *Paradise Regained* seems to be performing a function similar to the Ha-Satan of *Job* — a tester of faith. The claim that Milton was of the devil’s party cannot be applied to *Paradise Regained*. The first book of *Paradise Lost* offers a memorable introduction of Satan:

Th’ infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stird up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv’d
The Mother of Mankind, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav’n, with all his Host
Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his Peers,
He trusted to have equal’d the most High,
If he oppos’d; and with ambitious aim

⁹⁹ *OED tempt*, v. I.2. (a1340-1720) 2nd Edition 1989.

Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
 Rais'd impious War in Heav'n and Battel proud
 With vain attempt

(*PL* 1.34-44.)

The ruined splendour of Satan, evident in this quote and throughout Books 1 and 2 of *Paradise Lost*, is reduced in the opening lines of *Paradise Regained* to an operation of 'tempt'.

In the initial temptation of *Paradise Regained* in Book 1, Satan and Christ begin their verbal sparring. Satan claims that

What can be then less in me then desire
 To see thee and approach thee, whom I know
 Declar'd the Son of **God** to hear attent
 Thy wisdom, and behold thy **God-like** deeds.

(Bold mine. *PR* 1.383-86.)

The polyptoton 'God-God-like' is an interesting one because of the typography. The *OED* has examples of the word 'godlike' from as early as 1513 and Milton employs it in *Paradise Lost* ('Two of far nobler shape erect and tall, | Godlike erect, with native Honour clad' (*P.L.* 4.288-89)) to describe Adam and Eve.¹⁰⁰ However, when Satan deploys it here in *Paradise Regained*, a hyphen has been placed between 'God' and 'like'.¹⁰¹ This perhaps demonstrates that Satan is consciously adding 'like' to 'god'. This then focuses the reader's attention on the word 'like' and what Satan is actually arguing in this phrase: that the son of God is not actually God but only like God. If Satan believed that Christ was God then the word he could have used would be 'godly'.

¹⁰⁰ *OED* **like**, *a.* 1. (1513-1852).

¹⁰¹ I am aware that Milton did not typeset as that would have been done by the printer. However, given that I have been trying to be true to the linguistic treasury of the time, I have at all time based my readings on the typology of the text as a reader in the seventeenth century would have experienced it from spelling to punctuation. That practice has been followed as thoroughly as possible throughout this thesis.

Instead, Satan only allows that Christ is ‘God-like’. If we read the line as finishing with a spondee then the derisive nature of ‘god-like’ is further drawn out:

˘ / / ˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /

Thy wisdom, and behold thy God-like deeds.

This is no simple jeer on Satan’s behalf but constitutes the groundwork which culminates in his questioning of the meaning of the phrase ‘son of God’:

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
 And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn
 In what degree or meaning thou art call’d
 The **Son** of God, which bears no single sence;
 The **Son** of God I also am, or was,
 And if I was, I am; relation stands;
 All men are **Sons** of God; yet thee I thought
 In some respect far higher so declar’d.

(Bold mine. *PR* 4.514-21.)

As was noted in the previous chapter, plurality is a hallmark of fallen thinking and therefore ‘sign’ becomes ‘signs’ to a fallen intelligence. Here, Satan enacts that exact movement when he declares that ‘Son of God [...] bears no single sence’ and then demonstrates through a polyptoton that ‘Son of God’ can be multiple in its signification because it can also be ‘Sons of God’. Also, earlier in this chapter, it was noted that Satan used the same technique to imply that Eve was a ‘goddess’. When Satan argues that there can be a God and beings that are ‘like’ God or capable of ‘godlike’ actions in *Paradise Regained* and *Paradise Lost* it all points to his ontological problem with language, that it ‘bears no single sence’, and that it is capable of multiplicity, plurality, and hence ambiguity of meaning.

Haskin, following Mary Ann Radzinowicz, claims that *Paradise Regained* ‘dramatizes a veritable “hermeneutic combat”’.¹⁰² Savoie terms it ‘a logomachia, a battle in words for control of the Word’¹⁰³ and the battle is begun in Book 1. After insinuating that Christ is only ‘God-like’, Satan argues that he has actually aided mankind:

I lend them oft my aid,
Oft my advice by presages and signs,
And answers, oracles, portents and dreams,
Whereby they may direct their future life.

(PR 1.393-96.)

By now, we should be unsurprised to notice that every Satanic communication with mankind is provided in the plural (‘presages’, ‘signs’, ‘answers’, ‘oracles’, ‘portents’, ‘dreams’) and so Satan’s advice is multiple, plural, and ambiguous. Out of all the words that Satan uses to describe his communications with humanity, it is the word ‘oracles’ that centres Christ’s response to Satan’s boast.

The other service was thy chosen task,
To be a **lyer** in four hundred mouths;
For **lying** is thy sustenance, thy food.
Yet thou pretend’st to **truth**; all **Oracles**
By thee are giv’n, and what confest more **true**
Among the Nations? that hath been thy craft,
By mixing somewhat true to vent more lyes.
But what have been thy answers, what but dark
Ambiguous and with double sense deluding,
Which they who ask’d have seldom understood,
And not well understood as good not known?
Who ever by consulting at thy shrine
Return’d the wiser, or the more instruct

¹⁰² See Haskin, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation*, p. 148; and Mary Ann Radzinowicz, ‘*Paradise Regained* as Hermeneutical Combat’, *University of Hartford Studies in English Literature*, 15-16 (1983), pp. 99-107.

¹⁰³ John Savoie, ‘The Point of the Pinnacle: Son and Scripture in *Paradise Regained*’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 34 (2004), p. 93.

To flye or follow what concern'd him most,
 And run not sooner to his fatal snare?
 For God hath justly giv'n the Nations up
 To thy Delusions; justly, since they fell
 Idolatrous, but when his purpose is
 Among them to declare his Providence
 To thee not known, whence hast thou then thy truth,
 But from him or his Angels President
 In every Province, who themselves disdaining
 To approach thy Temples, give thee in command
 What to the smallest tittle thou shalt say
 To thy Adorers; thou with trembling fear,
 Or like a Fawning Parasite obey'st;
 Then to thy self ascrib'st the truth fore-told.
 But this thy glory shall be soon retrench'd;
 No more shalt thou by **oracling** abuse
 The Gentiles; henceforth **Oracles** are ceast,
 And thou no more with Pomp and Sacrifice
 Shalt be enquir'd at *Delphos* or elsewhere,
 At least in vain, for they shall find thee mute.
 God hath now sent his living **Oracle**
 Into the World, to teach his final will,
 And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell
 In pious Hearts, an inward **Oracle**
 To all truth requisite for men to know.

(Bold mine. *PR* 1.427-64.)

Christ begins his attack on Satan's oracular assistance to mankind by locating the word 'Oracles' after a particularly abrasive polyptoton 'lyer-lying' that suggests the plurality of Satanic communication by multiplying the term itself with the multiple forms of the word suggesting the multiple form of the lies Satan is pedaling. The first use of 'oracles' by Christ arrives in the middle of a polyptoton on 'truth-true'. Christ is again multiplying forms to aid later statements, that Satan mixes 'somewhat true to vent more

lies'. By turning the noun 'truth' into an adjective, 'true', Christ demonstrates Satan's own technique of adding 'somewhat true' to colour his lies. Once again, the plurality of forms indicates the plurality of what Satan has been saying. He has not been speaking the one truth.

Christ finishes his examination of the word 'oracles' with a final polyptoton on 'oracling-oracles' that firmly relegates the activity and the plural to Satan's worldly domain. Four lines after that he reintroduces the concept but in the singular. 'Oracles' and 'oracling' have now become 'oracle'. Fish writes:

There is in these lines an implied equation (later to be made explicit) between illumination and silence [...] The man whose heart is the dwelling place of God's truth will find bodily sounds superfluous and distracting. This distinction between an inner and outer word is one that Satan never understands, although in his volubility he continues to reinforce it.¹⁰⁴

Joseph Mayer provides the key to the entire episode when he writes:

Declaring that 'Oracles are ceast', Jesus in effect supplants Satan in that function, and avenges the devil's usurpation of God's glory. The action also anticipates his grander deposing of Satan at the end of the poem from rulership over kingdoms of the world.¹⁰⁵

Earlier, Mayer had written that the 'concluding vision of his [Christ's] prophetic function comes as a kind of miraculous non-sequitur'.¹⁰⁶ The matter is not that simple, Christ is repeating on a larger scale what God has already done in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost* on a smaller more compact scale. Christ is controlling a word and re-inscribing that word and he does it through polyptoton. In this case the polyptoton is spread out over a number of lines and so become a submerged use of the technique. Satan claimed the word and action of 'oracles' for himself and because this is 'hermeneutical combat',

¹⁰⁴ Fish, 'Inaction and Silence: The Reader in *Paradise Regained*', pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph G. Mayer, *Between Two Pillars: The Hero's Plight in Samson Agonistes and Paradise Regained* (Lanham: University Press of America Inc., 2004), p. 198.

¹⁰⁶ Mayer, *Between Two Pillars: The Hero's Plight in Samson Agonistes and Paradise Regained*, p. 195.

Christ in this passage seeks to rewrite the word on his own terms. By using different forms and the plural of the word 'oracle' when he links it to Satan, Christ is able to free the singular root for his own use to rehabilitate it as a valid means of communication with God. In effect, the same hierarchy that was created with 'creature-creatures' and 'heav'n-heav'ns' is here writ large between 'oracles' and 'oracle'.

So comprehensive is this affirmation of 'oracle' in the singular, that Milton has rewritten scripture in order to effect it.

'Living Oracle' swerves somewhat from the Protestant commonplace of 'the living Word'. In the immediate context of the dialogue, 'oracle' contrasts the Son's truth with the oracular lies that Satan inspired. Well beyond Satan, the peculiar self-reference participates in a deeper dialogue, this between the Son and scriptures, and draws more subtle distinctions. Paul speaks of the Old Testament in terms of 'the Oracles of God', and in Acts Stephen recounts the history of salvation and how Moses mediated the 'living oracles' between God and His people. Milton's Son essentially quotes this latter phrase save for the shift from the plural to the singular, from the utterances of Moses through the myriad writings of the Old Testament to the unity of Himself.¹⁰⁷

The 'oracles' of the scriptures are now also 'ceast' in one respect, the prophecies of the Messiah are now fulfilled and only Christ's word now mediates God's word to mankind. When Christ associated the word 'oracles' with Satan, it became imperative that he then did rewrite scripture to avoid the 'oracles' of St. Paul, St. John, Ezekiel, Moses and others becoming associated with Satanic communication. By rewriting scripture Christ demonstrates that he is its source, and that its power derives from him, and, of all men, he is the only one who can rewrite and edit it.

Mary Nyquist claims that 'the trials Satan devises in both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are meant to split the Word's presence to the faithful subject's

¹⁰⁷ Savoie, 'The Point of the Pinnacle: Son and Scripture in *Paradise Regained*', pp. 95-96.

consciousness';¹⁰⁸ Christ, however, early in the epic, has beaten Satan to the punch. It is Christ who splits the root word into 'oracles', 'oracling', and 'oracle'. Christ does it deliberately so that he can distance 'oracle' from 'oracles' and 'oracling'. While the change from 'oracles–oracling' into 'oracle' takes place too far apart for it to be considered an individual instance of polyptoton, Christ uses the technique to structure the entire speech. With our knowledge of the relationship between plurals and the satanic vocabulary and our knowledge that unfallen beings utilize polyptoton to expound and explicate theological problems and thought, when Christ begins his speech with 'all Oracles | by thee are giv'n' after Satan has mentioned them in passing, we should be alert to the possibility that Christ is going to recast that word. The ability of polyptoton to make fine logical distinctions makes it the perfect tool to do the job either quickly, or in a more submerged sense.

Nyquist goes on to argue that '*Paradise Regained* lacks both drama and metamorphic change'.¹⁰⁹ That *Paradise Regained* lacks drama I do not wish to strenuously deny. That *Paradise Regained* lacks metamorphic change should, at the very least, now be a claim that has become problematic. The metamorphosis consists in Christ re-inscribing and reclaiming words from the satanic lexicon and precisely differentiating what belongs to Satan and what does not belong to Satan. This is metamorphic in nature because Christ has to subtly metamorphose words through polyptoton to save language from Satan's influence. It is not a brash metamorphism, like that enacted by paronomasia; rather, it is the subtle, controlled, metamorphism that is the hallmark of polyptoton.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Nyquist, 'The Father's Word/Satan's Wrath', *PMLA*, 100 (1985), p. 189.

¹⁰⁹ Nyquist, 'The Father's Word/Satan's Wrath', p. 197.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is entitled ‘Punning Regained’ because that is what *Paradise Regained*, among many other things, does. It begins with the polyptotons in its opening lines which redeem ‘obedience’ from ‘disobedience’, Adam and ‘mankind’ through Christ, and the sung *Paradise Lost* through the ever present singing of *Paradise Regained*. Ken Simpson claimed that the ‘redemption of language in *Paradise Regained* is demonstrated in Christ’s silencing of Satan and, most emphatically, in his faithful waiting as the divine Word upon God’s silence in the pinnacle scene’.¹¹⁰ But, as we have seen, Christ is able to redeem the word ‘oracle’ not through silence but through polyptoton.

The final result of a polyptoton is to highlight the semantic closeness of words. ‘Foreknowledge’ is closer to ‘unforeknown’ (because they both rely on the root word ‘foreknow’), than ‘Sin’ is to ‘sign’ (because neither share a root word that is also the root concept). Antanaclasis, asteismus and syllepsis all rely on words that are spelt the same but mean different things. More often than not, these words share the same root word but they don’t have a root concept because the two meanings have drifted far enough apart to be viewed as disparate concepts. Paronomasia and polyptoton are almost polar opposite pun techniques. In polyptoton what is a clear pun ‘sound–resound’ can become that which is so semantically and phonically similar that we no longer call it a pun as is evident in ‘creature–creatures’. Paronomasia treads the other boundary where

¹¹⁰ Simpson, *Spiritual Architecture and Paradise Regained: Milton's Literary Ecclesiology*, p. 53.

semantic difference and phonic difference can devolve into rhyme, ‘*the jingling sound of like endings*’ as Milton put it.¹¹¹

Many critics have attempted to describe the style of *Paradise Regained* and the final two books of *Paradise Lost* as either ‘plain’, ‘stark’, ‘austere’, and ‘bleak’. Perhaps more effective is the idea that Milton placed himself under a poetic Self-Denying Ordinance. The Self-Denying Ordinance was designed to deprive ‘every member of Parliament except Cromwell of the right to hold an office in the army’.¹¹² That is, each and every ‘self’ in the Parliament (other than Cromwell of course), denied himself the opportunity to hold both a political and a military command. The effect was that Cromwell gained an effective monopoly on power. The rest of his political rivals denied themselves the means and opportunity to gain enough military support and backing to ever challenge Cromwell. During the period in which England was a republic, Milton was in constant proximity to the Parliament through his role as Secretary for Foreign Languages.¹¹³ But, the Self-Denying Ordinance was enacted in 1645, some four years prior to Milton’s appointment as Secretary for Foreign Languages, which occurred in 1649.¹¹⁴ However, Milton was partaking in the political and religious propaganda wars that was fought through the pamphlets of the time and by 1645, the year of the Self-Denying Ordinance, Milton had been engaged in political and religious pamphleteering for at least four years, since 1641.¹¹⁵ Given the way in which the Self-Denying Ordinance led to Cromwell taking over the New Model Army and leading it to

¹¹¹ John Milton, ‘The Verse’, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. by Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 352.

¹¹² Jack B. Oruch, ‘Milton as Adjutant-General?’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900*, 5 (1965), p. 66.

¹¹³ Robert Thomas Fallon, *Milton in Government* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Anna Beer, *Milton: Poet, Pamphleteer and Patriot* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 178 and pp. 210-11.

¹¹⁵ See Beer, *Milton: Poet, Pamphleteer and Patriot*, pp. 121-26.

significant victories over Charles,¹¹⁶ it is unlikely that Milton did not know of it. It is reasonable to suggest that Milton might have related the concept of the Self-Denying Ordinance to his poetic treatment of language and its redemption in *Paradise Regained*. Milton's subduing of his rhetorical prowess to his Christian belief mirrors to some extent the way in which some in the Puritan Parliament had to subdue their own political and military ambitions when they enacted the Self-Denying Ordinance.

The fury of Christ's rejection of rhetoric in *Paradise Regained* may be the over-exuberance of a convert.

Remove their swelling Epithetes thick laid
As varnish on a Harlots cheek, the rest,
Thin sown with aught of profit or delight,
Will far be found unworthy to compare
With *Sion's* songs, to all true tastes excelling.

(PR 4.343-47.)

Henry Weinfield claims that 'the one thing the poet is not able to do, however, is curb his talent'.¹¹⁷ Milton did not curb his talent, but rather found the rhetorical forms and tropes that would serve his purpose. Polyptoton is the one rhetorical pun technique that does not violate this poetic Self-Denying Ordinance because it is subtle and orderly, not transgressive and attention seeking in the manner of other punning techniques. This made it the natural choice of figure to still play with words when that play must be restrained and subdued to maintain the decorum of the poet's 'plain style'. Rajan perhaps said it best when he commented that 'the language of *Paradise Lost* works in conjunction with its structure and it is the union of the two which we ought to be

¹¹⁶ Beer, *Milton: Poet, Pamphleteer and Patriot*, p. 178.

¹¹⁷ Weinfield, 'Skepticism and Poetry in Milton's Infernal Conclave', p. 193.

discussing when we use that misleading label “style”.¹¹⁸ The sentiment holds true for *Paradise Regained* when we view the way in which polyptoton both aids and abets Milton’s poetic Self-Denying Ordinance and the content he was writing about in *Paradise Regained*.

Steven Zwicker writes intriguingly about Dryden’s effect on Milton in which he argued that Dryden influenced Milton’s approach to poetry.

And the anxiety of influence, since it has been told of Dryden, I want to attribute to Milton, to suggest why Dryden might have made Milton nervous, where in Milton’s work the anxiety might be confronted, and how it might have shaped his masterpiece *Paradise Regained*. For I want to suggest that *Paradise Regained* is a response to something other and more formidable than Thomas Ellwood’s ‘Thou has said much here of *Paradise Lost*, but what hast thou to say of *Paradise Found*?’; that Milton orchestrates not only a variety of sacred themes, rewriting the Book of Job and the Gospels, but that he also wished to engage, indeed to put into question, to controvert the formidable literary challenge posed by the new drama and the astonishing career of its foremost apologist, theorist, and practitioner, John Dryden. Milton shaped his brief epic, in part, as an answer to, and a repudiation of, the heroic drama: its rhyming couplets, its bombast and cant, its aristocratic code of virtue and honor, its spectacle and rhetoric, its scenes and stage machinery, its exotic lands and erotic intrigues, its warring heroes and virgin queens, its exaltation of passion and elevation of empire. Milton conceived *Paradise Regained* as a drama in the form of an epic in order to display ‘deeds above heroic’, while demonstrating what literary mode might best express heroic virtue, and how heroic colloquy ought truly to sound. I want, that is, to readjust the story of literary relations in the late 1660s to allow the contestatory force of *Paradise Regained*, its challenge to the form, style, and ethos of the heroic drama, to its theoretical defense of the form, and to Dryden’s astonishing career as the central protagonist of a new literary culture, its laureate, a commercial and critical

¹¹⁸ B. Rajan, ‘The Style of *Paradise Lost*’, in *Milton’s Epic Poetry: Essays on Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 287.

success beyond anything that Milton had experienced or could now hope to achieve.¹¹⁹

It is clear from the extract above that Zwicker views Milton as a poet of the ‘long Eighteenth Century’ since he believes that Dryden affected Milton’s poetics. The common conception is that the earlier poet (Milton) influences the later poet (Dryden). But, as Zwicker argues, there was a considerable overlap in the careers and lives of both Dryden and Milton. A previous chapter of this thesis, ‘The Gyant Race’ demonstrated that Milton had one foot in the Renaissance. Regardless of who influenced whom, Zwicker’s argument above demonstrates that Milton also had one foot in the ‘long Eighteenth Century’. The canonical poets of the Eighteenth century, those who engaged most with epic poetry, including *Paradise Lost*, are Dryden and Pope. It is to them that we now turn to see if the Miltonic metamorphosis of punning is continued, challenged, or changed by those who wrote during the ‘long Eighteenth Century’.

¹¹⁹ Zwicker, 'Milton, Dryden, and the Politics of Literary Controversy', pp. 271-72.

6 SCATTER'D THROUGH THE LAND

‘A bare clinch will serve the turne; a Carwhichet, a | Quaterquibble, or a Punn’.¹

INTRODUCTION

While Dryden may not have had the perpetual antagonism towards puns that Addison, Dennis or Johnson expressed, he was a man of his age and demonstrated its fashionable literary prejudices. When commenting on Ben Jonson, Dryden writes:

Nay, he [Jonson] was not free from the lowest and most groveling kind of Wit, which we call clenches; of which, *Every Man in his Humour*, is infinitely full: and, which is worse, the wittiest persons in the Drama speak them.²

‘Clench’, as we know, is a synonym of ‘pun’.³ While he condemns Jonson’s use of puns, Dryden also provides an excuse designed to rescue Jonson from the criticism.

This was then the mode of wit, the vice of the Age and not *Ben. Jonson’s*: for you see, a little before him, that admirable wit, *Sir Philip Sidney*, perpetually playing with his words.⁴

While it may be a forgivable error because Sir Philip Sidney played with words, we cannot ignore that Dryden used some quite emotive language when describing clenches: ‘lowest’ and ‘groveling’. This language demonstrates a clear critical distaste for punning. Given that he professed a dislike of ‘clenches’ or punning, it is reasonable to ask whether this professed aversion translated into an active writing practice which avoided the use of puns. But the question, by now, is more complicated than that. We

¹ John Dryden, *The Wild Gallant*. ed. by John Harrington Smith and Dougald MacMillan. Vol. 8, *The Works of John Dryden: Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), I.i.44-45.

² John Dryden, ‘*Conquest of Grenada, Part 2: Defence of the Epilogue. Or, an Essay on the Dramatique Poetry of the Last Age.*’, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Jr. H. T. Swedenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 213.

³ *OED* **clench**, n. II.4. (1638-1824) 2nd Edition.

⁴ Dryden, ‘*Conquest of Grenada, Part 2: Defence of the Epilogue. Or, an Essay on the Dramatique Poetry of the Last Age.*’, p. 214.

have so far seen how the Renaissance lyric poets used puns; following that, this thesis has argued that Milton enacted a stylistic change which affected his use of puns. If Dryden does use puns, then we will also need to examine whether his use of puns is similar to that of the Renaissance or whether it is more in line with the late practice of Milton.

Stephen Zwicker is one of the few critics to have argued against the dominant conception of influence between Dryden and Milton. I concluded the last chapter with an extract which claimed that, in part, Milton's plain style was influenced by Restoration poetics, particularly the rhyming couplet as practised by Dryden.⁵ While Zwicker's argument is plausible, the vast majority of critics generally view influence as running in the opposite direction — that it was Milton's poetry which influenced Dryden's poetics. In the main, this is based on a straight historical reading. Although Dryden was writing for the stage while Milton was alive (going so far as to rewrite, with Milton's permission, *Paradise Lost* for the stage under the title *The State of Innocence*⁶), the poetry that we are examining here, that which was written in primarily an epic vein, *Absalom and Achitophel* along with Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, were all composed after Milton's death. The question for us is whether the change in rhetorical punning that Milton enacted in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd* was adopted, contested or altered by Dryden when he came to write the mock-epic *Absalom and Achitophel* and translate Virgil's *Aeneid*.

⁵ Zwicker, 'Milton, Dryden, and the Politics of Literary Controversy', pp. 271-72.

⁶ James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 264-65.

ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

Euphemistic Punning

The opening of *Absalom and Achitophel* has been praised, not only for its wit and humour, but for the standard of poetry displayed within it. James Anderson Winn makes just this point:

The brilliant style of this justly famous passage helps make the argument: the emphatic placement of the wonderful verb ‘Scatter’d’ suggests the force of Charles’s orgasm, and the teeming alliteration (‘pious—Priest-craft—*Polygamy*—Promiscuous’; ‘man—many—multipli’d—monarch—Maker’s’; ‘cursedly—confin’d—Concubine—Command’) displays an equivalent poetic fecundity.⁷

While it is rhyme that is the dominant technique in Dryden’s, and later Pope’s, poetry, Winn also highlights another important technique: alliteration. The puns are few but do require our attention.

In Pious times, e’r Priest-craft did begin,
 Before *Polygamy* was made a sin;
 When **man**, on **many**, multiply’d his kind,
 E’r one to one was, cursedly, confind:
 When Nature prompted, and no law deny’d
 Promiscuous **use** of Concubine and Bride;
 Then *Israel*’s Monarch, after Heaven’s own heart,
 His vigorous **warmth** did, variously, **impart**
 To Wives and Slaves: And, wide as his Command
 Scatter’d his Maker’s Image through the Land.

(Bold mine. *AA* ll. 1-10.)⁸

⁷ Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, p. 351.

⁸ All references to *Absalom and Achitophel A Poem* are from John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1681-1684*. ed. by Jr. H. T. Swedenberg. Vol. 2, *The Works of John Dryden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). The most recent edition (Paul Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*. Vol. I (1649-1681) (London: Longman, 1995)) does not include original typography and spelling. As has been

The *OED* defines ‘many’ as meaning ‘Designating a large (indefinite) number’.⁹ Philosophically speaking, it meant much the same: ‘A multitude, plurality. Opposed to *one*’.¹⁰ ‘Many’, as Dryden uses it, is not an instance of syllepsis. The opening sentence of *Absalom and Achitophel* works to oppose, or at least to soften, the attitudes of those who support monogamy. ‘Man–many’ is, moreover, an example of paronomasia. ‘Man’ is only a ‘y’ away from ‘many’, and the use of paronomasia helps Dryden strengthen the argument that polygamy was natural and ‘pious’ — that ‘many’ springs from ‘man’, that the root of ‘many’ is ‘man’. However, the paronomasia does not stand out. It is submerged in the alliteration of the line: ‘When **man** on **many** multiplied his kind’ (bold mine). The effect of the alliteration is to emphasize ‘multiplied’ which becomes the focus of the line. ‘Multiplied’ is not a syllepsis because it had been used since circa 1390 to mean reproduction, which naturally, for us homo sapiens, means sexual reproduction.¹¹ This is divinely sanctioned language of course, for it is God who ‘said unto them [Adam and Eve] Be fruitful, and multiply’.¹² The overall effect is to focus the attention of the reader on the divine right of King David–Charles II to be fruitful and multiply with whomever he wished to multiply. This, as stated earlier, leaves the initial polyptoton in *Absalom and Achitophel* doubly subdued — 1) it is subservient to the overall scheme of the introduction, in that it does not initiate a new line of thought into the introduction; and 2) it is subservient to the line in which it appears, in that the dominant feature of the line is the alliteration which focuses attention away from the ‘man–many’ pun and onto ‘multiplied’.

pointed out previously, I have at all times attempted to utilize an edition that provides the reader with the original spelling and typography because the original spellings and typography may suggest puns that are not suggested by the modern spelling or typography.

⁹ *OED many*, *adj.*, *pron.*, and *n.*, and *adv.*, **A.** (OE-1869) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁰ *OED many*, *adj.*, *pron.*, and *n.*, and *adv.* **B.II. 8.** (a1619-1978) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹¹ *OED multiply*, *v.* **3.a.** (c1350-1785) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹² Robert Carroll and Stephen Prehett, ed., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Gen. 1:28.

Indeed, this sexual meaning of ‘multiplied’ goes on to dominate the entire passage and does open up a mine of puns for Dryden. Line 6 reads ‘Promiscuous use of concubine and bride’. Hammond notes that ‘promiscuous’ means ‘without distinction’ and references the *OED*’s second meaning.¹³ The *OED* does not strictly support Hammond’s assertion, the second definition of ‘promiscuous’ provided by the *OED* is:

Consisting of assorted parts or elements grouped or massed together without order; mixed and disorderly in composition or character; (with plural noun) of various kinds mixed together.¹⁴

The definition which Hammond is using, and it is the correct definition I believe, is a sub-definition of the *OED*’s first definition: ‘Of an agent or agency: making no distinctions; indiscriminating’.¹⁵ The reason that Hammond is at pains to make this distinction is because, surprisingly, the *OED* does not date the sexual denotation of ‘promiscuous’ (‘Of a person or animal: indiscriminating in sexual relations’¹⁶) until 1804, well over one hundred years after *Absalom and Achitophel* was published. What Hammond does is to use Eco’s concept of the cultural linguistic treasury to resist the potential for reading a syllepsis on ‘promiscuous’. ‘Promiscuous’ comes directly from the Latin *prōmiscuus* which means ‘common, shared, general, indiscriminate’.¹⁷ Recourse to viewing ‘promiscuous’ as a Latinism does not make ‘promiscuous’ a syllepsis or paronomasia as so often happens in Milton. Rather, it is ‘use’ which solely carries the sexual drive of the passage. One of the meanings of ‘use’, now obsolete, is ‘To have sexual intercourse with’ and this meaning was extant when *Absalom and*

¹³ Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*, note 6, p. 455.

¹⁴ *OED promiscuous*, *adj.* and *adv.* **A.2.** (1579-1951) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁵ In fairness to Hammond, the *OED* has recently finished updating the ‘P’ section of the dictionary. Given that Hammond edited *Absalom and Achitophel* in 1995, it is entirely plausible that he was working off the old definition of ‘promiscuous’ and I believe this to be the reason for what is a rather tiny error. The actual *OED* reference is: *OED promiscuous*, *adj.* and *adv.* **A.1.b.** (1633-1995) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁶ *OED promiscuous*, *adj.* and *adv.* **A.1.c.** (1804-2004) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁷ *OED promiscuous*, *adj.* and *adv.* Etymology. Draft Revision June 2009.

Achitophel was published.¹⁸ While it is Dryden who consciously subordinates the first pun of *Absalom and Achitophel*, the *OED* denies us the opportunity to read ‘promiscuous’ as a syllepsis.¹⁹

If, as I argued above, ‘multiplied’ generates a context in which punning may occur, one is then entitled to ask, then where are the puns which take advantage of the context created by ‘multiplied’? The answer is that they occur in line 8 — ‘His **vigorous warmth** did variously **impart**’ (bold mine). When describing a person or an animal, ‘vigorous’ denotes ‘Strong and active in body; endowed with or possessed of physical strength and energy; robust in health or constitution; hardy, lusty, strong’.²⁰ However, when describing the properties of things other than a person or an animal, ‘vigorous’ means ‘Full of, exhibiting, characterized by, vigour or active force; powerful, strong’.²¹ Given that line 8 occurs in the context of ‘polygamy’, ‘multiplied’ and ‘use’, it is tempting to read both ‘lusty’ and ‘full of active force, powerful, strong’ into ‘vigorous’.

Following on from reading ‘lusty’ into ‘vigorous’, it is interesting to note that both ‘warmth’ and ‘impart’ do not have any specifically sexual denotation according to the *OED*.²² Yet, in the context of the opening lines, the reader is invited to read ‘semen’ for ‘warmth’ and the word ‘impart’ is deliberately designed to convey the male orgasm. ‘Part’, by itself, was often used to mean the ‘genitals’.²³ The meaning is activated here

¹⁸ *OED use*, v. **II.10.b.** (1382-1889) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁹ It has been suggested that prior to the 1960s sexual revolution, the two most sexually racy periods in England’s history are the Restoration and the Regency. Given the overtly sexual nature of Charles II’s court (the mistresses, the poems of Rochester) it is possible to imagine that promiscuous could carry a sexual sense in that period only for it to recede until being reborn in the 1790s. I cannot stop such a reading and have sympathy for it; but, the *OED* at this point does not support such a conjecture and therefore this thesis cannot support it either. If someone were to investigate ‘promiscuous’ and its uses during the Restoration, they very well may be able to mount a more compelling case than I have been able to do so here that ‘promiscuous’ carried a sexual denotation at that time.

²⁰ *OED vigorous*, a. **1.** (c1330-1892) 2nd Edition 1989.

²¹ *OED vigorous*, a. **2.** (a1548-1909) 2nd Edition 1989.

²² *OED warmth; impart*, v.

²³ *OED part*, n.¹ **I.4.** (c1390-1994) Draft Revision Sept. 2009.

but it is buried inside the word ‘impart’ and therefore does not dominate the reading of ‘impart’. Because the two words do not, according to the *OED*, carry sexual denotations, there is actually some slippage between the two words. If ‘warmth’ does mean ‘semen’ then ‘impart’ could actually mean ‘ejaculate’. But, given that ‘warmth’ is combined with the adjective ‘vigorous’, ‘warmth’ could also mean the sexual act itself, or perhaps the King’s royal member itself that he will ‘variously impart’. In essence, we are dealing with euphemisms here. The punning in line 8 of *Absalom and Achitophel* resembles the punning of Belial during the War in Heaven, or the punning in Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnet, where words denote meanings quite divorced from their dictionary definitions as established by the *OED*. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan sets up a context in which Belial forces words to refer not only to peaceful dialogue but also to the cannon based warfare the fallen angels had recently employed. Shakespeare, on the other hand, creates a context in which the word ‘will’, among other things, comes to stand for ‘vagina’ and ‘penis’. The sexual context created by the opening lines of *Absalom and Achitophel* allows both ‘warmth’ and ‘impart’ to be read in a sexual way, but it also, deliberately on Dryden’s part, leaves the reader unable to pin down a precise sexual denotation. The reader strongly surmises that they refer to the sexual act but being precise in how they refer to intercourse is impossible, for the modern reader is unable to refer to a dictionary to prove that the words denote or connote the carnal behaviour. The *OED*, while unavailable as a resource for contemporary readers of Dryden, argues that they too would have experienced these as euphemism because it finds no evidence that the words themselves were denoting sexualized definitions at the time.

This has an interesting ramification, for such euphemizing punning, or the euphemizing syllepsis, is entirely reliant upon context. The punning adds to the overall

effect of the passage but in no way helps to create the movement of logic, or flow of thought in the passage. Puns such as ‘warmth’ and ‘impart’ are entirely reliant upon the context of the poem to be puns. This is where a vital difference between the puns of the ‘will’ sonnets and the puns in the opening of *Absalom and Achitophel* becomes apparent. As explained in chapter 3 of this thesis, ‘will’ is used initially to mean ‘desire’. As the poem continues, ‘will’ undergoes an enlargement of meaning, the speaker generating a surplus of desired denotations that the word ‘will’ represents: this includes the speaker’s desire for the dark lady, for her vagina, for the dark lady to desire the speaker and his penis. The addition of meaning and repetition of the word ‘will’ is a function and symptom of desire. That is, if you remove desire and its initial signifier — ‘will’ — from the poem, you strip the poem of the context which helps create the euphemistic punning that occurs within the poem. Or, to say it another way, if you remove the initial pun, the initial ‘will’, you remove the context generating crux of the poem. If you remove Satan’s use of the logic of the pun from *Paradise Lost*, then you remove the context in which Belial’s puns occur. To remove the context for the punning in *Absalom and Achitophel*, one would remove puns, but non-punning words — ‘polygamy’, ‘multiplied’, ‘use’. The euphemistic puns in the introduction of *Absalom and Achitophel* are ancillary to the sense of the passage. The same cannot be said with confidence about Belial’s punning during the War in Heaven and the same cannot be said about the puns on ‘will’ in Shakespeare’s sonnet.

The second ramification is that we are, perhaps, stepping outside the realms of rhetorical punning. Rhetorical punning techniques are relatively well defined and syllepsis is defined by Puttenham as ‘comprehending under one [word], a supplie of two

natures'.²⁴ While it is clear that 'warmth' and 'impart' are carrying meanings above and beyond their dictionary meanings, it is impossible to accurately denote those meanings. The double supply is present, but not in a way that a dictionary can define it for us. This is where the *OED* stops being useful in its ability to help define a particular pun. Previous to these examples, most instances of syllepsis in this thesis have had the two or more denotations expounded with the aid of the *OED*. While I do not doubt that examples of such euphemizing punning exist prior to Dryden, it is interesting to note that in the much celebrated ten opening lines of *Absalom and Achitophel* there is a rather weak and subdued polyptoton and two euphemizing syllepses resulting in three puns in ten lines of poetry.

One of the reasons for the subdued nature of *Absalom and Achitophel*'s first pun, perhaps, is that Dryden was beginning a poem that is, at heart, an allegory. Ruth Nevo understands allegory to be the crucial technique of the poem for it is 'the unwavering and detailed consistency of the total allegory Israel-England that is the very root and heart of *Absalom*'s success'.²⁵ Broadly speaking, critics agree with Nevo. Hammond terms it typology rather than allegory but reliance upon the Biblical appropriation remains key to Hammond's understanding of *Absalom and Achitophel*:

The use of a biblical typology was Dryden's solution: by imposing upon current events a narrative which had an existing, familiar shape (known to all readers of the Bible, which meant everyone) together with an already familiar, authorised interpretation (through which the story was recognised to speak of God's providential care for his kings), Dryden aimed to translate Monmouth, Shaftesbury and their associates out of the realm of constitutional debate and

²⁴ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 165.

²⁵ Ruth Nevo, 'Absalom and Achitophel', in *John Dryden*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 46.

political maneuvering [sic] into a fixed world where their actions were subjected to a single, final interpretation.²⁶

Indeed, Mullan argues that ‘Dryden we might say, withholds himself, giving us over to the biblical story’.²⁷ Even those critics who doubt the dominance of a particular possible interpretation — that the poem ‘leaves its reader at a loss to sort out the history from the satire’²⁸ — still validate the central place occupied by allegory in the poem.

In effect, the assumption of security and order in Dryden’s narrative contradicts both the biblical analogue and the contemporary course of events. In struggling to impose a conservative assertion of stability on the inevitably recalcitrant forces of history, the poem must falsify both the [biblical] past and the present, the two terms that it endeavors to equate.²⁹

What this means is that for the sake of the poem, for the allegory to work, the most important phrases for the reader are ‘In Pious times’ and ‘Then *Israel*’s Monarch’ because these are the phrases that establish the allegory. The puns, neither the paronomasia on ‘man–many’ nor the syllepses on ‘warmth’ and ‘impart’, serve the allegory, because they are ornamental rather than central.

The Logic of the Pun

While *Absalom and Achitophel* is full of rhetorical punning, it is hard to find sustained punning in the way we have seen Satan and Renaissance poets pun. One instance, the paronomasia on ‘Adam-wits’ in line 51 of *Absalom and Achitophel*, sets up a short burst of puns:

These *Adam-wits*, too fortunately free,
Began to dream they wanted libertie;

²⁶ Paul Hammond, *John Dryden: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 97.

²⁷ John Mullan, 'Dryden's Anonymity', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. by Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 170.

²⁸ David B. Haley, *Dryden and the Problem of Freedom: The Republican Aftermath 1649-1680* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 236.

²⁹ Laura Brown, 'The Ideology of Restoration Poetic Form: John Dryden', *PMLA*, 97 (1982), p. 402.

And when no rule, no president was found
 Of men, by Laws less circumscrib'd and bound,
 They led their wild desires to Woods and Caves,
 And thought that all but Savages were Slaves.

(Bold mine. *AA* ll. 51-56.)

Traditionally, 'Adam-wits' has not been read as a pun but as the first of many specific Miltonic allusions as Paul Hammond makes clear in his gloss on 'Adam-wits': 'Those who, like Adam, were not satisfied with their God-given freedom, and rebelled against their imagined constraint'.³⁰ But one recent commentator, Kathryn Walls, reads 'Adam-wits' as a pun.

Looking forward to the ultimate revelation of 'the naked truth', and wanting to recover a prelapsarian (or Edenic) purity, the Adamites worshipped in the nude. Dryden's contemporaries, while they had never before heard of *Adam-wits*, certainly knew about the similar-sounding *Adamites* (whom they inevitably tended to view as sex-crazed and promiscuous). Almost punningly, therefore, Dryden's term seems to allude to the presumption of those notorious antinomian radicals who, Dryden (and many others) no doubt believed, would have been far better 'clothed with humility' (cf. I. Pet. 5:5)—and, of course, with some real clothes.

Dryden's pun on 'Adamites' provides the perfect introduction to his subsequent account of the logic of republicans. Just as the quest for Edenic purity of the Adamites had led them to embrace what was merely (according to one seventeenth-century author) 'rustick impudence', so the republicans' quest for a freedom unprecedented in the civilized world has led them to the (obviously ridiculous) conclusion that 'all but savages [are] slaves' (line 56).³¹

It is interesting that Walls describes the technique as operating 'almost punningly' but in the next paragraph clearly calls it a 'pun'. Furthermore, Walls claims that the

³⁰ Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*, note 51, p. 459. A reading heavily influenced by the California edition which glosses 'Adam-wits' as 'Apparently a reference to those who, like Adam, could not be satisfied with the true freedom under God's law and yearned for more'. Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1681-1684*, note to l. 51, p. 241. For the same opinion, see also Mullan, 'Dryden's Anonymity', p. 170.

³¹ Kathryn Walls, 'Adam-Wits' in *Absalom and Achitophel*, *Notes and Queries* (2005), pp. 337-38.

paronomasia on ‘*Adam-wits*’ ‘provides the perfect introduction to [Dryden’s] subsequent account of the logic of republicans’. Not only does Walls claim that ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ is a pun, she also claims that it introduces a line of thought that Dryden can mine for both poetical and political purposes. Indeed, once one reads ‘Adamites’ instead of ‘*Adam-wits*’ the passage does gain a satirical edge, especially given that Adamites is the term used to classify those radical sects who sought to join Adam in his original freedom through the practice of nudity.³²

The ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ paronomasia gains its satiric edge by opening up a context in which more euphemistic syllepses occur. Neither ‘free’ nor ‘liberty’ carry a dictionary denotation of ‘unclothed’ but it is not hard to miss the figurative link between the definitions of ‘free’ (‘Unrestricted, released, loose’³³) and ‘liberty’ (‘Exemption or release from captivity, bondage or slavery’³⁴) and the shedding of one’s clothes.

Both ‘free’ and ‘liberty’ also share similar political denotations at the time Dryden is writing. ‘Exemption or freedom from arbitrary, despotic, or autocratic rule or control’³⁵ is a definition of ‘liberty’ and is the overt meaning Dryden intended it to carry. It differs from ‘free’ in a small but crucial way. ‘Of a state or its citizens and institutions: not subject to government which is despotic, tyrannous, or restrictive of individual rights’³⁶ is the overt denotation of ‘free’ in the above passage. (These meanings are ‘overt’ as compared to the ‘covert’ euphemized meaning of ‘nudity’ provided by the context of ‘Adamites’.) The meaning of ‘liberty’, as defined above, does not contain any clause that refers to individual rights. Both ‘free’ and ‘liberty’ oppose themselves to despotic rule. Importantly, the definition of ‘liberty’ links despotism with ‘arbitrary’

³² *OED Adamite*, *n.*¹ and *a.* **A.2.** (1628-1831) 2nd Edition 1989.

³³ *OED free*, *adj.*, *n.*, *adv.* **II.** (No date range) Draft Revision June 2009.

³⁴ *OED liberty*, *n.*¹ **1.a.** (c1386-1852) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁵ *OED liberty*, *n.*¹ **2.a.** (1484-1874) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁶ *OED free*, *adj.*, *n.*, *adv.* **I.2.a.** (a1225-2005) Draft Revision June 2009.

while ‘free’ links ‘despotic’ with ‘tyrannous’. This difference is crucial for Dryden. It is possible to be free under an absolute monarch so long as the monarch allows the citizens their liberties. Under David, of course, the Jews are ‘too fortunately free’, that is, David allows them too much freedom and he has not ruled firmly enough to keep them in line. Dryden, it would seem, sees no problem in reconciling ideas of freedom with ideas of absolute monarchy. However, for Dryden, the word ‘liberty’ is dangerous and problematic because the concept of ‘liberty’, ideologically speaking, is a Whig concept. So, when the ‘too fortunately free’ Jews begin to dream of ‘liberty’, they take one step too far for Dryden and the Tories to tolerate them unopposed.

There is another meaning of ‘free’, however, that institutes a more cynical — but still humorous — play with the ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ paronomasia. Now obsolete, ‘sexually promiscuous or available’³⁷ was a definition of ‘free’ that was in use during Dryden’s lifetime. The nudity practised by the Adamites, combined with this definition of ‘free’, links them to the fallen Adam and Eve not simply through the phrase ‘Adam-wits’ but by alleging that nudity, in a fallen context, simply makes one sexually available and encourages sexual promiscuity. ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’, by seeking to emulate the first human being in his freedom lead themselves to re-enact the first fallen action of Adam and engage in sexual intercourse. This layering of puns to combine multiple discourses — in this instance political, sexual, religious and nudism — is a feature of *Paradise Lost* and harks back to Milton’s youth and Renaissance uses of rhetorical puns as demonstrated in the poems considered in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The difference, however, is that the play is deftly curtailed by Dryden as he moves on to further his political agenda. The play finishes with the couplet ‘They led their wild

³⁷ *OED free, adj., n., adv.* **II.19.** (a1616-1707) Draft Revision June 2009.

desires to woods and caves,—And thought that all but savages were slaves’. (*AA* ll.55-56.) In the political context established by the syllepses on ‘free’ and ‘liberty’, ‘wild’ denotes that the Adam-wits’ desires are ‘Not submitting to moral control; taking one’s own way in defiance of moral obligation or authority; unruly, insubordinate; wayward, self-willed’.³⁸ This definition also supports the religious context established by the paronomasia on ‘*Adam-wits*—Adamites’ given that the Adamites were a religious sect. ‘Wild’ continues the sexual discourse established by ‘free’ because ‘wild’ can mean ‘Giving way to sexual passion; also, more widely, licentious, dissolute, loose’.³⁹ Finally, it continues the nudist thread of meaning through the first definition offered by the *OED* for ‘wild’: ‘Living in a state of nature’.⁴⁰ While that definition, according to the *OED*, applies only to wild animals, in the context of nudism in emulation of Adam and Eve’s original unfallen existence (as defined and described by Milton), ‘living in a state of nature’ becomes applicable to those humans who choose such a lifestyle.

The syllepsis on ‘desires’ further foregrounds the sexual discourse that began with ‘free’ and it here usurps the ostensibly overt political thread of the passage to replace it with the thread of sexual freedom (or depravity from the narrator’s point of view) not as the result of political freedom but as the aim of political freedom. That is, by seeking political freedom, the Adamites are really seeking sexual freedom. For, while desire, sans sex, means the ‘fact or condition of desiring; that feeling or emotion which is directed to the attainment or possession of some object from which pleasure or satisfaction is expected; longing, craving; a particular instance of this feeling, a wish’,⁴¹

³⁸ *OED wild, a. and n. A.II.7.a.* (c1000-1898) 2nd Edition 1989.

³⁹ *OED wild, a. and n. A.II.7.b.* (c1250-1849) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁰ *OED wild, a. and n. A.I.1.* (c725-1849) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴¹ *OED desire, n. 1.* (1303-1875) 2nd Edition 1989.

it does carry the explicitly sexual meaning of ‘Physical or sensual appetite; lust’.⁴² The first denotation is vague. It can be a desire for anything (although we know in this context that it is a desire for political freedom). The second meaning combines with the sexual definition of the adjective ‘wild’ to create a double barreled sexual reference. That is, ‘wild desires’ means ‘licentious, loose, dissolute lust’. What is the difference between the ‘licentious lust’ of the Adamites and the polygamy of King David–Charles II we might be tempted to ask of Dryden. The difference, of course, is that King Charles II’s behaviour is divinely and biblically sanctioned whereas the behaviour of the Adamites is not. While the King’s behaviour does not introduce instability into the body politic, the Adamites do introduce political instability by seeking sexual freedom under the guise of political freedom.

The result of this process is that the ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ end up following the dictum that ‘all but Savages were Slaves’. There is a syllepsis on ‘savage’ that neatly ties the whole passage together. Firstly, ‘savage’ can mean a ‘person living in the lowest state of development or cultivation; an uncivilized, wild person’.⁴³ This strengthens the couplet’s interior logic with the link between ‘wild’ in line 55 and ‘Savage’ in line 56. This, of course represents the thinking of Adamites who see clothing as a manifestation of a culture that has developed away from God. From the narrator’s point of view, the word ‘Savage’ helps make the argument against the ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’. The second meaning of ‘Savage’ is a ‘cruel or fierce person; also, one who is destitute of culture, or who is ignorant or neglectful of the rules of good behaviour’.⁴⁴ Neglecting the use of clothes certainly ensures that Adamites are transgressing the rules of good behaviour. The irony that is contained in the play of the word ‘Savage’ is, in some way, savage

⁴² *OED desire, n. 2.* (c1340-1887) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴³ *OED, savage, a. and n.¹ B.2.* (1588-1907) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁴ *OED, savage, a. and n.¹ B.2.b.* (1606-1898) 2nd Edition 1989.

itself. The ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’, through a *reductio ad absurdum* come to argue that only by being uncivilized can they have liberty. This helps the narrator’s argument by painting the ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ as people lacking not only intelligence and political nous but also common sense, people who would seek to throw out with the government all the trappings of culture — not just clothes and sexual mores but education, commerce, housing, and all the accoutrements of life during the Restoration. Moreover, in the context of the passage as a whole, it serves to bring the political discourse, hidden momentarily by the punning on ‘wild desires’, back to the forefront of the text.

The ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ passage, lines 51 to 56 of *Absalom and Achitophel* proves that Dryden was aware of the logic of the pun and was adept at using it. Indeed, the whole passage is made possible through the paronomasia on ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ and Dryden then uses other puns that continue the discourses opened up through the first pun; and this repeats the pattern established by Shakespeare’s ‘will’, Milton’s ‘girt’ and ‘dirt’, Sidney’s ‘*Astrophil and Stella*’ and ‘pain’, Donne’s ‘done’, and Satan’s ‘unfould’.⁴⁵ But, in Dryden’s poem, punning logic is only evidenced in an isolated incident because the poem follows other rules that establish its internal logic: the rules of allegory and rhyming couplets. While the logic of the pun informs the ‘*Adam-wits–Adamites*’ passage of *Absalom and Achitophel*, the passage itself occurs under the allegory through which Dryden was commenting upon the Exclusion crisis. Milton demonstrated to Dryden how to utilize the logic of the pun within a larger structure. If Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnet demonstrates how the logic of the pun can come to dominate and structure a poem, and *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain’d* demonstrate how the semantic energy contained in the logic of the pun can be harnessed and directed towards

⁴⁵ To find the discussion of these words in this thesis, then for ‘will’ see pp. 91-105; for ‘girt’ see p. 112; for ‘dirt’ see p. 112; for ‘*Astrophil and Stella*’ see p. 83; for ‘pain’ see p. 90; for ‘done’ see p.106; for ‘unfould’ see p. 124.

an exterior goal, then *Absalom and Achitophel* demonstrates how the use of allegory, a structural ambiguity, can create an exterior logic to which puns add support and ornament.

Ornamental Punning

One needs to be careful with some of Dryden's puns because, more often than not, they bear all the hallmarks of simplicity. That is, they are easily rendered into intelligible lines of thought and do not result in what Empson would call ambiguity. Here are two examples:

From hence began that Plot, the Nation's Curse,
Bad in it self, but represented worse:
Rais'd in extremes, and in extremes decry'd;
With Oaths affirm'd, with dying Vows deny'd:
Not weigh'd, or winnow'd by the Multitude;
But swallow'd in the **Mass**, unchew'd and **Crude**.

(Bold mine. *AA* ll.108-13.)

Hammond notes that 'crude' means 'raw, uncooked'.⁴⁶ W.K. Thomas argues that 'crude' is a play on words because it bears three meanings:

generally it reflects the nature of the mob as well as its food; specifically, in referring to food in the stomach, it means 'not digested' or, as then expressed, 'not concocted'; and connotatively it glances at another meaning, very appropriately, for when diseases or morbid growths were still in an early stage, they, too, were said to be 'crude' and hard to be 'concocted'.⁴⁷

The *OED* provides the proof on which Thomas bases his argument. When Thomas points out that 'crude' glances connotatively, he omits the fact that the *OED* clearly states that 'crude' denotes of 'a disease, morbid growth, etc.: In an early or undeveloped

⁴⁶ Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*, note 113, p. 464.

⁴⁷ W. K. Thomas, *The Crafting of Absalom and Achitophel: Dryden's "Pen for a Party"* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), p. 41.

stage; not matured'.⁴⁸ The Popish Plot, therefore, according to Dryden, is a disease. When the Popish Plot began, it was 'undeveloped' and had not 'matured' into the McCarthyite finger-pointing it was later to become as Titus Oates began to use his false construction to rid himself of his enemies. One of the then dominant political metaphors was that of the body (then, as now, and earlier in Roman times) and therefore it is no wonder that a political problem is understood and portrayed as a disease of the body politic. Thomas views this meaning of 'crude' as being connotative because there is nothing in the passage previously, or immediately after, to support the reading of the Popish Plot as a disease or cancer in the body politic. However, not all puns operate in that way. The syllepsis on 'crude' has the effect of producing a retroactive reading of the passage — that the 'curse | Bad in itself' is actually a disease the people have caught through imbibing food that has not been sufficiently prepared, not 'weighed' or 'winnowed'. The idea of the Popish Plot is first metaphorically represented as food for the people which then is retroactively recast through the language (and thus the metaphor) of disease.

Hammond and Thomas see the need to explicate, at different lengths, the word 'crude', but both leave 'mass' unglossed. The syllepsis on 'mass' is reliant upon the phrasing in which Dryden presents it — 'the Mass'. The *OED* highlights the phrase 'the mass' in two of the many meanings that 'mass' has denoted over the centuries. Firstly, 'The sacrament of the Eucharist; the Eucharist as a sacramental (esp. a sacrificial) rite or mystery. Usu. as **the Mass**'.⁴⁹ The second definition in which the *OED* explicitly highlights the phrase 'the mass' is '**the mass**: the generality or majority of mankind; the

⁴⁸ *OED crude*, a. 5. (1651-1847) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁹ *OED mass*, n.¹ 2.a. (OE-1994) Draft Revision June 2009.

main body of a people, nation, etc.; the ordinary people'.⁵⁰ Hammond states that when he edited *The Poems of John Dryden* he modernized the 'spelling, punctuation, capitals and italics, the 'accidentals' of the text'.⁵¹ This decision was made because it 'is important to recognize that the accidentals of seventeenth-century texts derive principally from compositors in the printing houses, not from the authors'.⁵² However, as the *OED* makes clear, typography could be very important in the reading of 'the mass' because when the phrase applies to the Eucharist, 'mass' receives a capital letter. The *California Dryden*, which preserves the 'accidentals' of the text has 'the mass' as 'the Mass'.⁵³ The question is, does the capitalization matter and is it significant? The seventeenth-century saw the beginnings of an effort to codify English grammar and of course it had its own publishing and printing norms. Hammond is confident that the capitalization was not Dryden's choosing. This leads us to ask, does the lack of a capital mean we can dismiss the meaning of 'Eucharist' when reading the phrase 'the mass'? Politics and religion were intimately and intensely related during the seventeenth-century, therefore, it is all the more likely that a phrase such as 'the Mass' is likely to garner not just a political response but also an educated and aware religious response — that is, a reader is going to be aware of what 'the mass' can connote for a papist, an Anglican, a Presbyterian, a Calvinist or other Protestants, the ability to discriminate between which meanings were accepted by whom would have been a part of navigating the contentious world of religious affiliations in Restoration England. The effect of reading 'the Mass' as a syllepsis which refers both to the people and the sacrament of the Eucharist is uncanny. It is strange because Dryden is using the language of the

⁵⁰ *OED mass*, n.² II.8.a. (1621-1993) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵¹ Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*, p. xvi.

⁵² Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*, p. xvi.

⁵³ By changing the capitalization in this phrase, Hammond does not seek to suppress the pun but, rather, to suppress the compositors altering the text and thereby our understanding of it.

Roman Catholic Church to describe how England was swept up in hysteria over an illusionary plot that was ‘concocted’ in ‘Rome’ to destroy English Protestantism. That is, he uses Roman Catholic terminology to describe the workings of an essentially Protestant piece of propaganda that made life difficult for Roman Catholics in England. Not just any piece of Roman Catholic terminology but one of its central tenets. If the phrase had the preposition ‘by’ then ‘the Mass’ would have to be read as denoting ‘the people’ but by using the preposition ‘in’, Dryden opens up the possibility for ‘the Mass’ to denote ‘the sacrament of the Eucharist’.

The ostensible denotation of ‘in the Mass’ is that the multitude swallowed the lies about the Popish Plot ‘whole’. This is clearly contiguous with the sense of the verse sentence. However, by appropriating Roman Catholic terminology, Dryden argues that the lies about the Popish Plot constitute a perversion of the Catholic sacrament enacted through his perversion of Catholic terminology. The Eucharist is changed from the body of Christ into the lies which constructed the Popish Plot. Dryden was not Catholic at the time he wrote *Absalom and Achitophel* (he was to convert to Catholicism later on) but he was sympathetic to those hurt by the Popish Plot affair and knew some of the Plot’s victims personally.⁵⁴ Still, the overall effect of this controlled pun is to draw a similarity between the Protestants who believed in the Popish Plot, and the Papists — the end result of which is that each group is as gullible as the other and Anglicanism is the sensible middle road between the two.

⁵⁴ Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, p. 31.

Critics have been swift to recognize the many parallels with, and allusions to, Milton's poetry in *Absalom and Achitophel*.⁵⁵ Less routine is Anne Ferry's claim that both Dryden and Milton share similar conceptions of language.

In *Absalom and Achitophel*, as in *Paradise Lost*, both the cause and the evidence of the Fall are represented as the abuse of words. In the satire and in the epic, sin and restoration are wrought by the powers of language. Uses of words, modes of speech, styles in each poem are therefore not only instruments for the poet's expression, but central to his very subject and meaning. This parallel concern with language as a moral force implies some more closely shared view of experience than is indicated by Dryden's ironic parodies, serious stylistic imitations, or extended allusive comparisons to Milton's work.⁵⁶

Ferry deepens her argument as she proceeds to examine *Absalom and Achitophel* in the light of *Paradise Lost*.

The corruption of language when words become neutral names severed from original or authoritatively sanctioned moral meanings is the most powerful effect and sign of sin in each poet's view of experience. Their presentations of the temptation and Fall show this deep similarity in attitude, which made the language of large portions of *Paradise Lost* — what we have called Satanic rhetoric — available to Dryden for his own satiric purposes. Dryden's use of that kind of language, within the total Miltonic context of *Absalom and Achitophel*, likens Milton's understanding of evil to his own, and therefore makes the comparison of his satire with *Paradise Lost* central to the meaning of his poem.⁵⁷

Ferry uses two words that came under heavy scrutiny in chapter 5 of this thesis, 'sign' and 'sin'. Sin, when recounting her birth to Satan makes the paronomasia 'call'd me *Sin*, and for a Sign | Portentous held me' (*PL* 2.760-61). Most critics highlight the play of

⁵⁵ See, for example: Nevo, 'Absalom and Achitophel', p. 55; Tina Skouen, 'The Vocal Wit of John Dryden', *Rhetorica*, 24 (2006), p. 399; Harold F. Brooks, *Dryden the Satirist* (Durham: The New Century Press, 1989), p. 154; L. L. Brodwin, 'Miltonic Allusion in *Absalom and Achitophel*: Its Function in the Political Satire', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 68 (1969), pp. 24-44.

⁵⁶ Anne Davidson Ferry, *Milton and the Miltonic Dryden* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 42.

⁵⁷ Ferry, *Milton and the Miltonic Dryden*, pp. 67-68.

différance that such a paronomasia creates and enacts, but ignore the way in which paronomasia creates a link between the played upon words. The effect of the link, in the case of the ‘sin–sign’ paronomasia is to redirect the reader toward God by reaffirming that sin is a sign of one’s fallen nature and therefore of the state of one’s relationship with God — so much so that one can then use that self-aware knowledge of sin to begin improving one’s relationship with God. A pun enacts a double movement — allowing *différance* while forging a distinct connection. A similar movement, though not quite so distinct, is occurring in the syllepsis on ‘the Mass’. By using the language of sacrament to describe the lies that constituted the Popish Plot, Dryden is reminding the reader of the spiritual truth of the sacrament that highlights the abominable nature of the Popish Plot and the perversion of those who believed it. Such a play of meaning requires that the reader of the syllepsis is able to understand ‘the Mass’ as something capable of being sacred and sanctioned by heavenly authority. In this phase of his career, it would have to be an Anglican Eucharist for it to be divinely sanctioned, but that is a ‘mass’ nonetheless.

This link between *Paradise Lost*’s fallen punning and *Absalom and Achitophel* is not the only one between the two poems; another is that Achitophel is often read as the Satan of *Absalom and Achitophel*.⁵⁸ A previous chapter of this thesis examined Satanic punning in *Paradise Lost* and argued that Satan is the only character who utilizes what has been termed ‘the logic of the pun’ in order to create a speech. Satan only did this during the War in Heaven, and elsewhere he subordinates the punning logic to the logic of his thought, but he still puns in his speeches. The true hallmark of the satanic style is plurality — turning a ‘sign’ into ‘signs’ and the phrase ‘son of God’ into ‘sons of God’.

⁵⁸ See, for example: Mullan, ‘Dryden’s Anonymity’, p. 171; Earl Miner, *Dryden’s Poetry* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 123; Brooks, *Dryden the Satirist*, p. 134; Brodwin, ‘Miltonic Allusion in *Absalom and Achitophel*: Its Function in the Political Satire’, p. 34.

The verbal wiles of Achitophel rely less on the semantic tricks beloved by Satan but on psychological manipulation of Absalom. Indeed, in his first speech, Achitophel makes little use of rhetorical pun techniques but they emerge in his second speech as he seeks to overcome Absalom's natural, but 'staggering' (l. 373), obedience to his father. It is to polyptoton that Achitophel turns:

the People have a Right Supreme
To **make** their Kings; for Kings are **made** for them.
[...]
The name **Godly** he may blush to bear:
'Tis after **God's** own heart to Cheat his Heir.

(Bold mine. *AA* ll.409-10, 435-36.)

The first polyptoton seeks to deny God's role in establishing the monarchy. On the surface it would seem that Achitophel is admitting that God creates Kings for the people, as a service to both people and society — 'Kings are made for them'. The polyptoton enacts a verbal rebellion mimicking and mirroring the hoped for rebellion to be led by Absalom–Monmouth. If the people 'make their Kings' then, *ipso facto*, 'kings are made for' the people — what the people make, must be of benefit and service to them. The polyptoton essentially replaces God with the mob and it relies upon the shifting form of the verb 'to make' to tie the two concepts together. Indeed, the two concepts now have a definite relationship because of the way 'make' precedes 'made'. Kings are 'made' because, and only because (or so the polyptoton and Achitophel are arguing), the people 'make' kings. Primogeniture does not make kings according to Achitophel–Shaftesbury. This may sound entirely reasonable to those of us reared under the influence of twentieth century democracy, but it must have sounded as heresy to those who supported Charles II and even some of the less radical supporters of Monmouth (Monmouth was at least a child of Charles II, despite his illegitimacy, and the royal bloodline would still be

somewhat intact if Monmouth took the throne). The polyptoton helps Achitophel create and cement the heresy with which he seduces Absalom.

The second polyptoton is responsible for one of the more confusing couplets in *Absalom and Achitophel*. The problem lies in the second line of the couplet: ‘’Tis after God’s own heart to Cheat his Heir’. How, one wonders, can God ever be understood to have cheated his heir? Does God have an heir in the first place? Hammond writes that:

The ‘Cheat’ would be acceptable to God because it would preserve Protestantism. D[ryden] may be recalling that David had his son Solomon anointed King to thwart his elder son Adonijah, who had begun to behave as king.⁵⁹

Hammond’s reading maintains the allegory, but another reading that can exist alongside the strictly allegorical, lies in the casting of Achitophel as Satan. Satan does feel cheated by what he views as the succession of Christ to the right hand of the Father. As the prior being — in Satan’s understanding of his creation and Christ’s creation — surely it is Satan who should be heir to the throne of Heaven. Another answer is simpler still: God, by being eternal, cheats Christ out of the kingship of Heaven because God will never vacate the throne of Heaven. Or, maybe, it is the jealousy of Esau when God prefers Jacob. Whatever the ultimate, and perhaps unknowable, answer to Dryden’s riddle, it is clear that Achitophel is seeking to denigrate God so that the epithet used of David, ‘godly’, becomes a further needle in Absalom’s psyche. David is denying Absalom the throne. People describe David as ‘godly’. Ergo, Absalom is going to be doubly denied the throne, once by David’s decision, and a second time because people recognize that denying Absalom the throne has the weight of divine precedent behind it and he will not be as ‘godly’ as his father.

⁵⁹ Hammond, ed., *The Poems of John Dryden*, note 435-6, p. 486.

One could claim that puns in *Absalom and Achitophel* are primarily ‘ornaments’. That is, they are not intrinsic to the logic behind the poetry — if you remove the puns, the logical edifice will remain the same, not as witty to be sure, but the same nonetheless. One of my favourite puns in *Absalom and Achitophel* occurs in lines 805-06: ‘To change **Foundations**, cast the **Frame** anew, | Is work for Rebels who **base Ends** pursue’ (bold mine). The marriage of building terms with political terms is not a new trick but here it is expressed with lucidity and the morality of it is brought into question through the syllepsis on ‘base’. Dryden’s political affiliations at the time of the writing of *Absalom and Achitophel* were aligned with the king, however, he is able to neatly recognize what the rebels wish to do (recast the political foundations) and he knows where such work must take place (at the ‘base’ of the political structure) but he also argues that such restructuring is immoral, ‘base’, and therefore wrong. The pun aids Dryden in making his point in as succinctly as possible. In large part, the drive for short, succinct statements is driven by the nature of the heroic couplet form and how such poetry tends to utilize the couplet as a complete thought in and of itself. Dryden, according to Tina Skouen, asserted this very point:

For as Dryden argues, whereas in the reading of blank verse one will have to go on until one ‘is out of breath’, in a poem composed of couplets it only takes a couple of lines to complete the sense’.⁶⁰

This viewpoint is not without its critics. Paul Ramsey argued that even ‘though the couplet is closed, the mind and ear are not compelled to stop short at the end of every second verse. Couplets may combine in paragraphs of many lengths’.⁶¹ But, critics like Ramsey cannot argue against the enclosed natural strength of the couplet for very long: ‘Yet the closed couplet does have a tendency to establish a strong boundary which

⁶⁰ Skouen, ‘The Vocal Wit of John Dryden’, p. 400.

⁶¹ Paul Ramsey, *The Art of John Dryden* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), p. 69.

neither sense nor rhythm can easily cross'.⁶² The extended sentences of the Renaissance (and here we think of Milton's blank verse sentences or Shakespeare's quatrain to sonnet length sentences) are inherently long enough sense units to allow the logic of the pun to forge the connections between different thoughts. The smaller unit of the couplet does not allow for this, as the semantic space opened up by a pun is generally limited to the couplet. If one were to pursue a study of eighteenth century punning in prose or poetry not written in heroic couplets, one might find the logic of the pun being used but in poetry written in heroic couplets, the punning logic tends to be drowned by the logic of the couplet.

VIRGIL'S ÆNEIS

It may come as a surprise to some readers that Dryden, in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, concludes the epic with a paronomasia when he describes the death of Turnus at the hands of Aeneas.

He rais'd his Arm aloft; and at the Word,
 Deep in his Bosom drove the shining Sword.
 The streaming Blood **distain'd** his Arms around:
 And the **disdainful** Soul came rushing thro' the Wound.
 (Bold mine. *VA* 12. 1374-1377.)⁶³

This paronomasia, in the last lines of the translation, is a repetition of the same paronomasia that occurred in the final lines of Book 10 which describes the death of Mezentius, again at the hands of Aeneas:

to the Sword his Throat apply'd.
 The Crimson Stream **distain'd** his Arms around,

⁶² Ramsey, *The Art of John Dryden*, p. 73.

⁶³ All quotations are from *Virgil's Aeneis* in John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Poems the Works of Virgil in English*. ed. by William Frost. Vol. 5 & 6 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

And the **disdainful** Soul came rushing thro' the Wound.

(Bold mine. *VA* 10.1311-13.)

Scholars have noted that in repeating this pun, Dryden is changing Virgil's text. Taylor Corse noted that it 'is out of choice, I think, rather than necessity that Dryden puts before us, in duplicated terms, the two most formidable opponents of Aeneas'.⁶⁴ Robert Fitzgerald notes the paronomasia, in both Book 10 and 12, is 'loosely related to the Latin'.⁶⁵ Fitzgerald goes so far as to supply the original Latin which describes Mezentius' death and his own translation of Virgil's words: '*udantique animam diffundit in arma cruore*: 'in a wave of blood he poured out his life upon his armour'.⁶⁶ Corse deepens the case for arguing that Dryden has manipulated Virgil's text away from its original form in using this paronomasia when he claims Turnus' death echoes the death of Camilla in the Latin text whereas Dryden has Turnus' death echoing Mezentius' death through the paronomasia on 'distain'd' and 'disdainful'.⁶⁷ The question, then, is why?

Corse's answer to this question is a little brief: 'In each instance a collocation of like sounds ('distain'd' and 'disdainful'), or paronomasia, supports the idea that death dissolves the union between body and soul'.⁶⁸ While it is true to some extent that the paronomasia on 'distained–disdainful' does help to accentuate, and even, perhaps, vocally replicate, the soul leaving the body, it also puts other elements into play. To begin with, the repetition of the first syllable, the prefix 'dis—', echoes the incessant playing on 'dis—' that was one of the major chords in *Paradise Lost*.⁶⁹ As Forsyth

⁶⁴ Taylor Corse, *Dryden's Aeneid: The English Virgil* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), p. 25.

⁶⁵ Robert Fitzgerald, ed., *The Aeneid of Virgil: Translated by John Dryden* (London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1964) note to 10.1312-13, p. 341.

⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, ed., *The Aeneid of Virgil: Translated by John Dryden*, note to 10.1312-13, p. 341.

⁶⁷ Corse, *Dryden's Aeneid: The English Virgil*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Corse, *Dryden's Aeneid: The English Virgil*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 5 of this thesis and also Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, pp. 217-238.

notes, ‘Dis’ is a name that both Virgil and Ovid use for the god of the underworld.⁷⁰ Turnus and Mezentius are both dispatched to the underworld and the repetition of ‘dis—’ would add a solemn ring to a knowledgeable reader’s ear.

Moreover, the paronomasia links together the words ‘distained’ and ‘disdaining’.

The *OED* proffers three meanings for the verb ‘distain’:

1. *trans.* To imbue or stain (a thing) with a colour different from the natural one; to discolour, stain, dye, tinge.
2. *transf.* and *fig.* To defile; to bring a blot or stain upon; to sully, dishonour.
- †3. To deprive of its colour, brightness, or splendour; to dim; to cause to pale or look dim; to outshine. *Obs.*⁷¹

The *OED*’s final example of the third meaning is from 1633. Dryden, born in 1631, had entered into an agreement with Tonson to translate all of Virgil’s works in 1694.⁷² It is unlikely, given the date range that the *OED* offers for the third meaning of ‘distain’, that it applies in this case. However, I am unwilling to categorically deny that the meaning can apply in this case. Certainly, the first two meanings apply and the word ‘distained’ is an instance of a *sylllepsis* even as it operates as part of a paronomasia. The *OED* defines ‘disdainful’ as ‘Full of or showing disdain; scornful, contemptuous, proudly disregarding’.⁷³ Turnus’ and Mezentius’ blood does indeed stain or change the colour of their armour. Further, their blood defiles their armour; but, the paronomasia argues, their blood only stains and defiles their armour because they were both individuals who were proud, scornful, and contemptuous of life and their enemy, Aeneas. Through their enmity with Aeneas, both Mezentius and Turnus become contemptuous of Jupiter because they seek to block and frustrate the Trojans’ attempt to found the Roman state as has been ordained and foretold by Jupiter. The paronomasia seems to argue that their

⁷⁰ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, pp. 228-33.

⁷¹ *OED distain*, v. 1. (1393-1839); 2. (1406-1873-4); 3. (c.1385-1633) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷² William Frost, ‘Dryden’s Virgil’, *Comparative Literature*, 36 (1984), p. 194.

⁷³ *OED disdainful*, a. 1. (a1542-1849) 2nd Edition 1989.

contemptuous and scornful souls and their blood ‘distain’ their armour. It is the nature of paronomasia and syllepsis to conflate words and denotations. Here, the similarity in sound helps conflate ‘distained’ and ‘disdaining’ to the point where the blood and soul are seen to share several properties. Finally, the phrase ‘disdainful soul’ can be both ‘the soul that disdains the body’ and ‘the soul of the disdainful person’.

This thesis has demonstrated elsewhere that paronomasia enacts both a separating and a joining of words and meanings.⁷⁴ This paronomasia is no different, it does support Corse’s argument that it helps exemplify the separation of body and soul (blood ‘distains’ while the soul ‘disdains’) but it also demonstrates the connected nature of body and soul (blood and soul both ‘distain’ and ‘disdain’). The *Aeneid* is a poem in which the titular hero is the example of piety and in which the entire movement of the poem is working to show the meaning of *pietas*; it is perhaps appropriate that the poem end with the death of the impious Turnus. In fact, Dryden’s *Aeneid* ends as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* begins, and strangely enough, Dryden’s *Aeneid* begins as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* ends. The echoing ‘dis—’ of the final lines of Dryden’s *Aeneid* is a softer version of the discordant ‘dis—’ which punctuates the first line of Milton’s epic: ‘Of Mans first disobedience’. (*PL* 1.1.) Dryden’s *Aeneid* begins simply, without any rhetorical puns, and so ends *Paradise Lost*.

Corse claims that Dryden engages in Latinate punning similar to Milton. Indeed, Corse argues that to ‘some extent, the practice of Milton sanctions and explains the practice of Dryden’.⁷⁵ One of the more complicated of the Latinate puns that Corse has found is contained in Book 7. Book 7, among other things, relates the list of warriors who join Turnus in waging war against Aeneas and the Trojans. One of these is the

⁷⁴ See especially ‘Astrophil–Sir Philip Sidney’ (p. 83) and ‘Sin–Sign’ (p.182).

⁷⁵ Corse, *Dryden's Aeneid: The English Virgil*, p. 84.

warrior maid Camilla who later dies during the action related in Book 11. Dryden introduces her thus:

Last, from the *Volscians* fair *Camilla* came;
And led her warlike troops, a Warriour Dame:
Unbred to Spinning, in the Loom unskill'd,
She chose the nobler *Pallas* of the Field.

(Bold mine. *VA* 7.1094-97.)

Commentators have previously pointed out that Pallas Athena is both a warrior goddess as well as being the goddess of the ‘housewifely arts’ as Fitzgerald terms it.⁷⁶ Corse moves beyond Fitzgerald’s gloss when he provides his interpretation of the passage:

to understand what Dryden means by ‘the nobler Pallas’ (there is a pun here on the Latin word for mantle or robe, *palla*) requires some knowledge of classical mythology. Pallas Athena is a goddess of domestic arts and goddess of warfare; in rejecting one for the other, Camilla makes the ‘nobler’ choice. Athena, however, like her Roman counterpart Minerva, is also goddess of wisdom, and this is surely her ‘noblest’ attribute. Many things contribute to Camilla’s death on the field of battle, and lack of wisdom, Dryden seems to suggest, is one important cause of her demise.⁷⁷

Corse’s interpretation hangs on the word ‘noble’ and his association of wisdom being understood as a nobler attribute than skill in warfare or weaving and sowing. This may very well be true but it is rather difficult to prove. According to the *OED*, *palla* is the Latin for a ‘loose outer garment or wrap worn out of doors, usually by a woman; an outer robe, a mantle’ and it enters English from 1706 onwards.⁷⁸ The paronomasia itself overtly asserts that warfare, conducted outside and hence requiring a *palla*, is nobler than the pursuit of indoor activities such as weaving. The paronomasia also makes clear that war is a suitable occupation for women because a *palla* is a female specific garment.

⁷⁶ Fitzgerald, ed., *The Aeneid of Virgil: Translated by John Dryden*, notes to 7.1097, p. 245.

⁷⁷ Corse, *Dryden's Aeneid: The English Virgil*, p. 112.

⁷⁸ *OED palla*, n. 1. (1706-1985) Draft Revision March 2005.

Camilla chooses the noblest female garment, that of the outdoors, the public realm. Wisdom, and Pallas Athena's role as the Greek and Roman goddess of wisdom, remains unremarked throughout the entire description of Camilla which takes up lines 1094 to 1113 of Book 7. Much is made of Camilla's physical prowess (skill in battle, the speed at which she runs, her attractive yet unattainable beauty) but there is an ironic tinge to Dryden's description of Camilla as choosing the 'nobler Pallas' because in Book 11, Camilla meets her death.

What is intriguing about this pun is that it is a trilingual paronomasia. The Greek word is here anglicized but readers have to firstly pick up on the ancient Greek religious connotations of the word 'Pallas' in order to understand Dryden's point. Secondly, they have to make the connection forged through paronomasia with *palla* to see what Dryden is truly saying — that the public world is nobler than the private world. The garments of a life conducted outside the private realm of the home are nobler than the garments that adorn the life of a stay-at-home mum. This, of course, is one of the themes of the *Aeneid*, repeated throughout the course of the poem: Aeneas rejects the private affair with Dido for the public quest to found his own city; Aeneas leaves the women, the old and the infirm after the funeral games of Book 5. The paronomasia on 'Pallas-*palla*' is an excellent example of the way in which a rhetorical pun can bring together and highlight for a moment the central conflict of a larger work.

Corse makes brief mention of several other Latinate puns throughout the text, but Dryden's relationship with Milton is not so much advertised by the fact that he uses Latinate punning but that Dryden also brings polyptoton to the fore. Just as Milton, in his severe plain style began to make much greater use of polyptoton as a rhetorical punning technique, so Dryden, as he leaves behind the lower poetic echelon of satire for

the higher decorum of Virgilian epic, also begins to prefer polyptoton as a rhetorical technique. The major way in which Dryden demonstrates that polyptoton is a technique suitable to epic is that he uses it to embody one of the great themes of the poem. On a handful of occasions in the text, Dryden uses a polyptoton to clarify the links between a people and their place of origin, enforcing an almost nationalist perspective in Aeneas' world. The first polyptoton asserts the lineage and history of the Roman peoples.

Then **Romulus** his Grandsire's Throne shall gain,
Of Martial Tow'rs the Founder shall become,
The People **Romans** call, the City **Rome**.

(Bold mine. *VA* 1.375-77.)

Later formulations are less drawn out and only use two words not three. From the 'O Light of **Trojans**, and Support of **Troy**', (bold mine, *VA* 2.367) to 'Since on the safety of thy Life alone, | Depends **Latinus**, and the **Latian** Throne' (bold mine, *VA* 12.92-93) it continues to link people and places inextricably together. Virgil's nascent nationalism is well known⁷⁹ and Dryden, writing at a time when the English were trading and conquering their way to an empire, uses the rhetorical pun technique to highlight the way in which people collectively identify themselves as coming from, and having ownership of, a place through the names they give themselves and others. A recognized highlight of Virgil's poetry is his etymological play involving the names of people and places.⁸⁰ Dryden artfully combines the two interests of Virgil through his use of polyptoton. Polyptoton, of all the rhetorical punning tropes this thesis has examined, is the one that argues for the closest relationship between both the words and meanings

⁷⁹ See W. R. Johnson, 'Imaginary Romans: Vergil and the Illusion of National Identity', in *Poets and Critics Read Vergil*, ed. by Sarah Spence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); R. D. Williams and T. S. Pattie, *Virgil: His Poetry through the Ages* (London: The British Library, 1982); David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁸⁰ See James J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) and Michael Paschalis, *Virgil's Aeneid: Semantic Relations and Proper Names* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

involved in the pun. The theme of nationality is important in Dryden's *Aeneid* and nationality, that sense of belonging to a particular place and/or group of people, is enacted time and again throughout the *Aeneid* through instances of polyptoton. Polyptoton, by using one word in a different form, demonstrates etymology at its most basic level, for one word of the two needed to create a polyptoton is going to be prior to, and the foundation of, the other, thus 'Troy' is the foundation of 'Trojan' and 'Rome' is the foundation of 'Roman'.

At the conclusion of the previous chapter, I quoted Steven Zwicker at length. Let us revisit his contention again in the light of what we now know about Dryden.

For I want to suggest that *Paradise Regained* is a response to something other and more formidable than Thomas Ellwood's 'Thou has said much here of Paradise Lost, but what hast thou to say of Paradise Found?'; that Milton orchestrates not only a variety of sacred themes, rewriting the Book of Job and the Gospels, but that he also wished to engage, indeed to put into question, to controvert the formidable literary challenge posed by the new drama and the astonishing career of its foremost apologist, theorist, and practitioner, John Dryden. Milton shaped his brief epic, in part, as an answer to, and a repudiation of, the heroic drama: its rhyming couplets, its bombast and cant, its aristocratic code of virtue and honor, its spectacle and rhetoric, its scenes and stage machinery, its exotic lands and erotic intrigues, its warring heroes and virgin queens, its exaltation of passion and elevation of empire.⁸¹

What becomes apparent when we admit the preponderance of polyptoton in Dryden's *Aeneid* is that Milton's influence did continue to inform Dryden's career. The plain style of the last two books of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd* is echoed by Dryden in his masterly translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Where Milton sought to use polyptoton to exercise some control and restraint over the plurality and ambiguity of language, Dryden uses polyptoton to assert nationality. Polyptoton becomes the way through which

⁸¹ Zwicker, 'Milton, Dryden, and the Politics of Literary Controversy', pp. 271-72.

Dryden can assert Virgil's improvement on Homer — the binding of epic to the fortunes of a particular nationality. In some sense, it argues that if you cannot describe yourself as descending from your own city or place, you are incomplete. When Troy is taken from him, Aeneas must go found the Roman people. The nationalism and empire building themes of the *Aeneid* are in tempo with English attitudes during its early days of empire and Dryden's use of polyptoton to highlight those themes fits both the poem and the culture in which his translation was first published.

For all of the chest beating and drum banging that occurs in the *Aeneid*, Dryden finds moments when he can puncture Virgilian confidence in the longevity of the Roman empire. As a subdued warning, perhaps, to those who energetically pursue the dreams of empire, Dryden glances through occasional puns, at the end of the Roman empire. In Book 1, Dryden has Aeneas say 'we move | To *Latium*, and the Realms **foredoom'd** by *Jove*' (bold mine, *VA* 1.285-86). The *OED* states that the verb 'foredoom' means to 'doom beforehand: **a.** to condemn beforehand (*to* a destiny, or *to do* something); **b.** to foreordain, predestine (a thing)'.⁸² 'Doom', however, contains a much bleaker meaning than Aeneas intends: 'Final fate, destruction, ruin, death'.⁸³ Aeneas rallies his men and announces the plot of the poem to come, but Dryden, and his readers, are ironically aware that the Roman Empire is doomed to eventual destruction.⁸⁴ Again following in Milton footsteps, Dryden is the follower of an abandoned leader and lost cause (although, of course, Dryden's James II and Catholicism are far removed from Milton's Puritan Republic); and Dryden is writing from this position of one dispossessed with a sidelong glances for those of his time who appear to have triumphed and found their

⁸² *OED foredoom*, v. **1.a.** (1608-1878) and **1.b.** (1674-1844) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁸³ *OED doom*, n. **4.b.** (c1600-1874) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁸⁴ To be fair, one should note that Rome itself still stands. But, it has been conquered a number of times, and it is no longer the political centre for a quarter of the world's population.

appointed kingdoms here on earth — warning them that even Rome, the greatest of all classical western empires, fell. But, perhaps, in a movement away from Milton, Dryden does not repudiate all earthly glory, for Aeneas will found Rome.

Any discussion of puns and Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* is not complete without at least some discussion of perhaps the most famous pun included in the volume. It is not, however, one of the rhetorical pun techniques I have been discussing so far in this thesis and so the following is something of an addendum. This is because the most famous pun in Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* was not created by Dryden but by Tonson and it is not word-play but image-play. I am talking, of course, about Tonson's manipulation of Aeneas' nose so that he resembled the then King of England, King William III.⁸⁵ This was 'Tonson's idea of a compliment' according to Steven Zwicker.⁸⁶ The changing of the nose was intended to visually link Aeneas and King William III, and that the public would read the resulting image as such, was the Dryden's understanding at least. Dryden wrote to his sons to complain about Tonson's amendments to the artist's design and of his opposition to Tonson's sycophantic efforts.⁸⁷ There is every chance that the most famous pun in Dryden's *Aeneid* did not come from Dryden's pen but was produced at the behest of his publisher and was a visual pun.

⁸⁵ Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, p. 484.

⁸⁶ Steven Zwicker, *Politics and Language in Dryden's Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 190.

⁸⁷ John Barnard, 'Dryden, Tonson, and the Patrons of *the Works of Virgil*', in *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 179.

CONCLUSION

Dryden followed Milton in using polyptoton to help enact a major theme in a major work. Polyptoton is central to the presentation of nationalism in Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*. Alongside that similarity though, there is a difference, Dryden picks up on the euphemizing syllepses of Belial and deploys them more often than Milton. Euphemism, of course, allowed the politically and sexually unspeakable to be said in a time where overt freedom of speech could land one in very hot water indeed. Dryden's use of the syllepsis was not limited to its ability to allow euphemism into the text. It allowed him greater freedom of association than polyptoton but it does not stretch that freedom of association to the point that paronomasia does. Rhetorical punning as practised by Dryden does not drive the poetry but remains subservient to the logic of the poems. That is, Dryden does not allow his poems to be shaped by the logic of the pun. Instead, a pun serves to lash two concepts together for a short space of time before the poetry moves on to other concerns. Theoretically, the puns could be removed and the flow of thought throughout the poetry would not be unduly disturbed. This, of course, is the opposite of the Renaissance poetry examined earlier. If you remove the puns from those poems, the flow of thought is broken and the poem swiftly becomes meaningless, or at least utterly different.

The anti-pun debate is, perhaps, symptomatic of a larger arc that I am tracing. That arc is the move from an Ovidian conception of language through to a Virgilian view of language that finally morphs into a language that was self-consciously imitating Horace. This encompasses within it the move from a metamorphic view of language, which utilizes the logic of the pun to a more logical, decorous view of language that uses

the pun as an ornament or finishing touch. This change in language styles took place during a period in which the view of the literati was that the ‘greatest literary accomplishment of classical culture [...] was not so much tragedy as epic’⁸⁸ — or, as Sidney calls it, the heroic.

⁸⁸ William Frost, *John Dryden: Dramatist, Satirist, Translator* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), p. 9.

7 THE GUTTER AND THE STARS

‘But for Variegation, nothing is more useful than [...] THE PARANOMASIA, OR PUN, where a Word, like the tongue of a jackdaw, speaks twice as much by being split’.¹

Dryden’s inclination to prefer syllepsis above other forms of rhetorical punning, and the coexistence of that preference with an increase in euphemistic punning, is a thread we can follow through Dryden’s poetry and into Pope’s. As we shall see, it is a poetic preference that Pope deploys throughout his early and late poetry. That Pope saw Dryden as his great original is not a new idea, but Pope was not simply a slavish imitator of Dryden, he perfected the art of the couplet and this had ramifications for the logic of the pun. Further, where Ovid appears to be the dominant classical voice for the Renaissance poets, and Virgil becomes the classical register for the late Milton and Dryden, Pope’s classical idol was Horace, the same Horace through which Ben Jonson denigrated paronomasia in *The Poetaster*. This is the final movement of this thesis, from the Virgilian poetics of Dryden, to the Horatian poetics of Pope.

THE GIDDY CIRCLE OF EUPHEMISM

‘Triviality, moral anarchy, insignificance — these judgments are already implicit in the title of the poem, ‘the rape of the lock’, with its confusion of the practical joke of the snipping of Belinda’s lock with sexual violation’, states Laura Brown.² But, even more basic than that, the title *The Rape of the Lock*³ encodes through syllepsis the sexual

¹ Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.* (1797) <<http://books.google.com.au>> [Accessed 14/05/2010 p. 238.

² Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985), pp. 18-19.

³ All references to *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) are taken from Alexander Pope, *Poems in Facsimile* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988).

context in which the poem operates. The syllepsis is on the second word of the title, ‘rape’. The *OED* cites the title of Pope’s poem as evidence of the use of ‘rape’ meaning the ‘act of taking something by force; *esp.* the seizure of property by violent means; robbery, plundering. Also as a count noun: an instance of this, a robbery, a raid’.⁴ The sexualized denotation of ‘rape’ does not, however, have the title of Pope’s poem as evidence of its use:

Originally and chiefly: the act or crime, committed by a man, of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse with him against her will, *esp.* by means of threats or violence. In later use more generally: the act of forced, non-consenting, or illegal sexual intercourse with another person; sexual violation or assault.⁵

The meaning ‘forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse with him against her will [...] by means of threats or violence’ continuously and sinisterly doubles the prior meaning of ‘taking by force’. As we know, the Baron will take by force Belinda’s lock of hair. Ellen Pollack has noted that ‘Of all the works regarded by the modern critical establishment as classics of English poetry, Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* is perhaps the most liberal in its use of that synecdochic principle by which a part is made to stand for a whole’.⁶ Pollack then goes on to argue that the lock of hair is the part which, through synecdoche, stands for the whole of Belinda:

For if, as Pope portrays it, female chastity (i.e., sexuality) is something over which man has a rightful claim, then the lock must, by association, be understood at least transiently as the common property of Belinda and the Baron. Moreover, just as this part of her [the lock] — which is symbolically all of her — is really a part of him (and here the notion of the phallus is relevant), so in ‘wedlock’ (the term is never actually used in the poem and yet it seems to

⁴ *OED rape*, n³ 1. (c1350-a1973) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁵ *OED rape*, n³ 2.a. (c1425-2005) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁶ Ellen Pollack, ‘*The Rape of the Lock: A Reification of the Myth of Passive Womanhood*’, in *Pope*, ed. by Brean Hammond (London: Longman, 1996) p. 79.

function as a silent pun throughout) the good wife is the rightful possession of her husband and a natural extension of him.⁷

The Baron is not Belinda's husband, rather, he is the rapist and as such, he steals by force her lock and, via synecdoche, he violates her chastity. The lock of hair is the common property of the Baron and Belinda only because the Baron rapes her of it. Furthermore, the lock becomes the common property of the poet and Belinda and then the readers, the poet, and Belinda through the stellification passage.⁸ The synecdochic principle is as central to *The Rape of the Lock* as Pollack argues and, interestingly, it is activated in the title by the syllepsis on 'rape' meaning 'steal by force' and 'uninvited sexual violation of a woman'.

Furthermore, the title provides the poem with a context within which innuendo can flourish, as Robin Grove maintains:

the verse throbs on every side with contrary undermeanings: 'trembling', 'melting', 'soften'd' — the language of sentimental romance, climaxing [a knowing pun one imagines] in its favoured euphemism, 'die'.⁹

But Grove also realized that innuendo and euphemism have their dangers:

The Poet's problem was to keep the implications of his language active but at bay — and in this the knowingness of mock-heroic was a positive liability, edging couplets towards the very cynicism decorum would suppress.¹⁰

As we shall see in the following passage, the innuendo is heavily reliant upon Pope's use of euphemism.

Oft when the World imagine Women **stray**,

⁷ Pollack, 'The Rape of the Lock: A Reification of the Myth of Passive Womanhood', p. 79.

⁸ For a nuanced reading of the interaction between Pope, Virgil, Belinda's lock of hair, and ideas of poetic immortality (which ensures that the lock is the common property of readers), see M. E. Grenander, 'Pope, Virgil, and Belinda's Star-Spangled Lock', *Modern Language Studies*, 10 (1979-1980) pp. 26-31.

⁹ Robin Grove, 'Uniting Airy Substance: The Rape of the Lock 1712-1736', in *The Art of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Howard Erskine-Hill and Anne Smith (London: Vision, 1979) p. 68. See also Bonnie Latimer, 'Alchemies of Satire: A History of the Sylphs in the Rape of the Lock', *The Review of English Studies*, 57 (2006).

¹⁰ Grove, 'Uniting Airy Substance: The Rape of the Lock 1712-1736', p. 57.

The *Sylphs* thro' mystick Mazes guide their Way,
 Thro' all the **giddy Circle** they **pursue**,
 And old **Impertinence** expel by new.
 What tender Maid but must a Victim fall
 To one Man's **Treat**, but for another's **Ball**?
 When **Florio** speaks, what Virgin could withstand,
 If gentle **Damon** did not squeeze her Hand?
 With varying **Vanities**, from ev'ry Part,
They shift the moving Toyshop of **their** Heart;
 Where **Wigs** with **Wigs**, with **Sword-knots** **Sword-knots** strive,
Beaus banish **Beaus**, and **Coaches** **Coaches** drive.
 This erring Mortals Levity may call,
 Oh blind to Truth! the *Sylphs* contrive it all.

(Bold mine. *RL* I. 91-104.)

The *OED* uses the above passage to demonstrate that 'stray' means to 'wander from the path of rectitude, to err'.¹¹ In a more literal and less figurative sense, 'stray' could mean to 'escape from confinement or control, to wander away from a place, one's companions'¹² or to 'wander up and down free from control, to roam about'.¹³ Nowhere, at any point, does the *OED* point to a sexual or possible sexual denotation of 'stray'. However, because the sexual context has been established for 'stray' by the title of the poem, readers are able to interpret 'stray' as meaning that women can escape the control of men and when they do so they err and wander from the path of chaste rectitude onto the path of sexually free activity. The syllepsis is possible because the context of the poem allows a euphemistic reading of 'stray' that would not be possible when using only the *OED*.

The next instance of wordplay is a pair of syllepses on 'giddy circle'. Pope used the phrase in his translation of the *Iliad* at XVIII. 695 and the *OED* uses that line ('So

¹¹ *OED* **stray**, v.² 4. *fig. a.* (c1325 – 1902) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹² *OED* **stray**, v.² 1. (c1330-1888) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹³ *OED* **stray**, v.² 2. (c1398-1866) 2nd Edition 1989.

whirls a wheel, in a giddy circle toss'd') to exemplify the following meaning of 'giddy': 'Whirling or circling round with bewildering rapidity'.¹⁴ Alternatively, 'giddy' can denote:

Of persons, their attributes and actions: Mentally intoxicated, 'elated to thoughtlessness' (J.); incapable of or indisposed to serious thought or steady attention; easily carried away by excitement; 'light-headed, frivolous, flighty, inconstant'.¹⁵

Johnson reads 'giddy' as here meaning 'that which causes giddiness' and quotes *The Rape of the Lock* as proof in his dictionary.¹⁶ And 'giddiness' is defined by Johnson as 'Vertiginous; having in the head a whirl, or sensation of circular motion, such as happens by disease or drunkenness'.¹⁷ The *OED* first defines 'circle' as:

A perfectly round plane figure. In *Geom.* defined as a plane figure bounded by a single curved line, called the circumference, which is everywhere equally distant from a point within, called the centre. But often applied to the circumference alone, without the included space.¹⁸

But, an equally possible denotation is a 'number of persons united by acquaintance, common sentiments, interests, etc.; a 'set' or coterie; a class or division of society, consisting of persons who associate together'.¹⁹ Each of the denotations cited above are contained in the phrase 'giddy circle'.

'Pursue' is another syllepsis and, like 'stray' the *OED* does not provide any sexual denotation for the word. The most benign meaning that the *OED* offers for pursue is to 'go in chase or pursuit; to give chase'.²⁰ It is not hard to see how this meaning can be quickly subverted by the sexualized context of the poem and so offer a euphemized

¹⁴ *OED giddy*, a. 2.d. (1593-1890) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁵ *OED giddy*, a. 3.a. (a1547-1922) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁶ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*. 2 vols. Vol. 1 (London: W. Strahan, 1755) **giddy**, 4.

¹⁷ Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* **giddy**, 1.

¹⁸ *OED circle*, n. 1.1.a. (c1305-1884) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁹ *OED circle*, n. 21.a. (1646-1885) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁰ *OED pursue*, v. 1.2.b. (a1375-1991) Draft Revision June 2009.

reading of ‘court’, ‘woo’, or ‘seduce’. However, the previously cited denotation is a later development of an earlier meaning to which it is related. That meaning is: ‘Originally: to follow (a person, animal, or thing) with intent to overtake and capture, harm, or kill; to hunt. Later usu. more generally: to chase, go after’.²¹ The concept of ‘pursue’ is based in the language of the hunt and it brings that element to *The Rape of the Lock*. Where ‘stray’ brought in the language of religion and morals, ‘pursue’ references the language of the hunt and the reader is reminded that ‘courting’, ‘wooing’ and ‘seducing’ can swiftly devolve into ‘stalking’ and ‘hunting’. Finally, of course, a successful hunt generally ends in the death of the hunted and while *The Rape of the Lock* does not feature any real deaths, we are reminded by a vital syllepsis that the Baron ‘sought no more than on his Foe to die’ (*RL* v. 78.) which links the concepts of physical destruction and sexual fulfillment and therefore emphasizes ‘the self-destructive nature of the Baron’s project’.²²

The next syllepsis is a Latinate one in the tradition of Miltonic Latinisms. ‘Impertinence’, as it is used in the poem probably denotes the ‘fact or character of being unsuitable, out of place, improper, or irrational; action or conduct of this character; inappropriateness, incongruity; triviality, trifling, folly, absurdity’.²³ This keeps up the veneer of ‘Triviality’ that Pope establishes from the opening lines of the poem.²⁴ Once again, though, we have another meaning underneath the trivial surface for ‘Impertinence’ can also denote: ‘Interference with what lies beyond one’s province; unmannerly and offensive intrusion or taking of liberty; presumptuous or forward

²¹ *OED pursue*, v. **I.2.a.** (c1300-2004) Draft Revision June 2009.

²² Carolyn D. Williams, ‘Breaking Decorums: Belinda, Bays and Epic Effeminacy’, in *Pope: New Contexts*, ed. by David Fairer (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) p. 72.

²³ *OED impertinence*, n. **2.** (1629-1823) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁴ Brown, *Alexander Pope*, p. 18.

rudeness of behaviour or speech, esp. to a superior; insolence'.²⁵ The first recorded instance of this denotation occurs in an essay penned by Steele and published in *The Spectator*. The case for this interpretation being included here gets stronger when one realizes that the entire action on which the poem hinges, the rape of Belinda's hair, is an 'impertinence' as it is here defined. The lovers of Pope's mock-epic are not merely trivial, they are insistently unmannerly, offensive, and taking liberties. What those liberties are we can only guess at (although the sexualized context enables it to be educated guesswork) but they are being taken. 'Impertinence' is descended from 'impertinent' which has an etymological heritage that stretches through French back to the Latin *impertinēns*, which means 'not belonging'.²⁶ It has a strange effect on the reading of the piece probably most in tune with what Laura Brown has called 'the interconnected developments of capitalism and mercantile imperialism' in Pope's work.²⁷ The line reads 'And old Impertinence expel by new' and when we realize that old fashions literally do 'not belong' and are 'expelled by new fashions' the world of capitalism and commerce becomes another metaphor for that of sexual show, desire, and conquest.

In these four lines of poetry, Pope has used three syllepses which all draw into the poem competing and conflicting metaphors for the relationships that the poem both mocks and, to some extent, valorizes. The rapidity and density of the punning suggests that Pope is using the logic of the pun; but he has not and this is so because the puns are not mining the same seams of meaning. Rather, when one discourse is deployed (morals and religion through 'stray') it is not long before it is replaced with the language of dancing, social sets, frivolous actions and the unstable feeling in one's mind ('giddy

²⁵ *OED impertinence*, n. 3. (1712-1883) 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁶ *OED impertinent*, Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

²⁷ Brown, *Alexander Pope*, p. 3.

circle’); the threads of meaning then become the threads of hunting and courtship (‘pursue’), which are in turn supplanted by the seams of triviality, offense, liberty taking, and not belonging (‘Impertinence’). The puns of *The Rape of the Lock* are similar in nature to the glittering ornaments of Belinda’s world, surface glints and gleams that reveal a sinister underbelly which is only excavated in the Cave of Spleen; until then the puns remain like baubles or will-o-the-wisps that delight and entertain even as they demonstrate the potential to lead us to uglier truths. And throughout it all, reigning supreme, is the overall sexual context of the poem that infects words and turns them into euphemisms. ‘Stray’, ‘pursue’, ‘Impertinence’, all have a puerile element to them when heard with a teenager’s ear. Robin Grove argues that ‘innuendo was always present’²⁸ in the poem but Bonnie Latimer provides a deeper analysis when she argues that ‘neither satire nor innuendo exists in isolation; each requires a (virtual, conceived, or real) audience to get the joke’.²⁹ She is only half way there, for the satirist or innuendo-ist has to create a context that encourages the audience to read the satire or read the euphemisms that have been loaded with sexual baggage and in *The Rape of the Lock* that context is created by its title.

This context is partly responsible for the next two puns in the passage we are examining: ‘What tender Maid but must a Victim fall–To one Man’s **Treat**, but for another’s **Ball**?’ (bold mine, *RL* 1.95-96). Given the previously mentioned mercantile consumerist society that Pope is both mocking and representing, it is easy to read into ‘Treat’ as meaning: ‘An entertainment of any kind given gratuitously, esp. to children; a pleasure party or the like’.³⁰ Critics have already noticed the role played by Belinda’s

²⁸ Grove, ‘Uniting Airy Substance: *The Rape of the Lock* 1712-1736’, p. 57.

²⁹ Latimer, ‘Alchemies of Satire: A History of the Sylphs in *the Rape of the Lock*’, p. 696.

³⁰ *OED treat*, n.¹ **I.4.b.** (1683-1885) 2nd Edition 1989.

lapdog Shock³¹ and the use of the word ‘Treat’ here helps reinforce the patriarchal structures implicit in the poem: as Belinda ‘treats’ Shock, so the men offer ‘treats’ to women in order to win their affection. This meaning of ‘treat’ is derived from an earlier definition which meant an ‘entertainment of food and drink, esp. one given without expense to the recipient; a feast, refection, collation’.³² The older definition captures the preening and display rituals the men must go through, putting on engagements and providing all the fare in order to seduce and win a woman. It also resounds strongly with the next pun, ‘ball’, where the ‘treat’ not only includes food and drink but dancing, music and other entertainments. The *OED* is quite definite that ‘ball’ during Pope’s time meant, among other possible denotations, a ‘social gathering for dancing, esp. of people belonging to a common establishment, society, profession, etc., sometimes having an organized programme and special entertainment’.³³ It would be remiss of me to not point out that another denotation of ‘ball’ extant during Pope’s lifetime (as well as ours) is ‘A testicle’.³⁴ It is not unusual for puns in *The Rape of the Lock* to carry denotations that are both civil and crass,³⁵ and the *OED* does claim that this meaning of ‘ball’ is a slang denotation. Slang can be a verbal indication of a person’s affiliations, interests, social standing — in much the same way that choice of clothing can be used to identify with and separate one from different social groups. Bonnie Latimer has argued that Pope, when writing *The Rape of the Lock*, was writing for an audience that

was conceived as one of literary coffee-house wits: au courant, well-read young men of the world. In this context, *The Rape* can be read not as a carefully

³¹ See Laura Claridge, ‘Pope’s Rape of Excess’, in *Pope*, ed. by Brean Hammond (London: Longman, 1996).

³² *OED treat*, n.¹ I.4. (1651-1819) 2nd Edition 1989.

³³ *OED ball*, n.² 2.a. (?1605-2007) Draft Revision March 2009.

³⁴ *OED ball*, n.¹ IV.12.a. (?a1325-2007) Draft Revision June 2009.

³⁵ Another notable example that is much less decorous would be Belinda’s exclamation of ‘Oh hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize—Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these!’ (*RL* iv. 175-76.).

considered, vitriolic anti-female piece, but rather, as carelessly, elegantly contemptuous, gleefully caught up in its own cleverness.³⁶

And, according to Latimer, the slang or language this audience indulged in could be usefully compared to our notion of ‘Locker-room talk’.

‘Locker-room talk’ implies a closed group of people — especially men — commenting particularly on women, and specifically in a sexual sense. Outside the context of the locker-room, the commentators may treat the individual women they talk about with at least superficial respect, friendliness, or politeness; but inside that sequestered space, they are free to discuss them in ways that would be unacceptable in a face-to-face interaction. This does not necessarily mean that in the locker room they will say what they ‘really’ think. To a certain extent, the topics or tenor of the conversation may involve self-conscious (sexual) preening, intentional crudity, or gratuitous innuendo to impress peers. Yet this kind of consciously witty, cock auto-projection may be a fairly apt description of the satiric processes in *The Rape*.³⁷

‘Ball’, meaning ‘testicle’ is an example of intentional crudity that is consciously witty because the other meaning of ‘a social gathering for dancing’ fits the context of the poem so well that it almost hides the shock of realizing that Pope has directly denoted a part of the male genitals. In other words, the syllepsis on ‘ball’ does not require the context of the text to euphemize a sexual denotation into it. One wonders, given the definite denotation of ‘ball’, what innuendo or euphemism ‘treat’ is capable of carrying for not only does it occur in a poem dedicated to clothing all it can in sexual innuendo, it is also used in a line which breaks through innuendo, euphemism and connotation into sexual denotation.

‘Treat’ and ‘Ball’ demonstrate an essential difference between a euphemistic syllepsis and syllepsis supported by the linguistic treasury. The syllepsis supported by the linguistic treasury is much more specific in what it denotes; for example, ‘Ball’, to

³⁶ Latimer, ‘Alchemies of Satire: A History of the Sylphs in *the Rape of the Lock*’, p. 696.

³⁷ Latimer, ‘Alchemies of Satire: A History of the Sylphs in *the Rape of the Lock*’, p. 695.

cite Empson, is used ‘to join together so smartly a [sexual] and a [dancing] notion [...] with an air of having them in watertight compartments in your own mind’.³⁸ The euphemistic syllepsis on the other hand is much more likely to widen the possible interpretative landscape. ‘Treat’, for example, means ‘entertainment’, ‘food and drink’; and, given the context, the word could be read as conveying a sexual meaning as well, in which case it could be a ‘sexual entertainment’. Because *The Rape of the Lock* is full of euphemistic syllepses like ‘treat’, in some ways, it never manages to escape the schoolboy humour that Dryden uses in the opening lines of *Absalom and Achitophel*. *The Rape of the Lock* is a celebration of sniggering.

‘*Florio*’ and ‘*Damon*’ are the next two puns and instead of being yet more examples of syllepsis as every other pun from this passage has been, they are instances of paronomasia. It was Puttenham who gave paronomasia the English title of ‘Nicknamer’ and it is well earned on this occasion.³⁹ ‘*Florio*’ shares the same Latinate root as ‘florid’: *floridus*, flowery, blossoming.⁴⁰ Metaphorically this Latinism has been applied to speech and the English ‘florid’ has come to denote ‘Abounding in ornaments or flowers of rhetoric; full of fine words and phrases, flowery’.⁴¹ Rhetoric, as has been well documented, is the art of moving people through words, and *Florio* would not be the first to attempt to woo a woman through the power of speech. Indeed the type of person that *Florio* represents in the poem, the stereotype that he encapsulates in one line, is exactly the type of suitor who will attempt seduction through florid rhetoric. *Florio* is another in the long line of love poets but unlike Sidney’s *Astrophil*, his existence is

³⁸ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 108.

³⁹ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 203.

⁴⁰ *OED florid* a. etymology, 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴¹ *OED florid*, a. 2.a. (1656-1878) 2nd Edition 1989.

confined to half a couplet and the tradition of courtly poets finds its apotheosis in his caricature.

‘*Damon*’ is required by the line it occurs in to have two syllables.

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /

If gentle *Damon* did not squeeze her hand?

‘*Damon*’ is close in spelling and pronunciation to ‘*dæmon*’. A ‘*dæmon*’ is, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition and still extant today, an ‘evil spirit; a malignant being of superhuman nature; a devil’.⁴² The sylphs necessarily mediate such a reading as they fulfill the ‘machinery’ of the poem, but given that this is a paronomasia, and a nickname, one wonders if Pope is making subtle value judgment here. Those seducers who rely on the art of rhetoric are upstaged by their rivals comfortable with seduction based on physical contact but the rhetorical wooers maintain a moral edge over the physical Lotharios who are ‘*dæmons*’. On the larger scale, the Baron is one of these physical Lotharios and he literally has a ‘malignant, cruel, terrible, or destructive nature’.⁴³ He rapes Belinda and while his rape is not a sexual act, it is physically the taking by force of a visible and tangible indication of Belinda’s being and sexuality, her hair. Given *The Rape of the Lock*’s continual mixing of the ‘epic’ and the ‘trivial’, the Baron becomes a malignant force in the poem prefigured by *Damon* the demon who upstages the rhetorician through physical action. In the paronomasias on both ‘*Florio*’ and ‘*Damon*’ we have at work a technique that Pope was to refine throughout his life: the caricature.

The two sketches of the competing lovers lead into a deliberately ambiguous couplet which celebrates the mingling of male and female while cynically undercutting the process through which they mingle: ‘With varying **Vanities**, from ev’ry **Part**,—**They**

⁴² *OED demon*¹ **2.b.** (1398-1865) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴³ *OED demon, n.*¹ **2.c.** (1614-1829) 2nd Edition 1989.

shift the **moving** Toyshop of **their** Heart'. (Bold mine. *RL* 1.99-100.) 'Vanities' here bears the surface meaning of a 'vain, idle or worthless thing; a thing or action of no value'.⁴⁴ This denotation of vanity extends into the phrase 'moving Toyshop of their Heart' with which the couplet concludes, furthering the mercantile edge to the poem. In this reading of 'Vanities', 'Part' stands for 'part of the world'. There are alternative readings, however, produced by two alternative denotations of 'Vanities' which means that 'Vanities' is a syllepsis. 'Vanity' can also denote 'Vain and unprofitable conduct or employment of time'.⁴⁵ On one hand, Pope would seem to be implying that all this seduction and wooing is both self-serving and unproductive for all concerned, male or female. That would be a literal reading invoked by the syllepsis but we know that while such wooing and seduction may be based on the personal vanity of the wooer and wooed, it is seldom 'unprofitable'. In any time consummated relationships could often be thought of in terms of 'profit': whether that be social profit (moving up the social ladder through marriage); financial profit by marrying someone wealthier than oneself; pleasurable profit through the sexual act; or the profit of a lover receiving small gifts ('Vanities') to being a 'kept' partner. Another denotation applicable in this couplet is that 'Vanities' means the 'quality of being vain or worthless; the futility or worthlessness of something'.⁴⁶ This reading depends on a much more ambiguous sense of 'Part' whereby 'part' belongs not to 'part of the world' but opens up to become 'part' as in 'a role'⁴⁷ that the lovers play but also 'part of the body' or 'part of the dress, attire or accoutrements' (as is confirmed in the following couplet about wigs, swordknots, and

⁴⁴ *OED* **vanity**, 4.a. (a1300-1848) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁵ *OED* **vanity**, 1.b. (1303-1751) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁶ *OED* **vanity**, 2.a. (c1325-1864) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁴⁷ *OED* **part**, n.¹ **II.12.b.** (1488-2000) Draft Revision June 2009.

coaches). So, by reading ‘Vanities’ as a syllepsis, one thread of meaning opened up by the syllepsis creates a syllepsis on ‘Part’.

The syllepsis on ‘Part’, although activated somewhat by ‘Vanities’, has an existence separate from the threads created by ‘Vanities’. ‘Part’ can also mean a ‘division or section of a book, play, poem’;⁴⁸ and with this denotation, Pope involves his text in the vain frivolity that his poem celebrates. While the poem at all times refuses to allow the frivolous or the serious to separate out into identifiable wholes, it began as an effort to heal the rift between the people involved in the real life incident on which it is based. That is, Pope’s vanity, *The Rape of the Lock*, was designed to enter into the ‘Toyshop’ of Arabella Fermor’s heart, every part of it. Of course, by the time we arrive at the edition now being examined, published first in 1714, Pope has moved far beyond the original two canto version of the poem published in 1712. If anything, by adding more parts (cantos) to his poem, Pope is increasing his own indulgence in his vanities. There is a self-aware nature to Pope’s poem in which the poet knows that he is both apart from and also a part of the social scenes that he is describing: both commentator and participant, both playwright and player. To some extent this is make-believe on Pope’s part given his physical circumstances, but nonetheless, he remains on the borders of the world he is describing, inhabiting the grey zone, the littoral space in which he can both engage with society and comment upon it. It is puns like this one on ‘part’ that betray the uncanny relationship between literature, life, and the artist that Pope knew he occupied.

The ‘they–their’ polyptoton heightens the swirling ambiguity of all the lines to the point at which we cannot definitively separate the male from the female protagonists

⁴⁸ *OED part*, n.¹ I.6.a. (1424-2002) Draft Revision June 2009.

of the interactions Pope is describing. The use of ‘their’ would seem to be applicable to the females being described — ‘the moving Toyshop of their Heart; | Where Wigs with Wigs, with Sword-knots Sword-knots strive, | Beaus banish Beaus, and Coaches Coaches drive’. The female heart becomes the battleground on and in which the men will ‘strive’ for female affection.⁴⁹ ‘They shift’ begins the line which finishes with ‘the moving Toyshop of their Heart’, so we could reasonably expect ‘They’ to be the same people of whom the later collective possessive pronoun (‘their’) is used. But, ‘They shift’ follows the first line of the couplet ‘With varying Vanities, from ev’ry Part’, and could conceivably belong to those people who provide the females with objects from all corners of the globe — that is, the suitors. Therefore, the ‘They’ becomes ambiguous and it belongs, appropriately to both the men and women who fill the ‘giddy Circle’ and also the Sylphs who ‘contrive it all’.

Finally, in between the polyptoton on ‘they–their’, is a syllepsis on ‘moving’. The *OED* states that ‘moving’ can mean ‘Unstable, changeable, fickle’.⁵⁰ The final quote given in support of this definition is the line currently being analysed. There is no doubt that Pope is suggesting that women have fickle hearts throughout *The Rape of the Lock*, but, equally, so are the men. The polyptoton which creates the confusion of gender thereby enables the denotations of ‘moving’ to apply to both men and women, and the second meaning of ‘moving’ which applies in this context is ‘Producing strong emotion’.⁵¹ Part of the irony of *The Rape of the Lock* is bound up in the way something supposedly small and inconsequential, a lock of hair being cut off, produced the strong emotions which led to Pope writing the poem in the first place. Those emotions Pope centres in the ‘moving Toyshop of their Heart’. While the emotions might seem trivial to

⁴⁹ Brown, *Alexander Pope*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ *OED moving*, *adj.* 3. (c1425-1714) Draft Revision Sept. 2009.

⁵¹ *OED moving*, *adj.* 4. (1594-1991) Draft Revision Sept. 2009.

us, as toys displayed in a toyshop, the emotions are important and visceral for both the poem's leading lady and the Baron. Finally, 'moving' can denote 'Causing or producing an action or effect'.⁵² The emotions felt by the players in Pope's drama might be fickle and subject to our ironic laughter, but they do help prompt the Baron and Bella to their respective actions. In that sense, both are literally 'moved' to do what they do — the Baron to cut Bella's hair, Bella to begin fighting the Baron.

This leads into the couplet 'Where Wigs with Wigs, with Sword-knots, Sword-knots strive, | Beaus banish Beaus, and Coaches Coaches drive'. Pollack views the couplet as yet again demonstrating the use of synecdoche which characterizes the poem.

Pope's *Rape of the Lock* criticizes the sterility and social vanity of a world in which appearances have actually become substitutes for things themselves, where virtue has been reduced to reputation and men themselves to swordknots.⁵³

Before Pollack, Brown noted that 'when Ariel describes the epic battles within the 'moving Toyshop' of the female heart, he dismembers the combatant heroes, representing them through their accoutrements'.⁵⁴ In other words, Ariel is substituting a part for the whole and using synecdoche to represent the warring males. Synecdoche is central to the effect of the couplet (and beyond it for the entire poem as well) but a more useful assertion was made by Laura Claridge:

Even the wordplay of the famous zeugma suggests a world out of control just as it is extremely overcontrolled — that is, the exaggerated linguistic tightness points to a defence against its opposite.⁵⁵

Claridge suggests that 'strive' (which governs both 'wigs' and 'sword-knots' and is therefore a zeugma) is an instance of wordplay. While this thesis has argued that zeugma

⁵² *OED moving, adj. 2.b.* (c1443-1993) Draft Revision Sept. 2009.

⁵³ Pollack, 'The Rape of the Lock: A Reification of the Myth of Passive Womanhood', p. 64.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Alexander Pope*, p. 29.

⁵⁵ Claridge, 'Pope's Rape of Excess', p. 94.

does not constitute a pun, it is worth investigating here because the conclusion that Claridge arrives at is an important one for an understanding of Pope's use of rhetorical pun devices.

As used by Pope in this couplet, 'strive' has the literal meaning of 'contend in rivalry; to seek to surpass another or each other; to compete in a trial of strength or skill'.⁵⁶ The *OED* notes that this meaning is obsolete but the last to use it, according to the *OED*, was Pope in his 1725 version of Homer's *Odyssey*. But, it could also mean to 'contend in arms, fight *with*'.⁵⁷ The *OED* cites an example from 1706 as the last example of this denotation, and 1706 is not that far removed from when the poem was first published in 1712 and remade for the 1714 publication. However, given that 'sword-knot' meant 'a ribbon or tassel tied to the hilt of a sword (originating from the thong or lace with which the hilt was fastened to the wrist, but later used chiefly as a mere ornament or badge)',⁵⁸ it is reasonable that 'strive' does summon to the mind armed conflict and is in fact a subtle syllepsis. While the primary meaning of the line is that suitors compete against each other through their head ornaments and sword ornaments, the language of epic violence is never too far away and is contained in this line in the word 'strive'. The 'arms' that would normally be used, spears, swords, shields, arrows, are here replaced by other, civilized arms, wigs and sword-knots. There is a mock-epic nobility, which may be preferable to an epic sensibility, in letting one's sword-knot decide the matter rather than one's sword.

The linguistic complexity of the couplet does not stop with 'strive' operating as both a syllepsis and a zeugma. Then, as now, 'wig' denotes

⁵⁶ *OED strive*, v. 6. (c1450-1725) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵⁷ *OED strive*, v. 4. (1338-1706) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁵⁸ *OED sword*, n. 6.d. (1694-1881) 2nd Edition 1989.

An artificial covering of hair for the head, worn to conceal baldness or to cover the inadequacy of the natural hair, as a part of professional, ceremonial, or formerly of fashionable, costume (as still by judges and barristers, formerly also by bishops and other clergymen), or as a disguise (as by actors on the stage).⁵⁹

Though politics seems to rarely enter the poem (rarely as overtly as it does through the zeugma on ‘take’ linking ‘tea’ and ‘counsel’⁶⁰) paronomasia here does allow a political slant to be taken on the initial part of the couplet. ‘Wigs’ is a homophone of ‘whigs’ and ‘whig’, politically speaking in England, became prominent during Dryden’s lifetime when it came to be ‘Applied to the Exclusioners (*c* 1679) who opposed the succession of James, Duke of York, to the crown, on the ground of his being a Roman Catholic’.⁶¹ This later transmuted into ‘from 1689, an adherent of one of the two great parliamentary and political parties in England, and (at length) in Great Britain’.⁶² Is it possible to read a paronomasia on ‘wigs–whigs’ in this line? We should be reluctant to do so. Pope was Catholic, and the heroine of his poem was based on a fellow Catholic, Arabella Fermor. The Whig party was not in control when *The Rape of the Lock* was written but they did gain the ascendancy later under Sir Robert Walpole — a favourite target of the older Pope.⁶³ The paronomasia cannot be entirely discounted, but it exists as a submerged glimmering of meaning, not as an active rhetorical pun. It is here that what Claridge called the ‘linguistic tightness’ is fully demonstrated, the language is tight because ‘wig’

⁵⁹ *OED wig, n.*³ **1.a.** (1675-1879) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁰ ‘Here Thou, Great *Anna!* whom three realms obey,—Dost sometimes Counsel take — and sometimes *Tea!*’ (*RL* iii.7-8.)

⁶¹ *OED whig, n.*² and *a. A.3.a.* (1679-1905) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶² *OED whig, n.*² and *a. A.4.* (1702-1911) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶³ As one commentator notes, the First Minister rated a reference in Pope’s *Dunciad*. See Michael Seidel, ‘Satire, Lampoon, Libel, Slander’, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650-1740.*, ed. by Stephen N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 51. Of more interest is that one of Pope’s contemporaries, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, thought fit to attack Pope because of his opposition to Walpole. See Donna Landry, ‘Alexander Pope, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the Literature of Social Comment’, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650-1740*, ed. by Stephen N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 321. For a more nuanced exploration of Pope’s opposition to Walpole, see Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-42.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), esp. pp. 68-95.

is kept to ‘wig’ and ‘whig’ is suppressed by the context of the poet’s biography. It is a possible, but not an economical, reading.

This lexical tightness slips, though, as we move to the next synecdoche, ‘Sword-knots’ which are not only the decorative attachment to a gentleman’s weapon but a description of the milling masses of suitors. There is a knot of swords, which means there must be a knot of suitors, all tied up together as they compete for attention. The word ‘Sword-knot’ as repeated by Pope moves from the literal realm to the figurative realm and it is uncertain where this move takes place. We cannot be sure that ‘with Sword-knots Sword-knots strive’ is an example of antanaclasis as the word moves either literal to metaphorical or the reverse. Instead, the repetition creates the sense that both uses of the word can be literal and figurative at the same time. Each use of ‘Sword-knots’ then is an instance of syllepsis as the literal denotation dominates but the secondary metaphoric meaning dances close to the surface.

‘Beau’ is a syllepsis meaning both a ‘man who gives particular, or excessive, attention to dress, mien, and social etiquette; an exquisite, a fop, a dandy’⁶⁴ and the ‘attendant or suitor of a lady; a lover, sweetheart’.⁶⁵ The latter denotation is first cited by the *OED* from 1720. However, given the fact that this entire passage has been about how men are suitors for the women’s attention and affection, it is reasonable to read ‘suitor’ or ‘lover’ when we read ‘Beau’. Therefore, ‘Beau’ constitutes a syllepsis which continues both the ‘seduction’ thread of meaning and the ‘foppery’ thread. Finally, it is also a paronomasia on ‘bow’. While we should not discount the lurking epic denotation of a ‘weapon for shooting arrows or similar missiles’,⁶⁶ the stronger denotation of ‘bow’ that could apply in this instance is a ‘double-looped ornamental knot into which ribbons,

⁶⁴ *OED beau, a. and n. B.1.* (1687-1824) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁵ *OED beau, a. and n. B.2.* (?1720-1875) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁶ *OED bow, n.¹ II.4.a.* (a1000-1877) 2nd Edition 1989.

etc., are tied (the usual sense)'.⁶⁷ The paronomasia reinforces the emphasis that Brown and Pollack placed on synecdoche — the beaus are represented through bows of ribbon. This also follows the knot of sword-knots. The ribbons on their swords and elsewhere on their persons are drawn into a relationship with their status as foppish followers of fashion and lovers or women. The normally tenuous link provided by paronomasia is here strengthened by Pope's heavy reliance on synecdoche. It is the latest 'bow' which will banish the 'beau' not fully conversant with the dictates of fashion.

Which leaves us with the most confusing of the four groupings: 'Coaches Coaches drive'. 'Coach' can be either a noun or a verb but the overriding image that the phrase summons is of a 'large kind of carriage: in 16th and 17th centuries, usually a state carriage of royalty or people of quality'⁶⁸ moving one by one through the area, the next coach chasing the prior one out of the virgin's heart. Alternatively, a coach is stacked on top of another coach and is literally 'driving' it. Where Claridge sees a world out of control due to an excess of linguistic tautness, in fact the world is out of control due to the ornaments of rhetoric introducing 'giddy circles' of meaning just as the accoutrements of the would be lovers result in the absurd image of one coach driving another.

Above all, though, it is the sexualized context that creates a seam of euphemism through the poem. Throughout the passage, five instances of syllepsis have additional meanings added to extant denotations through euphemism. That use of euphemism was reliant upon the context of the poem which is fed from two sources: 1) the title which through syllepsis allows a sexual reading of usually non-sexual words to occur; and 2) the events upon which the poem is based. Part of Pope's challenge is to control the

⁶⁷ *OED bow*, n.¹ **II.16.b.** (1547-1896) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁶⁸ *OED coach*, n. **1.a.** (1556-1841-4) 2nd Edition 1989.

ability of language to succumb to the euphemizing tendencies of the reader. Once the invitation to look for smut is provided, the reader can potentially take over the poem and force a reading on to it through euphemism. The main thrust of the euphemizing in *The Rape of the Lock* is sexual in nature. It is interesting to note that polyptoton is only used once here compared to five euphemistic syllepses, five syllepses, and three paronomasias. Where Milton and Dryden made much use of polyptoton, Pope relies rather on euphemistic syllepsis, which limits the possibility of using the logic of the pun, and instead elevates context into becoming the primary creator of meaning.

THE DUNCIAD IN FOUR BOOKS

The second Book of the *Dunciad*⁶⁹ has not received the high praise that other Books, particularly Book 4, have attracted.⁷⁰ But, it demonstrates a basic conflict within Pope's mock-epic writing — that it at once occupies both the gutter and the epic. While most critics have focused upon the universal Dulness of the fourth Book, the greatest disparity of the gutter and the language of epic is achieved in the Book 2. Pope achieves such a radical and comprehensive combining of the two arenas, the ditch and the stars, through

⁶⁹ There are essentially four versions of *The Dunciad*. I follow Valerie Rumbold who believes that *The Dunciad in Four Books* is 'the fullest and arguably the most interesting of the versions'. (Valerie Rumbold, 'Introduction', in *The Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. by Valerie Rumbold (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 1999), p. 1.) Douglas Brooks-Davies asserts that all editions of *The Dunciad* are 'a continuing testament to Pope's concerns and beliefs, at once intensely serious and deeply comic'. (Douglas Brooks-Davies, *Pope's Dunciad and the Queen of Night: A Study in Emotional Jacobitism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 1.) The final version that Pope published was in 1743 and he died in 1744. *The Dunciad in Four Books* represents not only the final great work of his career but can be used to compare Pope's use of puns at the end of his career compared to thirty years earlier towards the beginning of his literary career when he wrote his other great mock-epic, *The Rape of the Lock* in five cantos (1714).

⁷⁰ Book IV normally receives the most praise: for examples, see: Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered*, p. 191; Brean S. Hammond, *Pope* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986), p. 144; Leavis, *Revaluation*, pp. 88-89. Book II has had its defenders, notably Reuben Arthur Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 333; and, Richard Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper: An English Genre and Discourse* (Hants: Ashgate, 2005), p. 137.

euphemism. As we shall see, the euphemism of *The Dunciad* is not created by the title of the poem, as was the case for the sexualized euphemism of *The Rape of the Lock*.

Excremental Theology

During the early action of Book 2, there is a running race between rival booksellers, Lintot and Curll. At one point, Curll falls over in the puddle his lover Corinna has left on the ground where she emptied out her chamber pot in the morning. Upon falling into the puddle and losing the lead in the race, Curll prays to Jupiter for aid to regain the lead and thus the victory.

A place there is, betwixt earth, air, and seas,
Where, from Ambrosia, Jove retires for **ease**.
There in his seat two spacious vents appear,
On this he **sits**, to that he leans his ear,
And hears the various vows of fond mankind;
Some beg an eastern, some a western **wind**:
All vain **petitions**, mounting to the sky,
With **reams** abundant this **abode** supply;
Amus'd he reads, and then returns the **bills**
Sign'd with that **Ichor** which from Gods **distils**.

(Bold mine. *DFB* 2.83-92.)

Paul Baines has described this passage as one which contains 'high euphemism'.⁷¹ Here Pope comes close to breaking the surface decorum through puns in the first passage but by the time the close of the second passage has arrived, Pope has moved through euphemism to merely finding synonyms for 'shit', the hidden pun which rules this passage if not all of Book 2. In line 86, we are told that 'On this [vent] he sits' and 'sits' is only one letter away from being 'shits'; the two are homophones due to the similarity of the 's' and 'sh' sounds. Pope is telling us, through paronomasia, that through this vent

⁷¹ Paul Baines, *The Complete Critical Guide to Alexander Pope* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 136.

Jupiter defecates, but, in all reality, we know this already because ‘ease’ in line 64 can denote ‘to relieve the bowels’.⁷² Pope has found a syllepsis that includes the denotation ‘defecates’ and then uses a paronomasia to start hiding the pungent reality of what he is describing. In the next syllepsis, ‘wind’, the surface meaning of the line (‘Some beg an eastern, some a western wind’) is that people are asking Jupiter for a favourable ‘current of air’.⁷³ Due to the context that ‘wind’ occurs in, it includes the meaning “‘Air’ or gas in the stomach or intestines (or, according to early notions, in other parts of the body); flatus’.⁷⁴ Through syllepsis, it would appear that Jove’s petitioners are asking him to fart them to their destination.

Next is a syllepsis on ‘petition’. The *OED* states that the first meaning of ‘petition’ — here also the surface meaning — is a ‘solemn and humble prayer to God; an entreaty, esp. to a sovereign or superior’.⁷⁵ Alongside this denotation exists the following:

More generally: a formal written request or supplication, (now) *esp.* one signed by many people, appealing to an individual or group in authority (as a sovereign, legislature, administrative body, etc.) for some favour, right, or mercy, or in respect of a particular cause.⁷⁶

It is this idea of a prayer being written down and presented to Jove which allows Pope to make the joke, four lines later, that Jove uses petitions as toilet reading and then toilet paper. This joke is continued through the use of the words ‘ream’ (a ‘large quantity of paper, without reference to the precise number of sheets’⁷⁷) and ‘bills’ (a ‘formal

⁷² *OED ease*, v. 1.c. (c1440-1926) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷³ *OED wind*, n¹. I.1.a. (c897-1893) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁴ *OED wind*, n¹. II.10.a. (c1000-1897) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁵ *OED petition*, n. 1.a. (?a1400-2001) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁷⁶ *OED petition*, n. 2.b. (c1437-1993) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁷⁷ *OED ream*, n.³ 1.b. (1565-1989) Draft Revision June 2009.

document containing a petition to a person in authority; a written petition'⁷⁸). It almost constitutes use of the logic of the pun since both 'ream' and 'bills' still, to some extent, denote 'prayers'. However, if so, it is the smallest example of the logic of the pun that this thesis has uncovered thus far. Also, it should be noted, 'petition' does create the possibility of 'ream' and 'bill' to carry the denotation 'prayer' but they do so through euphemism as the linguistic treasury of the time did not include 'prayer' as a possible denotation for either 'ream' or 'bill'.

Between 'ream' and 'bill', is another instance of euphemism — separate to the that created by 'petition' — when Pope describes the toilet as 'this abode'. 'Habitual residence, dwelling' is the relevant denotation offered by the *OED* and it lends itself to the overall joke of Book 2 — even the Gods of Aeneas tend to spend most of their time on the toilet combining, like Leopold Bloom, the act of reading and defecating and then bringing the two together when the anus is wiped with the paper just read. Jupiter's 'habitual residence' is the 'abode'. Nowhere does the *OED* link the word 'abode' with 'toilet' but Pope's poem, through the context established by 'ease', 'sits' and 'wind' clearly does link the words by association.

However, the highest euphemism completes the joke and finishes the verse paragraph, and it relies on the reader understanding 'Ichor which from Gods distils' as 'divine excrement' which has been made to 'pass or flow gently'.⁷⁹ (Although we might be remiss not to include a possible Latinate pun here on the root word: '*distillāre*, more correctly *dēstillāre* to drip or trickle down, drop, distil'.⁸⁰) The *OED* defines 'ichor' as, when read in the context of Greek or Roman mythology, the 'ethereal fluid supposed to

⁷⁸ *OED bill*, n.³ 2.a. (1377-1728 [passage under discussion cited as the 1728 example]) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁷⁹ *OED distil, distill*, v. 1.b. (1609-a1853) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁸⁰ *OED distil, distill*, v. Etymology. 2nd Edition 1989.

flow like blood in the veins of the gods'.⁸¹ This denotation (and the *OED* has supplied this passage from the *Dunciad* to support it) sits uncomfortably with the previous uses of 'ease', 'sits', 'wind' and 'abode' because it creates the possible reading that the blood of the gods (Ichor) has become or is excrement. The logical conclusion of this is that the pagan Gods are, to borrow a colloquial crudity, 'full of shit'. The human experience of defecation is so common to our experience of life that when we read 'Sign'd with that Ichor which from Gods distils' we are not taken in by the surface decorum. The context of the line created by the euphemisms, paronomasia and syllepsis lead us to read the line as denoting Jupiter 'wiping his shit on the prayers'. Brean Hammond noted that there is 'an inverse power of Ovidian metamorphosis at work, whereby literary production is continually turning into dirt and mess'.⁸² Critics often talk of Pope's mixture of high and low culture in the *Dunciad* which reaches an apotheosis here in the depiction of Jupiter crapping on the prayers of the faithful, but J. Philip Brockbank summed it up best when he wrote that 'the scatology of *The Dunciad* aspires to eschatology'.⁸³

While Pope may not have been in a position to scatologize any of the various Christian eschatologies of his day, he was free to do what he willed with the pagan Gods of Virgil, Ovid and Horace. Catherine Ingrassia hints as much when she states that 'Pope straddled the world of the elite and the popular, claiming the former as the rightful domain of the Virgilian model of his career, yet simultaneously exploiting the energy and opportunity of the latter'.⁸⁴ As Thomas Woodman argues, 'satire can be amazingly

⁸¹ *OED ichor* 1. (1676-1855) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁸² Hammond, *Pope*, p. 124. Both dirt and mess, as Hammond is no doubt aware, can denote 'excrement' (*OED dirt*, n. 1. (a1300-1830) 2nd Edition; *OED mess*, n. 1 3.e. (1903-1986) Draft Revision June 2009).

⁸³ J. Philip Brockbank, 'The Book of Genesis and the Genesis of Books: The Creation of Pope's *Dunciad*', in *The Art of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Howard Erskine-Hill and Anne Smith (London: Vision, 1979) p. 200. The sharper eyed of you will no doubt have spotted my riff on this for the section title.

⁸⁴ Catherine Ingrassia, 'Dissecting the Authorial Body: Pope, Curll, and the Portrait of A "Hack Writer"', in *More Solid Learning": New Perspectives on Alexander Pope's Dunciad*, ed. by Claudia N. Thomas (London: Associated University Press, 2000), p. 165.

protean in mode, tone, and style, including all those elements of the sordid and disgusting that have already been referred to, and yet also appropriate for high style, the tragic and epic elevation'.⁸⁵ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White view the high-low, here epitomized by Jupiter on the toilet, as much more of an exploration and experimentation with transgression of social norms by Pope.

Any transgression of the high-low domains creates a grotesque hybrid right at the social threshold, a neither–nor creature, neither up nor down, which repels and fascinates Pope and which guards, like the hydra, the pathways and meeting-places between high and low. And the effect is not merely that predictably anti-democratic polemic we should expect from Pope. It is of graver consequence, a closure of identity which in attempting to block out somatic and social heterodoxy is fated to rediscover it everywhere as Chaos, Darkness, and 'Mess'. The classical body splits precisely along the rigid edge which is its defence against heterogeneity: its closure and purity are quite illusory and it will perpetually rediscover in itself, often with a sense of shock or inner revulsion, the grotesque, the protean and the motley, the 'neither–nor', the double negation of high and low which was the very precondition for its social identity.⁸⁶

This transgression becomes deeper, involving the pagan Gods not just in defecation but mixing sexual and defecatory pleasure, in the verse paragraph which follows that of Jove on the toilet.

In office here fair **Cloacina** stands,
 And **ministers** to Jove with purest hands.
 Forth from the heap she pick'd her Vot'ry's pray'r,
 And plac'd it next him, a distinction rare!
 Oft had the Goddess heard her servant's call,
 From her **black grottos** near the Temple-wall,
 List'ning delighted to the jest unclean
 Of link-boys vile, and watermen obscene;

⁸⁵ Thomas Woodman, 'Pope and the Paradoxical Centrality of the Satirist', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 38 (2005), p. 11.

⁸⁶ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 113.

Where as he **fish'd** her **nether realms** for Wit,
 She oft had **favour'd** him, and **favours** yet.
 Renewed by **ordure's** sympathetic force,
 As oil'd with magic juices for the course,
 Vig'rous he rises; from th' **effluvia** strong
 Imbibes new life, and sours and stinks along;
 Re-passes Lintot, vindicates the race,
 Nor heeds the **brown dishonours** of his face.

(Bold mine. *DFB* 2.93-108)

Dustin Griffin views this passage as evidence of Pope enjoying his 'rich linguistic play with ordure and its magical sympathetic force'.⁸⁷ In more recent times, the passage has been used to help expound metaphors and ideas of prostitution in relation to the publishing industry as it existed in Pope's time.⁸⁸ The passage begins by moving from Jupiter to the goddess of the sewers,⁸⁹ Cloacina, who 'ministers' to Jupiter. 'Cloacina' is a name created from the word 'cloaca' which meant 'underground conduit for drainage, a common sewer'.⁹⁰ This continues the idea from the previous verse paragraph that Jupiter is in the toilet and beneath the toilet is the heavenly sewer. 'Ministers' is defined by the *OED* as being to 'serve, perform the function of a servant; to attend to the comfort or needs of another; to assist, be of use'.⁹¹ Part of Cloacina's role is to provide

⁸⁷ Dustin H. Griffin, *Alexander Pope: The Poet in the Poems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 232.

⁸⁸ Eric Chandler, 'Pope's "Girl of the Game": The Prostitution of the Author and the Business of Culture', in *More Solid Learning": New Perspectives on Alexander Pope's Dunciad*, ed. by Claudia N. Thomas Catherine Ingrassia (London: United University Press, 2000), p. 113.

⁸⁹ Chandler, 'Pope's "Girl of the Game": The Prostitution of the Author and the Business of Culture', p. 113. Also, we should not forget that a common meaning of 'sewer' during this time was 'An attendant at a meal who superintended the arrangement of the table, the seating of the guests, and the tasting and serving of the dishes'. See *OED sewer*, n.² (a13..-1864) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁹⁰ *OED cloaca* 1. (1656-1832) 2nd Edition 1989. Commonly defined as either 'sewer' or 'drain' in Latin-English dictionaries. For example: 'Cloaca', in *The Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. by James Morwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁹¹ *OED minister*, v. 4.a. (a1382-1993) Draft Revision March 2009.

Jupiter with his toilet reading material and it is Curll's prayer that she chooses.⁹² It is worth noting that at least one critic has read 'ministers' to mean that Cloacina is wiping Jupiter as he defecates.⁹³

Curll, it appears, has visited Cloacina's realm before as she has heard him while residing in her 'black grottos'. A 'grotto' is either a 'cave or cavern, esp. one which is picturesque, or which forms an agreeable retreat' or an 'excavation or structure made to imitate a rocky cave, often adorned with shell-work, etc., and serving as a place of recreation or a cool retreat'.⁹⁴ It is well known that Pope built himself a grotto as a personal retreat at his Twickenham estate.⁹⁵ It is in a euphemistic pun like this that Pope shows how fine a line he is treading. In other poems at other stages, he has written of his grotto and never before has he sullied the word with a connection to 'sewer' or 'sewerage'. Howard Weinbrot argued that 'Pope memorializes the heroic with whom he associates himself, while denigrating the vile with which he associates dung'.⁹⁶ But, in his scatological attacks on his enemies, Pope is aware that he is part of the publishing industry and his grotto, to his eyes beautiful, may also be a sewer to others. The power of euphemism is that while Pope adds to his joke of describing the lowest subject in the highest possible terminology, that low subject matter transgresses the boundaries through the euphemism and all 'grottos' are now, to some extent, possible 'sewers'. But, the joke relies on the reader being able to sense the disparity of the term and what it is describing. Euphemism forces two concepts into close proximity but it also attempts to

⁹² The larger context of these extracts from Book 2 is the running race between Curll and Lintot. Curll has just slipped in the excrement slopped onto the ground by his lover, Corinna. He sends a prayer to Jupiter to help him win the race.

⁹³ Chandler, 'Pope's "Girl of the Game": The Prostitution of the Author and the Business of Culture', p. 113.

⁹⁴ *OED grotto* 1. (1617-1887); 2. (1625-1832) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁹⁵ Pat Rogers, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 142-43.

⁹⁶ Howard D. Weinbrot, 'Annotating a Career: From Pope's *Homer* to the *Dunciad*: From Madame Dacier to Madame Dacier by Way of Swift', *Philological Quarterly*, 79 (2000), p. 473.

allow the denial of the second, euphemistic concept with limited success because the end result of euphemism is to collapse the two concepts into one combined and doubled concept. With paronomasia there is always a difference between the two words enacted in the spelling which the sound similarity cannot bridge. Euphemism bridges the gap because the joke becomes a joke precisely when, with a shock, we realize that Cloacina's 'agreeable retreat' is simultaneously a 'sewer'.

Euphemism again rears its head in the couplet 'Where as he fish'd her nether realms for Wit, | She oft had favour'd him, and favours yet'. The *OED* defines this instance of 'fish'd' as meaning 'To search through (a receptacle, region, etc.) *for* (something material or immaterial)'⁹⁷ and included this couplet as an example of 'fish'd' being used in this way. Literally speaking, 'nether' means 'the lower or bottom part (section, component, segment, etc.) of a person or thing'.⁹⁸ But, in a second supplement to the dictionary, the *OED* added the following definition: '*euphem.* In various compounds signifying the anus or vulva. Freq. in nonce-formations'.⁹⁹ Alongside this, 'realm' means '**a.** A kingdom...**b.** In extended use, chiefly *fig.* and in figurative contexts'.¹⁰⁰ All up, one meaning of the opening line of the couplet is that Curll has sought for wit in the lowest sewers that fall under Cloacina's purview. A second meaning, if we read the more general denotation of 'realm' as a 'region, a territory'¹⁰¹ in a physical sense is that Curll has gone fishing for wit in Cloacina's vagina and/or anus.¹⁰² David Fairer argues that in the Cave of Spleen the 'transforming 'pow'rful

⁹⁷ *OED fish*, v.¹ **II.6.b.** (1727-1865) 2nd Edition 1989.

⁹⁸ *OED nether*, *adj.* and *n.* **A.1.** (c1300-1992) Draft Revision June 2009.

⁹⁹ *OED nether*, *adj.* and *n.* **S2.** (c1390-1998) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁰⁰ *OED realm*, *n.* **1.a.** (c1300-190) **1.b.** (c1450-2007) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹⁰¹ *OED realm* **3.a.** (a1425-2007).

¹⁰² The construction 'nether realm' could refer to the genital region as whole which would then include both vagina and anus. The other reading is that the vagina or the anus is the nether realm in which Curll has to fish.

Fancy' has become a nightmare of sexual incongruity'¹⁰³ but here in *The Dunciad* Pope is attempting to demonstrate both incongruity and congruity. Curll's chase to own a plagiarist (for that is at least part of what the phantom More signifies as will be discussed later) is congruent with swimming through ordure and searching the genitals of the sewer's goddess for material to publish. The strength of the passage is affirmed when we realize that it is incongruent with normal human behaviour but there is a metaphorical congruency that forces home the satirical point Pope is making.

The sexualized reading of the passage is confirmed by the polyptoton on 'favour'd-favours'. 'Favour', according to Griffen, 'still carried suggestions in Pope's time of sexual favours'¹⁰⁴ but this is not supported by the *OED*. The closest to a sexualized sense that the *OED* contains is 'Something given as a mark of favour; *esp.* a gift such as a knot of ribbons, a glove, etc., given to a lover, or in mediæval chivalry by a lady to her knight, to be worn conspicuously as a token of affection'.¹⁰⁵ On the surface at least, the word is meant to denote 'regard with favour, look kindly upon; to be inclined to, have a liking or preference for; to approve'.¹⁰⁶ But, through a parodic intertextuality with mediæval romance the literary reference to 'something given as a mark of favour' we have Curll being Cloacina's chosen knight and representative. This reading is borne out by Cloacina giving Curll's petition to Jove ahead of other petitions. The sexual reading is created by the context of 'nether realms' and then one wonders what kind of 'gift' Curll will be wearing after receiving Cloacina's 'favours'.¹⁰⁷ The polyptoton moves from the past tense to the present tense and so includes, much to

¹⁰³ David Fairer, *Pope's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 77.

¹⁰⁴ Griffen, *Alexander Pope: The Poet in the Poems*, p. 232.

¹⁰⁵ *OED favour, favor, n. 7.a.* (1588 – 1864) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁶ *OED favour, favor, v. 1.a.* (1340-70 – 1873) 2nd Edition 1989.

¹⁰⁷ There is an argument to be made here that when Curll is fishing Cloacina's nether realms he is engaging in anal sex and the favours that she grants him are the stains of excrement that such sexual activity could result in. Especially given that we are to shortly arrive at the phrase 'brown dishonours of his [Curll's] face.

Curll's chagrin no doubt, a history (sexual or otherwise) between the book publisher and sewers. That history, through the polyptoton beginning with the past tense and moving into the present tense, is projected into the present and the future. Curll, it would seem, will always have the 'favour' of Cloacina.

This dancing around the subject matter through the use of euphemism comes to a resounding halt when Pope states that Curll is 'Renew'd by ordure's sympathetic force' where the *OED* defines 'ordure' as meaning 'Excrement'.¹⁰⁸ It is euphemism which Ruth Perry does not name but clearly relies upon to claim the following about Pope's later poetry:

Pope never gave over his fine discriminating sensibility even at the height of his most passionately excremental diatribes. Indeed, his tones are so highly polished, his language so refined, that modern students reading these poems often miss the brutal meaning in the well-wrought lines and are amazed when they realize what is being said in such polite language. He was not given to the full-scale, exuberant, Rabelaisian, excremental visions of Swift; even at his most savage he maintained the surface decorums.¹⁰⁹

The surface decorum has been broken here. It is not often in Pope that this happens, but it does happen regularly enough to qualify Perry's claim. It happens rarely enough that the reader is jolted when euphemism is discarded and this, in something of a paradox, helps hide the euphemism as the focus becomes the moment when euphemism is abandoned.

It does not take us long to return to the world of euphemism, though, when Curll is described as 'oil'd with magic juices' and obtaining new life from 'th' effluvia strong'. The two euphemisms refer to the puddle of urine and excrement that now covers Curll and the smell that accompanies him. It ends in that wonderfully euphemistic

¹⁰⁸ *OED ordure*, n. 1.a. (c1390 – 2000) Draft Revision June 2008.

¹⁰⁹ Ruth Perry, 'Anality and Ethics in Pope's Late Satires', in *Pope*, ed. by Brean Hammond (London: Longman, 1996), p. 178.

phrase ‘brown dishonours of his face’. Those brown dishonours are faecal stains and the phrase conveys both the colour and reality (to this day it would be a dishonour to have excrement stains on one’s face) in which Curll finds himself. This particular euphemism does not play off a sense of high and low that was occurring a mere moment ago (‘magic juices’ and ‘effluvia’) but rather it brings the reader out of the mock epic realm they are in and into a reality created through a mundane word (‘brown’) coupled to what is, for all intents and purposes, an honest word: ‘dishonours’. What makes it more effective is that we are told that Curll ignores the dirt on his face. The race, then, is a metaphor for Curll’s activities as a book seller and the excremental imagery and euphemistic punning gains full force when the reader understands it as a metaphor for Curll’s professional life. The gentle satire of *Absalom and Achitophel*’s euphemistic opening has been left far behind.

Pope, on the other hand, used excremental imagery for a different purpose. For him, it added fuel to his fire, strengthened his expressions of hostility towards enemies, made clear how far beyond the pale of civilized society he felt them to be. His most savage satire, written towards the end of his life, was also his most excremental.¹¹⁰

That savagery is here epitomized in the euphemistic term ‘brown dishonours’. Pope will never bluntly tell the reader that Curll ignores the shit on his face, but he will make the reader realize the negativity of Curll’s behaviour through that phrase ‘brown dishonours’ and the actions of which have lead to Curll’s displaying the ‘brown dishonours’ that are the mark of Cloacina’ ‘favours’. That the satire is so savage is, in part, due to the ability of puns, and euphemistic puns in particular, to combine concepts that are of completely different tenors — here excrement with epic sensibility. The further apart the concepts

¹¹⁰ Perry, 'Anality and Ethics in Pope's Late Satires', p. 171.

are to begin with, the more overt and powerful the satire as the reader is made to yoke the two together.

More–Moore–More

Such scatological satire, as demonstrated above, is a contributing factor in *The Dunciad* being ‘so often dismissed by its own contemporaries and later readers as the writer’s petty revenge on his enemies’.¹¹¹ Amongst the euphemistic scatology of the second book are puns which demonstrate that Pope was as capable of the erudite pun as he was the crass. To one of them we now turn; it occurs early in the second book, when Dulness creates the phantom which will result in Curll sending his prayers via Cloacina to Jupiter.

A Poet’s form she plac’d before their eyes,
 And bade the nimblest racer seize the prize;
 No meagre, muse-rid mope, adust or thin,
 In a dun night-gown of his own loose skin;
 But such a bulk as no twelve bards could raise,
 Twelve starv’ling bards of these degen’rate days.
 All as a partridge plump, full-fed, and fair,
 She form’d this image of well-body’d air;
 With pert flat eyes she window’d well its head;
 A brain of feathers, and a heart of lead;
 And empty words she gave, and sounding strain,
 But senseless, lifeless! idol void and vain!
 Never was dash’d out, at one lucky hit,
 A fool, so just a copy of a wit;
 So like, that critics said, and courtiers swore,
 A Wit it was, and call’d the phantom **More**.

(Bold mine. *DFB* 2.35-50.)

¹¹¹ Valerie Rumbold, ‘Milton’s Epic and Pope’s Satyr Play: *Paradise Lost* in the *Dunciad* in Four Books’, *Milton Quarterly*, 38 (2004) p. 140.

James Moore Smythe has been identified as the person on whom Pope based his phantom prize that Curll and Lintot are racing to catch.¹¹² This portrait of Moore Smythe, along with all the other caricatures of which Pope was so fond, no doubt helped prompt Lytton Strachey to his memorable appraisal of Pope:

Among the considerations that might make us rejoice or regret that we did not live in the eighteenth century, there is one that to my mind outbalances all the rest — if we had, we might have known Pope. At any rate, we have escaped that. We may lament that flowered waistcoats are forbidden us, that we shall never ride in a sedan-chair, and that we shall never see good Queen Anne taking tea at Hampton Court: but we can at least congratulate ourselves that we run no danger of waking up one morning to find ourselves exposed, both now and for ever, to the ridicule of the polite world — that we are hanging by the neck, and kicking our legs, on the elegant gibbet that has been put up for us by the little monster of Twit’nam. And, on the other hand, as it is, we are in the happy position of being able, quite imperturbably, to enjoy the fun.¹¹³

While Curll may have reason to believe that his gibbet could rarely be described as elegant, More could not condemn Pope for dragging him through excrement. The link is obviously made and sustained through a paronomasia on ‘More–Moore’ that allows those readers with enough knowledge to make the connection. From here, we must depart from the poem proper to the commentary with which Pope chose to surround it.

The first reading of the ‘More–Moore’ pun is directed through Curll’s identification of Moore in his *Key to the Dunciad* as claimed by one annotator of the poem in the first note to the line.¹¹⁴ It goes on to argue that the phantom More stands as

¹¹² By Curll in his *Key to the Dunciad* no less, at least that is what *The Dunciad in Four Books* asserts Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, note 50, p. 152.

¹¹³ Lytton Strachey, *Pope: The Leslie Stephen Lecture for 1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925) p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, note 50, p. 152. The notes about ‘More’ are different in *The Dunciad in Four Books* from the earlier *Dunciad Variorum*. In the *Variorum*, the pun is at one point expressly denied: ‘Notwithstanding what is here collected of the Person imagin’d by *Curl* to be meant in this place, we cannot be of that opinion [...] since the name itself is not spell’d *Moore* but *More*’. See *The Dunciad Variorum 1729* in Pope, *Poems in Facsimile*, note to verse 46, p. 26. It is interesting that in the

an example of a plagiarist because, it is alleged, Moore plagiarized both Pope and Swift.¹¹⁵ A plagiarist is, of course, a ‘copy of a wit’ in the hope of being recognized as a wit (‘A wit was called’). The figure of a phantom that booksellers are to chase as being representative of a plagiarist has a metaphorical logic to it. That booksellers need to make a profit is understood; but, Pope is having a dig at those who profit from the unethical treatment of writers by publishing phantoms of a genuine author’s work. The plagiarist is a phantom, an intellectual phantom as his or her ideas and creations are not his or her own, and thus have no substance to them. While booksellers may be taken in by the phantom for its seeming veracity, to those in the know, the plagiarist is reduced to something less than a real author, he or she is a cheat, a thief, a phantom.

Scriblerus does not follow the ‘More–Moore’ paronomasia but engages in erudite cross language punning to make his case for what ‘More’ means: ‘It appears from hence that this is not the name of a real person, but fictitious; *More* from *μωρός*, *stultus*, *μωρία*, *stultitia*, to represent the folly of a Plagiary’.¹¹⁶ Blakey Vermeule paraphrases Scriblerus’ argument as ‘directing us to interpret him [More] as ‘stupidity’ because his name, More, is derived from the Greek *moros*’.¹¹⁷ *Moros* is the etymological root of the English word ‘moron’ but the *OED* supports Scriblerus in claiming that the ancient Greek word meant ‘folly’: ‘Ancient Greek *μωρόν* is used as a noun in the sense ‘folly’, but is not used to denote a person (the neuter usually represents inanimate categories)’.¹¹⁸ The logic of Scriblerus’ assessment is based on the kind of punning logic

later work, Pope allows the pun ‘More–Moore’ to stand without even the attempted retraction of the *Variorum*.

¹¹⁵ Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, note 50, pp. 152-53.

¹¹⁶ Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, note 50, p. 153.

¹¹⁷ Blakey Vermeule, ‘Abstraction, Reference, and the Dualism of Pope’s “Dunciad”’, *Modern Philology*, 96 (1998) pp. 35-36.

¹¹⁸ *OED moron*, n.² (and adj.) Etymology. Draft Revision June 2008.

that would have made Derrida proud and Richard Rorty uncomfortable.¹¹⁹ Because (a) More is etymologically related to the ancient Greek word *moros* and (b) *moros* means ‘folly’ and (c) in order to be a plagiarist one needs to have the attribute of folly, *ipso facto*, the phantom More represents the ‘folly of a Plagiary’.

The commentary placed around *The Dunciad in Four Books* offers us, through the different commentators, two interpretations of what ‘More’ could mean: 1) for Curll it is a paronomasia on Robert Moore Smythe; 2) for Scriblerus it is an etymological paronomasia which means both the English ‘More’ and the ancient Greek ‘folly’. The commentary in the margins fails to make the leap between ‘More’, Scriblerus’ etymology, and Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly*, or to give it its Latinized Greek title: *Moriae Encomium*. Erasmus dedicated the work to one of England’s most famous Catholics, Sir Thomas More. As a Catholic poet, this is a somewhat disturbing resonance within the poem, for it is hard to see how the portrait of ‘More’ within the poem is a positive one. The linking of ‘More’ to Sir Thomas More and to Erasmus’ *Moriae Encomium* has two effects. The first one is that it becomes clear that ‘More’ is Pope’s praise of the folly of plagiary. Second, the phantom is a kind of utopian figure for the crowd that chases it, and it was Sir Thomas More who wrote *Utopia* — that dream of the unachievable order here on earth. The phantom ‘More’ offers the opportunity of a distinctly earthly paradise of ill-gotten wealth to the publishers who chase him.

In more recent times, critics have had a more difficult time being so confident in the ability of the word ‘More’ to denote anything in a concrete manner.¹²⁰ Increasing the problem is the fact that the *OED* has some trouble defining ‘more’ in sense that helps

¹¹⁹ To see an example of Richard Rorty dismissing punning logic, read the chapter of Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972-1980)* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982) which tackles Derridean thought.

¹²⁰ In particular, see Vermeule, ‘Abstraction, Reference, and the Dualism of Pope’s “Dunciad”’, and Fredric V. Bogel, ‘Dulness Unbound: Rhetoric and Pope’s Dunciad’, *PMLA*, 97 (1982).

interpret Pope's use of it. Perhaps the most useful definition the *OED* has to offer us is when it defines the pronoun 'more' as a 'greater quantity, amount, degree, etc'.¹²¹ Interestingly, 'more' can also mean 'Originally: an edible root, as a carrot or parsnip. Later *gen.*: the root of a tree or plant; the fibrous roots of a tap root, etc. Also: tree stump'.¹²² For the booksellers, the plagiarist is a form of edible root — people will consume the product of the plagiarist as they would the creations of legitimate authors. The irony, of course, is that More is a phantom, so he might seem to offer all the intellectual and economic benefits that a legitimate author does but he is simply an illusion. Compared to an edible root or tap root of a tree (from which the tree draws water and nourishment) the immateriality and lack of physical substance of the phantom is highlighted by the syllepsis on 'More'. But, of course, to continue to talk of the phantom being a plagiarist is to continue operating under the assumption that either Curll's reading or Scriblerus' reading has validity, for nowhere in the passage does Pope openly use the term 'plagiary', or 'plagiarist'. Instead, he coyly gives the reader the phrase 'so just a copy of a wit' from which 'plagiarist' may be inferred.

On the other hand, the syllepsis on 'More' can be read in a way that sidelines the issues of whether or not the phantom is a phantom plagiarist or just a phantom wit. (Although, a plagiarist is also a phantom wit). What no critic has yet noticed, is that Pope would also seem to be parodying the naming of Sin by the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost* for the phantom is named by the critics and courtiers who follow Dulness. Pope has changed the context, those who name and those who are named, but he retains an important word which connects the two naming passages:

back they recoild affraid

¹²¹ *OED more*, *adj.*, *pron.*, *adv.*, *n.*³, and *prep.* **B.I.1.a.** (c1200-1997) Draft Revision June 2009.

¹²² *OED more*, *n.*¹ **1.a.** (c1150-1977) Draft Revision December 2008.

At first, and **call'd** me *Sin*, and for a Sign
 Portentous held me;

(*PL* 2.759-61. Bold mine.)

So like, that critics said, and courtiers swore,
 A Wit it was, and **call'd** the phantom More.

(*DFB* 2. 49-50. Bold mine.)

It is interesting to note that both Milton and Pope use the term 'called' instead of 'named'. Naming, under a hermeneutic that all the poets included in this thesis would have been aware of, would have meant recognizing the essential nature of what was named. Or, as Valerie Rumbold puts it, 'world springs from word'¹²³ as God creates the world and, importantly, as Adam 'names' and therefore understands and comprehends nature. It is a mark of fallen intelligence that one can no longer 'name' but only 'call'. The extension of this hermeneutic is that the poetic is privileged for its ability to 'make good the deficiencies of fallen human language'.¹²⁴ Or, as Sidney would have it, to paint a golden world which will lead the reader towards redemption.

The fallen angels, critics, and courtiers make great interpretative mistakes when they attempt to 'name' the beings in front of them. As discussed in 'Fallen Punning', the fallen angels, through the paronomasia on 'sin-sign' realize that Sin is a sign but fatally misread the message she embodies. For the fallen beings, the paronomasia on 'sin-sign', institutes the never ending play of *différance*; but, as chapter four also demonstrated, the phonetic link that the paronomasia forges also supported an alternative reading which was created by the context of the poem, that God created Sin as a sign of Satan's fallen nature. For those who can read the sign Sin correctly, it stands as a marker of a relationship with God, not a perfect relationship but a relationship none-the-less.

¹²³ Valerie Rumbold, 'Ideology and Opportunism: The Role of Handel in Pope's *the Dunciad in Four Books*', in *"More Sold Learning": New Perspectives on Alexander Pope's Dunciad*, ed. by Claudia N. Thomas Catherine Ingrassia (London: Associated University Press, 2000) p. 65.

¹²⁴ Rumbold, 'Ideology and Opportunism: The Role of Handel in Pope's *the Dunciad in Four Books*', p. 65.

As discussed in chapter four, a singular ‘sign’ was linked with unfallen communication while the pluralized ‘signs’ was the hallmark of fallen communication. Gregory Colomb notes that in ‘the mock-epic, no term is singular’.¹²⁵ *The Dunciad* overtly admits that ‘More’ is not a singular term. The critics and courtiers read the phantom as being a wit and also more than a wit. What that ‘more’ is, nobody knows. It could be poet, playwright, singer, dancer, courtier, critic, essayist, lord, politician, anything, the reader is left free to make ‘more’ mean whatever he or she wants. Through a reading of ‘More’ as denoting both a name (proper noun) and ‘something additional to wit’, ‘More’ becomes a doubly treacherous syllepsis which highlights the fallen nature of Dulness’ critics and courtiers. As a figment of Dulness’ imagination, the phantom does not receive the validation a proper noun gives. By giving a person a name you recognize their existence verbally. The phantom has no existence as is proved when Curll attempts to lay a hand on it.

And now the victor stretch’d his eager hand
Where the tall Nothing stood, or seem’d to stand;
A shapeless shade, it melted from his sight,
Like forms in clouds, or visions of the night.

(DFB 2.109-112.)

When Curll attempts to catch it, the poet names the phantom ‘Nothing’ which stands as the antithesis of ‘More’. Secondly, the name is treacherous because it suggests that there is substance to the phantom. It is a wit and more than a wit. We see the crowd giving the phantom intellectual substance and weight through their misapprehension; ironically, the nomenclature the crowd uses to name the phantom is perhaps the right word because

¹²⁵ Gregory G. Colomb, *Designs on Truth: The Poetics of the Augustan Mock-Epic* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 44.

‘more’ conveys substance without having to concretely specify it; the very physicality of the name is as insubstantial as the phantom.

Helen Deutsch claims that:

Pope’s double entendres and tricks of perspective demonstrate, such incidental fun with literary and social conventions, such proper insignificance, such aesthetic distance, such static display, are the stuff of serious epic narrative, serious violence, serious loss.¹²⁶

While she is writing about *The Rape of the Lock*, Deutsch’s comment rings true for *The Dunciad in Four Books* also. Words are matter for serious epic as Milton demonstrated through his creation of the plain style and its favouring of polyptoton as the preferred rhetoric pun technique. Dryden followed Milton by using polyptotons in his translation of the *Aeneid* to assert the nationality and heritage of its characters — that is, Dryden named his characters and sourced that identity in their place of residence. Milton used polyptoton to re-appropriate the word ‘oracle’ to mean Christ. Pope, however, rather than use a punning technique to rescue puns from continually differing and deferring meaning attempts to give the phantom its proper name and thereby arrest the play of meaning he unloosed previously when the phantom was called ‘More’. The real nature of what has happened here has perhaps been best described by Colomb:

Mock-epic is, of course, an instrument of meaning. The mock-epic’s poetic pillory attempts to take control over the good sense — and so the behaviour — of citizenry by taking control of its language. Mock-epic is fascinated by language, its powers of social control, and its frightening — and thrilling — malleability. Mock-epic engages the manipulative powers of poetry in an effort to fix language, to make it a stable instrument for passing judgement on affairs of state. The effort was in some respects doomed, since it was cut off from the social forces that drive language change; but it also succeeded in the way that all

¹²⁶ Helen Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 47.

propagandistic, official histories succeed when they become canonical and so silence the other voices.¹²⁷

Or, in another way, the ‘essential project of the mock-epic is finally name-calling, renaming its objects so that it can re-characterize its world by restructuring its public language’.¹²⁸ Pope engages in such renaming when he calls the Phantom ‘Nothing’. The denotation of ‘nothing’ retrospectively acts upon all the readings that are offered for ‘More’. Moore is a nothing, the folly of a plagiarist is in the end a no-thing, the something additional is constituted of, and creates, nothing. The later readings, including this one, which admit of the vacillations and oscillations of meaning, according to Pope are composed essentially of nothing and therefore comprise no-thing.

Importantly though, Pope’s victory is incomplete. Calling the phantom by another name which retroactively attempts to deny any potential meaning in the ‘More’ pun fails for similar reasons to why Shakespeare was unable to rescue his name in Sonnet 136 after the denotative mayhem of Sonnet 135. Shakespeare exiled the word ‘will’ for six lines in order to stop the polysemy created by the fourteen uses of the word in the previous sonnet. But once polysemy is enacted, it becomes hard to retroactively constrain it and Shakespeare was unable to fully sign himself anymore with ‘will’ because it could be read to also denote wish, desire, penis, vagina, sexual desire, the Dark Lady’s desire, Will the Speaker’s desire, the Young Man’s desire. The poet does force the word to return to signifying William but he can’t stop the other meanings from echoing in the background. Pope faces the same problem here — nothing itself gets caught up in the play of language as it becomes nothing and no-thing. ‘More’ becomes

¹²⁷ Colomb, *Designs on Truth: The Poetics of the Augustan Mock-Epic*, pp. xvi-xvii.

¹²⁸ Colomb, *Designs on Truth: The Poetics of the Augustan Mock-Epic*, p. 40.

the supplement that ensures 'Nothing' can denote 'nothing'. Where Shakespeare has 'Will in over-plus', Pope has 'More'.

CONCLUSION

Howard Erskine-Hill once wrote that the 'unique form of *The Dunciad* is its precariously creative synthesis of forms'.¹²⁹ That synthesis of forms, the addition of parodic commentaries and annotations to the central poem along with the pastiche of epic relationships to Home, Virgil and Milton, allows Pope to fully subordinate the logic of the pun. In *The Dunciad*, euphemism becomes the main punning technique, a technique which marginalizes the linguistic treasury as it relies on the context created by the poem to establish secondary denotations. Also, punning logic is consigned to the proto-Derridean Scriblerus who uses it to expound his entertaining and informative readings of the text. The profound misreading enacted by Charles Kinbote on John Shade's poem in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* owes a great debt to *The Dunciad*; but, Scriblerus' reading of *The Dunciad* is more responsive to the poem itself than Kinbote's is to *Pale Fire*. Where Kinbote seeks to insert himself in the poem through spurious associations and puns, Scriblerus seeks to expand and play with the poem. The logic of the pun is one technique Scriblerus uses to interact with *The Dunciad*. The Renaissance use of the logic of the pun is not going to occur extensively again in serious poetry until the twentieth century, when puns again become a method of thinking in both modernist and post-modernist literature and the critical readings of Derrida and his many disciples.

So, while we should always heed the wise warning offered by Catherine Ingrassia and Claudia N. Thomas, that '*The Dunciad* remains a critical and interpretative

¹²⁹ Howard Erskine-Hill, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Howard Erskine-Hill and Anne Smith (London: Vision Press, 1979)

minefield'¹³⁰ we should also recognize that *The Dunciad* marks the marginalization of punning logic from poetry into parodies of erudition and textual scholarship and the subordination of rhetorical pun techniques to euphemism. I realize that this might sound negative and judgmental but it is not designed to be such. The logic of the pun is like any other intellectual device, it can be popular or unpopular, fashionable or unfashionable, but it remains a valid technique nonetheless. What is truly fascinating is the way in which habits of punning might have changed, but the end results of both the 'Will Sonnets' and the 'More' pun are similar despite using different punning mechanisms to get there. The logic of the pun is one such tool, but as Pope reminds us, there remains more than one way to indulge in wordplay.

¹³⁰ Catherine Ingrassia and Claudia N. Thomas, 'Introduction', in *"More Solid Learning": New Perspectives on Alexander Pope's Dunciad*, ed. by Claudia N. Thomas Catherine Ingrassia (London: Associated University Press, 2000), p. 23.

8 ALL THINGS DOO CHAUNGE

‘In the beginning was the pun. And so on’.¹

This thesis set out to discover if, given that there was a shift in the critical attitude towards puns which separates Renaissance criticism from eighteenth century criticism, was there a change in punning between the practice of Renaissance poets and eighteenth century poets that either mirrors or matches in any way the change in critical temperament between the two ages; this thesis suggests that we can trace a change in habits of punning between those of Renaissance poets and those of eighteenth century poets. As ever, the story is not quite that simple. We have traced a cultural arc from 1590 through to 1740, an arc that began with Ovid being the consciously imitated classical forebear of English poets, through to Virgil, and finished with Horace. This generational change in admiration for particular classical authors matches the literary historical movement that this thesis traced from the Renaissance lyric poets through Milton into Dryden and finishing with Pope. What this thesis has intimated, through close reading of particular puns, is that we can trace a similar arc in habits of punning: from the logic of the pun employed by Renaissance lyric poets, early Milton and, later, his Satan, through the polyptoton of Milton’s poetic self denying ordinance and Dryden’s Virgil, to finish with the euphemistic punning of Dryden and Pope.

Ovid, Virgil and Horace

The period of English literary history that we have traversed is one in which its poets always looked back to their classical Roman predecessors for examples of literary excellence. In fact, this thesis has proposed that, as we travelled from the Renaissance to

¹ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*. ed. by Paul Auster. Vol. 1, *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), p. 42.

the eighteenth century, the classical poetic voice consciously echoed by the English poets changed as poetic styles altered from 1590 to 1740. The Renaissance looked back to Ovid, the fecund poet of the *Metamorphoses* who not only provided them with numerous stories but also demonstrated the mutability of language through wordplay. The Ovidian spirit pervades Renaissance literature, and one aspect in which it finds expression is the use of puns to structure the thought flow of a poem, the thought twisting and turning as the words mutate and metamorphose through their various existences on the page and in the ear. Renaissance poets were willing to explore the polysemous depths of words and language; it is they, perhaps, who allow the ‘alarming glimpse of language out of control’² (and here we should think of the ‘will’ sonnets) but this in no way means that the language is actually out of control. Meaning is there and we can attempt to explicate it somewhat. This does not entail that we can definitively tie meaning down and to some extent, especially in Donne’s ‘A Hymn to God the Father’, we have to leave the different strands of thought in the air together without opting conclusively for one denotation over another. The end of the poem is itself *non finito* because the puns are deployed in such a way that definitively pinning them down to one meaning is impossible. Ovid’s conception of an eternal and ceaseless metamorphosis, as elucidated in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*, was a potential inspiration and guide for the punning that occurs in some Renaissance poetry that has been examined in this thesis.

While Virgil has often been held up as the model upon which Milton based his career, and it is true that Milton moves away from what might be termed Ovidian uses of language, it is with Dryden that we fully leave the Ovidian for the Virgilian. The

² Bates, 'The Point of Puns', p. 429.

Restoration of the monarchy in England occurred as the Great Vowel Shift was beginning to draw to its conclusion and at the same time as a desire grew to bring the chaotic nature of the English language under the control of an agreed upon grammar and lexical consensus; an indication of this was the appointment of Dryden to the Royal Society. While we may now view Dryden as the great reformer of prose, he was also responsible for helping to create what later critics would recognize as the eighteenth century or Augustan poetic that Pope was to further polish and whose final flowering occurs with Samuel Johnson. Milton sought the Virgilian decorum of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain'd*, especially through the plain style that came to dominate the later books of the former and all of the latter work. Dryden took a different path to Virgilian decorum and translated the *Aeneid*. Both, however, relied upon polyptoton as a rhetorical technique which allowed them to engage in a subtle punning that was subservient to the context and logic of the themes and ideas they were exploring and engaging with. For Dryden, polyptoton allowed him to demonstrate and, on occasion, critique ideas of nationalism. Milton, on the other hand, used polyptoton as an ornament but also as the technique through which the reader could return from Satanic pluralism to Christian monism.

Finally, as Pope adopted Dryden's mantle as the premier living poet in England, Virgilian decorum was left for the urbanity of Horace. Where Ovid paraded and scandalized, Horace was calm and controlled; where Ovid sought the extremes of emotion, experience and language, Horace would rather the Sabine farm and peace after the tumult of the Roman civil wars. The control that Pope retains over his punning, banishing the logic of the pun to the mock commentary in the margins of the text, ensuring that the punning serves the larger concerns of the poem, using syllepsis to

perfectly capture and complete a neat duality or joke and as the final point to a couplet, all match the Horatian ideal of control over ones self and material. But, it is under Pope that we finally arrive at the wholesale adoption of euphemistic punning where the puns are created by the context of the poem more so than the puns being exploitable assets of the linguistic treasury or identifiable rhetorical tropes. Such euphemistic punning does all it can to preserve the surface decorum of ‘one word one meaning’ while sneaking in the subversive, humorous and illegitimate through context rather than denotation or its less lexically rigorous sibling, connotation.

The movement from Ovid through Virgil and into Horace that this thesis has traced has been broadly recognized by literary historians. Where this thesis has broken some new ground is in proposing a similar movement from rhetorical punning able to utilize the logic of the pun, through to the most ‘rational’ punning rhetorical technique, polyptoton, becoming the central technique of Milton’s plain style, to the succession of euphemistic punning under Pope. This change in punning preferences in the poets who self-consciously sought to write poetry of high cultural value also stands alongside the movement towards a critical attitude that treated puns and punning as culturally obnoxious.

The Logic of the Pun

This thesis has defined the logic of the pun as the way in which a pun opens up particular avenues of thought that can be exploited by the poet. By following denotative associations of a pun, the poet follows its logic. This can work in either of two ways as exemplified in ‘The Gyant Race’. Firstly, a single word and its multiple denotations are the central movement and structure of the poem; just as in Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnets and Donne’s ‘Hymn to God the Father’. Donne’s poem opens up parallel readings which

remain open and valid through puns on ‘done’ and ‘more’. The poem attempts to enact a closure to the opened seams of thought but is only half able to do so. Shakespeare’s ‘will’ sonnets are much more extreme than Donne’s use of ‘done’ and ‘more’. The various dictionary definitions of ‘will’ are utilized by the poet, but he also moves beyond the linguistic treasury and euphemistically fills ‘will’ with denotations such as ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ that, as yet, remain unauthorized by the *OED*. However, the euphemistic meanings that the poet adds to ‘will’ do stem from the seams opened up through the syllepsis on ‘will’. The definition of ‘sexual desire’ contains within it the seeds for ‘will’ also meaning ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ — the tools of sexual desire. The thought process of ‘Sonnet 135’ is established and created by the various meanings of ‘will’. That is, the logical movement of ‘Sonnet 135’ is determined by the syllepsis inherent in the word ‘will’ which the poet mines to create the sonnet.

Secondly, a pun and its multiple denotations are used to invoke two or more discourses. As the poem progresses, the two or more discourses are continued and expanded through the use of more puns which have possible denotations that fit those particular multiple discourses. Examples of this second use of the logic of the pun can be found in *Astrophil and Stella*, Milton’s ‘On the University Carrier’ and in speeches by Satan and Belial in *Paradise Lost*. In the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney used a syllepsis on ‘pain’ to mean, among other denotations, ‘childbirth’; through the Petrarchan twist, childbirth then became the dominant trope of the sonnet. In ‘On the University Carrier’, Milton starts with two different syllepses — ‘girt’ and ‘dirt’ — which open up a seam of meaning that combines the language of death with the language of the carrier’s trade. In Sidney, the pun proleptically signals the Petrarchan twist that occurs in the second half of the sonnet. Similarly, two discourses are

developed by Milton throughout 'On the University Carrier' with thirteen of the eighteen lines containing puns that denote meanings relevant to both death and the carrier's trade. Satan and Belial, however, use the puns to mock and jeer at the loyal angels. Satan begins by mixing the language of peace with that of cannon based warfare. Initially at least, the loyal angels are denied access to the second seam of meaning as they are ignorant of the cannons that the fallen angels are hiding in their midst. After the fallen angels fire upon the loyal angels, Satan again mixes the language of peace and cannon based warfare but this time the loyal angels are able to understand Satan's nasty joke. Belial, unable to match the wit of his leader but keen to impress, endeavors to continue the joke and does so through a series of puns created by euphemism. It is here, in Belial's euphemizing, that the punning logic ends because the structure of Belial's speech is created by the context of Satan's prior use of puns.

Poetry often relies on different figures of speech to create more than one discourse; however, when using puns, poets are constrained by the meanings of the word, or words, as much as they are by their imaginative powers. The fact that poets are constrained by the denotations of their chosen pun means that they are then forced to follow the logic of that pun if they wish to use it in any greater way than as a one shot witticism. The associated denotations that constitute the logic of the pun are what Derrida has termed the 'seam';³ moreover, Derrida asserted that the seam had to be followed with rigor and what I am designating the logic of the pun provides that rigor in these cases. These opinions about the possibilities of wordplay, of the denotative associations, of the seam, of the rigor of the logic of the pun, are not just a critical discovery of the twentieth century but long recognized aspects of the use of language.

³ Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', p. 64.

While he did not define this phenomenon as ‘following the logic of the pun’, Samuel Johnson was clearly aware of it when he wrote his famous paragraph on Shakespeare’s relationship with punning. The paragraph has been discussed at length earlier in chapter four of this thesis. It is important again here because of the language which Johnson uses to describe the effect of puns, or the ‘quibble’, on Shakespeare who ‘follows it at all adventures’. Johnson also claimed that quibbles would ‘lead him out of his way’ and that because of ‘its fascinations’, Shakespeare ‘will always turn aside’. To ‘follow’ something that ‘leads’ him implies that the quibble, or wordplay, or pun, has a thread that Shakespeare can pursue. That thread, or ‘luminous vapour’, operates as what is here defined as ‘the logic of the pun’. And, as we have seen, it is a feature not only of Shakespeare’s writing. Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton all utilize the logic of pun in at least one of its two forms.

M. M. Mahood once argued that ‘Shakespeare plays with verbal meanings, not because the rhetoricians approve of wordplay, but because his imagination as a poet works through puns’.⁴ The view that Shakespeare thought through puns is not a proven fact and it has its detractors as well as its supporters. S. S. Hussey, for one, complains that Mahood and Johnson’s contention ‘is really incapable of proof’.⁵ To some extent, of course, Hussey is correct; we cannot ask Shakespeare if he thinks through puns. But, as this thesis has demonstrated, if we can’t prove that Shakespeare thought through puns, it is clear that some of Shakespeare’s poetry thought patterns are structured by puns. Nor is it only poetry that is capable of thinking through puns: criticism, as Pope reminds us, is also capable of punning logic. The commentary placed around *The Dunciad in Four Books* offers us, through the different commentators, two interpretations of what ‘More’

⁴ Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, p. 20.

⁵ S. S. Hussey, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 140.

could mean: 1) for Curll it is a paronomasia on Robert Moore Smythe; 2) for Scriblerus it is an etymological paronomasia which means both the English ‘More’ and the ancient Greek ‘folly’. The effect is that the logic of the pun, deployed to great effect in Renaissance lyric poetry is here literally marginalized by Pope.

Polyptoton

Polyptoton has come under greater scrutiny throughout this thesis than ever before. As we know, polyptoton is the repeated use of the same root word but in a different form or inflexion: ‘The winged **Courser**, like a gen’rous Horse, | Shows most true Mettle when you *check* his **Course**’ (bold mine).⁶ As this example demonstrates, polyptoton can be quite a subtle technique. It is capable of immediately recognizable puns: ‘with th’ innumerable **sound** | Of Hymns and sacred Songs, wherewith thy Throne | Encompass’d shall **resound** thee ever blest’ (bold mine).⁷ In this example, the difference in meaning engendered by the addition of ‘re—’ is significantly greater than that created by the removal of ‘—r’ from ‘Courser’. Along with the different levels of denotative metamorphosis that polyptoton is capable of producing, this thesis has demonstrated that it is a technique that some poets — in particular Milton — have used to great effect. One of the most well known passages of *Paradise Lost*, the Proserpine simile, uses polyptoton to engage the reader who is with Proserpine ‘gathering’ the flowers and then jolted into awareness that as she treats the flowers, so she was ‘gathered’. As has already been noted, polyptoton is a relatively unexamined rhetorical technique amongst critics.

These two examples highlight the two extremes of polyptoton. At one extreme there is an exceptionally subtle change in meaning and at the other extreme there is quite

⁶ Pope, ‘An Essay on Criticism’, ll. 84-87.

⁷ *PL* 3.147-49.

a large change in meaning, sufficient change to argue that it does indeed constitute a play on words. This is why Nash wrote that when polyptoton

is deliberate it is often a form of word-play. Strictly speaking, this figure is proper to richly inflected languages like Greek and Latin, with their variety of word-endings denoting case, tense, mood and so on. The English examples are approximations, and might be described as pseudopolyptoton.⁸

While English may not have the range of prefixes, suffixes, cases, tenses, moods, genders, that other languages may utilize, it still utilizes these syntactical aids to enact meaning, and so English is capable of polyptoton. A ‘pun’ is defined, in part, by the *OED*, as ‘two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings’.⁹ Because of the way polyptoton requires that two words share the same root word, a poet is guaranteed to get a similarity in sound between the two words for they will both involve the same root ‘sound–word’. We have become accustomed to viewing Groucho Marx’s ‘irrelephant’ as two words of nearly the same sound with two different meanings.¹⁰ What we forget is that ‘Courser’ and ‘Course’ are also two words of nearly the same sound with two different meanings. That is, ‘Courser–Course’, as used by Pope above, is a homophone, the two words sound alike. Previously, this thesis has defined ‘pun’ as referring to those rhetorical figures that rely upon homophony or homonymy to generate their effects. This thesis, primarily in ‘Punning Regain’d’, has stretched our concept of ‘wordplay’ or ‘pun’ to include polyptoton because of the homophonic element essential to it. Indeed, we have now begun to discriminate between examples of a poor polyptoton (raven–ravenous) and a well deployed polyptoton (gathering–gathered) by the same poet.

⁸ Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion*, p. 117.

⁹ *OED pun*, n.¹ (1644-1992) Draft Revision June 2008.

¹⁰ Groucho Marx cited in Sauers, *Pundemonium: The Step-by-Schlep Guide to Humour's Lowest Form*, p. 199.

More importantly, polyptoton allows a poet to forge logical connections through the use of prefixes and suffixes rather than purely through homophony and homonymy. The homophony inherent in the repetition of a root word is harnessed and directed through the prefix, suffix or declension of the root word. The ability of polyptoton to establish a hierarchy and figure subtle logical distinctions between meanings is one that Milton makes liberal use of throughout *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. The clause ‘The Rib he formd and fashioned with his hands’ can be interpreted in two different ways: a) as applying to the earlier phrase ‘a Rib [...] The Rib he formd’; or b) as describing what God did with the rib once he had removed it from Adam. By using a polyptoton to link the line ‘The rib he formd and fashiond with his hands’ to the next line ‘Under his forming hands a Creature grew’, Milton ensures that the potential ambiguity of the line is removed through the close denotative connection forged by using a polyptoton. Secondly, the sense of movement inherent in a polyptoton, the metamorphic nature of the technique, gives the reader a sense of the rib being changed. The word ‘formd’ changing into ‘forming’ echoes the transfiguration of the rib into Eve. It has been argued previously in this thesis that punning rhetorical tropes are an ideal form for poetically enacting a metamorphosis as the poetry describes that metamorphosis. When highlighting a word in this way, the poet or speaker can attempt logical argument through the use of polyptoton. The changing nature of polyptoton means that the positive and negative aspects of a word can be looked at as well as different tenses, and word forms (adjective, verb, noun). In one of Christianity’s thorniest theological problems — whether God’s foreknowledge and omnipotence means that he is ultimately responsible for humanity’s fall from grace — Milton has God use polyptoton as the trope with which to best demonstrate His innocence of this

charge.

It is perhaps imprecise to argue that polyptoton is a form of ‘logic’, but it does have logical effects. It is an effective technique for highlighting hierarchies within a term, and for allowing the speaker to make fine distinctions between different senses of the one root term. Paronomasia, antanaclasis and syllepsis do not allow for these distinctions between terms, but rather unite sometimes quite disparate denotations into one sound. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, this has raised the ire of logicians throughout the ages. Polyptoton on the other hand is the tool of the logician as God demonstrated in his speech on ‘foreknowledge’.

It is the clear connection of root word to derived word that Dryden exploits when he uses polyptoton in his translation of the *Aeneid* to clarify the links between a people and their place of origin, enforcing an almost nationalist perspective in Aeneas’ world. Another highlight of Virgil’s poetry is his etymological play involving the names of people and places.¹¹ Dryden artfully combines the two interests of Virgil through his use of polyptoton. Polyptoton, of all the rhetorical punning tropes this thesis has examined, is the one that argues for the closest relationship between both the words and meanings involved in the pun. The theme of nationality is important in Dryden’s *Aeneid* and nationality, that sense of belonging to a particular place and/or group of people, is enacted time and again throughout the *Aeneid* through instances of polyptoton. Polyptoton, by using one word in a different form, demonstrates etymology at its most basic level, for one word of the two needed to create a polyptoton is going to be prior to, and the foundation of, the other. ‘Troy’ is the foundation of ‘Trojan’ and ‘Rome’ is the foundation of ‘Roman’.

¹¹ See O’Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* and Paschalis, *Virgil’s Aeneid: Semantic Relations and Proper Names*.

Polyptoton offers the poet a punning technique which allows the methods of distinguishing meaning by altering a root word to control the potential homophony and homonymy of language. Due to this, it is a technique which appears to have all the hallmarks of rational and logical thought rather than the irrational syllepsis or even more irrational paronomasia. So attuned are we to how a word is changed by being deployed in a different form or with a prefix or suffix that we can miss the homophony that polyptoton naturally must include. Given what we know of the technique, it should come as no surprise that Dryden used it to link birthplace to identity or that Milton found it useful when he sought a language suitable to unfallen beings in *Paradise Lost* and the plain style of the that poem's final two books and its companion poem, *Paradise Regain'd*. When seeking to rein in the potential limitless nature of polysemy and homophony, polyptoton deploys the tools English has developed to distinguish logical distinctions between words and so when we see it being deployed consistently we can note that a poet is attempting to put a close check on the inchoate world of eternal homophony and polysemy.

Euphemistic Punning

When investigating the punning habits of both Dryden and Pope, two poets considered to be part of the long eighteenth century, this thesis found that they chose not to use the logic of the pun as a tool to structure their poetry. Instead, we saw that they began to euphemize to a greater extent. This has an interesting ramification, for such euphemizing punning, or, to construe it within the scope of this thesis, the euphemizing syllepsis, is entirely reliant upon context. The punning adds to the overall effect of the passage but in no way helps to create the movement of logic, or flow of thought in the passage. Euphemistic puns, such as 'warmth' and 'impart' from the opening lines of *Absalom and*

Achitophel or ‘ichor’ from the *Dunciad*, are entirely reliant upon the context of the poem to be puns. This is where a vital difference between the puns of the ‘will’ sonnets and puns relying upon euphemism becomes apparent. As explained in chapter four of this thesis, ‘will’ is used initially to mean ‘desire’. As the poem continues, ‘will’ undergoes an enlargement of meaning, the speaker generating a surplus of desired denotations that the word ‘will’ represents: this includes the speaker’s desire for the dark lady, for her vagina, for the dark lady to desire the speaker and his penis. The addition of meaning and repetition of the word ‘will’ is a function and symptom of desire. That is, if you remove desire and its initial signifier — ‘will’ — from the poem, you strip the poem of the context which helps create the euphemistic punning that occurs within the poem. Or, to say it another way, if you remove the initial pun, the initial ‘will’, you remove the context generating crux of the poem. If you remove Satan’s use of the logic of the pun from *Paradise Lost*, then you remove the context in which Belial’s puns occur. To remove the context for the punning in *Absalom and Achitophel*, one would remove puns, but non-punning words — ‘polygamy’, ‘multiplied’, ‘use’. The euphemistic puns in the introduction of *Absalom and Achitophel* are ancillary to the sense of the passage. The same cannot be said with confidence about Belial’s punning during the War in Heaven and the same cannot be said about the puns on ‘will’ in Shakespeare’s sonnet.

The puns of *The Rape of the Lock*, on the other hand, are similar in nature to the glittering ornaments of Belinda’s world, surface glints and gleams that reveal the sexual undercurrent of the poem. And throughout it all, reigning supreme, is the overall sexual context of the poem that infects words and turns them into euphemisms. ‘Stray’, ‘pursue’, ‘Impertinence’, all have a puerile element to them when heard with a

teenager's ear. Robin Grove argues that 'innuendo was always present'¹² in the poem but Bonnie Latimer provides a deeper analysis when she argues that 'neither satire nor innuendo exists in isolation; each requires a (virtual, conceived, or real) audience to get the joke'.¹³ She is only half way there, for the satirist or innuendo-ist has to create a context that encourages the audience to read the satire or read the euphemisms that have been loaded with sexual baggage and in *The Rape of the Lock* that context is created by its title. Part of Pope's challenge is to control the ability of language to succumb to the euphemizing tendencies of the reader. Once the invitation to look for smut is provided, the reader can potentially take over the poem and force a reading on to it through euphemism.

The second Book of the *Dunciad* demonstrates a basic conflict within Pope's mock-epic writing — that it at once occupies both the gutter and the epic. Pope achieves such a radical and comprehensive combining of the two arenas, the ditch and the stars, through euphemism. It is in a euphemistic pun like the one on 'grotto' that Pope shows how fine a line he is willing to tread. In other poems at other stages, he has written of his grotto and never before has he sullied the word with a connection to 'sewer' or 'sewerage'. Howard Weinbrot argued that 'Pope memorializes the heroic with whom he associates himself, while denigrating the vile with which he associates dung'.¹⁴ But, in his scatological attacks on his enemies, Pope is aware that he is part of the publishing industry and his grotto, to his eyes beautiful, may also be a sewer to others. The power of euphemism is that while Pope adds to his joke of describing the lowest subject in the highest possible terminology, that low subject matter transgresses the boundaries

¹² Grove, 'Uniting Airy Substance: *The Rape of the Lock* 1712-1736', p. 57.

¹³ Latimer, 'Alchemies of Satire: A History of the Sylphs in *the Rape of the Lock*', p. 696.

¹⁴ Weinbrot, 'Annotating a Career: From Pope's *Homer* to *the Dunciad*: From Madame Dacier to Madame Dacier by Way of Swift', p. 473.

through the euphemism and all ‘grottos’ are now, to some extent, possible ‘sewers’. But, the joke relies on the reader being able to sense the disparity of the term and what it is describing. Euphemism forces two concepts into close proximity but it also attempts to allow the denial of the second, euphemistic concept with limited success because the end result of euphemism is to collapse the two concepts into one combined and doubled concept. With paronomasia there is always a difference between the two words enacted in the spelling which the sound similarity cannot bridge. Euphemism bridges the gap because the joke becomes a joke precisely when, with a shock, we realize that Cloacina’s ‘agreeable retreat’ is simultaneously a ‘sewer’.

The second ramification of euphemistic punning is that we are, perhaps, stepping outside the realms of rhetorical punning. Rhetorical punning techniques are relatively well defined and syllepsis is defined by Puttenham as ‘comprehending under one [word], a supplie of two natures’.¹⁵ While it is clear that ‘warmth’ and ‘impart’ are carrying meanings above and beyond their dictionary meanings, it is impossible to accurately denote those meanings. The double supply is present, but not in a way that a dictionary can define for us. This is where the *OED* stops being useful in its ability to help define a particular pun. Previous to these examples, most instances of syllepsis in this thesis have had the two or more denotations expounded with the aid of the *OED*. As mentioned above, *The Dunciad* marks the marginalization of the logic of the pun from poetry into parodies of erudition and textual scholarship and the subordination of rhetorical pun techniques to euphemism. I realize that this might sound negative and judgmental but it is not designed to be such. The logic of the pun is like any other intellectual device. It can be popular or unpopular, fashionable or unfashionable, but it remains a valid

¹⁵ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 165.

technique nonetheless. What is fascinating is the way in which punning metamorphosed from 1590 to 1740, and it is interesting to note that the end result of the ‘will’ sonnets is so similar to the conclusion of the pun on ‘More’ even though Pope and Shakespeare found alternative means of arriving at that outcome. The logic of the pun is one such tool, but as Pope reminds us, there remains more than one way to indulge in wordplay. When we look back at how the eighteenth century poets deployed euphemistic puns so enthusiastically, it is worth bearing in mind two important points: first that such euphemistic punning appeared to enjoy favour as the critical minds of the day began to denigrate puns and, indeed, may have even encouraged such a critical mindset; secondly, that the word ‘pun’ as a negative catch-all for instances of wordplay cemented itself during the period in which the self-consciously canonical poets appeared to favour the euphemistic pun over the rhetorical pun techniques available to them.

Riverrun

This thesis has merely scratched the surface. It has peered narrowly at a handful of puns and a handful of poets. In its narrow peeking and sifting, it has thrown up a number of seams of punning that may bear further enquiry. Not by your dear author though, I shall leave it to some other insomniac to bear a torch into the pun mine; but I will point out some of the seams of punning that I neglected for the obvious reason that this thesis could not be the Theory of Everything Punning.

The first place further research might begin is with primary material other than self-consciously culturally ‘high’ poetry. An investigation of the puns of the pamphlets, sermons, speeches, plays, essays, ballads, songs, of any written production of the time would give a picture of the wider cultural habits of the period 1590 to 1740. It should be noted that such an effort would require a braver scholar than myself and a lifetime

dedicated to the activity, or a team of scholars armed with a sophisticated database. There is a wealth of printed material available for study and waiting for a pundit willing to tackle the challenge. The natural way of limiting the research would be to focus on one particular genre. This thesis does not limit itself to one genre of poetry but it does limit itself to lyric and epic poetry and this proved to be a useful way of ensure it did not drown in a sea of potential material.

One area that has gone unremarked throughout this thesis is the way in which poets seem to be inveterate punners on names. Not one chapter has been able to avoid interaction with names being played with in some way. Sidney, Shakespeare and Donne all pun on their names (and Donne refers to his wife through a pun). Sin and Eve have their names punned on in *Paradise Lost*. Christ re-inscribes and reclaims the word oracle when he names himself the ‘living Oracle’. The Adam-wits–Adamites of *Absalom and Achitophel* have their name punned on by Dryden. Later, Dryden uses polyptotons on proper names to demonstrate the nascent nationality of Virgil’s epic. Pope puns on Damon and Florio in *Rape of the Lock* while James Moore Smythe is lampooned through a pun in the *Dunciad*. It would be a rewarding area for future research, to examine how and why people pun on names. Punning on people’s names has been an activity engaged in for millennia, and it is not for nothing that Puttenham’s English name for paronomasia was ‘the Nicknamer’.¹⁶

Finally, for the researcher interested primarily in Pope or the Scriblerus Club, it would be fruitful area of research to examine the puns in the margins of the *Dunciad*. Such research would have to extend into understanding eighteenth century criticism and whether punning occurred in it as well. While this thesis demonstrates that punning logic

¹⁶ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. 203.

exists in the margins of the *Dunciad*, it did not make an extended or thorough examination of its use by Scriblerus and the other commentators. Such an examination would have much to say not just about eighteenth century criticism, but the nature of satires upon that criticism and satire as a collaborative art-form (due in part to the fact that Pope was not the sole composer of the criticism that surrounded the *Dunciad*).

Be that as it may, this thesis has made considerable advances in the study of punning throughout the period 1590 to 1740. Because the word ‘pun’ is anachronistic for poets before Dryden, this thesis approaches puns through the lens of rhetorical punning tropes that all the poets of the time would have been taught: asteismus, antanaclasis, paronomasia, syllepsis and polyptoton. The result of this approach can be found in the three central concepts of the thesis: the logic of the pun, polyptoton and euphemistic punning. The idea that puns have a logic of their own is not new but it is interesting to note how Renaissance lyric poets were able to tap into it and deploy it to structure their poems. Milton absorbed the lesson in his youth and then co-opted the logic of the pun to the Satanic standard in *Paradise Lost*. It was with polyptoton that Milton sought to restrict and control polysemy and homophony. Polyptoton is the true centre of this thesis: it is the lynchpin between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century habits of punning and it was Milton who used it to soar to poetic heights few others have achieved. The eighteenth century saw an increased reliance on euphemistic punning that brought puns fully under control of the overall context of the poem, a reversal of the habits we witnessed in some Renaissance poets who used puns to create the context.

I would like to conclude with the hope that I have tried at all times to avoid indulging in any discrimination between the various uses of puns that this thesis has investigated. It is true that this thesis could be read as a tale of poetic loss as the logic of

the pun is marginalized; but, equally, it should be read as a story of poetic gain as the thesis explores the trope polyptoton. Rather than approaching this thesis' historical narrative through the overpowering contemporary theory of evolution, it might be preferable to view it through the lens of Ovidian *non finito* metamorphosis. One habit of punning metamorphosing into other which engenders yet another and on and on — no one habit necessarily better or worse but the link being that they always change and alter and it is part of our duty as literary critics to understand and elucidate those changes and alterations.

Puns are an attempt to stuff more in to words. All the poets studied here attempted to control the linguistic energy released by puns. As Johnson well knew, puns are will-o-the-wisps, they are ephemeral and the more one interacts with them the harder they can be to grasp. The difficulty of that grasping is testified to by the long, involved and detailed readings of this thesis. And, despite my best efforts, I doubt that I have nailed every possible meaning. There is always the threat, with puns, that there is more.

APPENDIX 1

Antanaclasis

A word is repeated and when it is repeated it is used in a different sense.

All seems **Infected** that th' **Infected** spy.¹

Asteismus

Where a word is either repeated in a different sense by another speaker or where a response is structured around an alternative — and perhaps unintended — denotation of a word used by the initial speaker. A technique not frequently deployed in poetry. It is a technique more suited to the stage as it requires two speakers. Hence, this example is from *King Lear*.

KENT: I cannot **conceive** you.

GLOU'STER: Sir, this young fellow's mother could; whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed.²

Paronomasia

A homophone, where two words are linked through their similarity of sound. Groucho Marx was a master, his 'That's irrelephant' is an excellent example.

Ploce

Where a word is repeated. While meanings can shift somewhat through the repetition, ploce does not contain such a large shift in meaning that it would be considered a pun.

¹ Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', l. 558.

² William Shakespeare, 'The Tragedy of King Lear', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997) I.i.11-14.

Ploce and antanaclasis can be confused as they are very similar but antanaclasis is a pure pun while ploce is not. For example: ‘**Tomorrow**, and **tomorrow**, and **tomorrow** | Creeps in this petty pace from day to day’.³

Polyptoton

Where a word is repeated with a change in form. The root word remains the same but tense, number, prefix or suffix may have changed. The change can be so slight that it quite often gets overlooked. However, a change occurs in both the sound, spelling and meaning of the word and so it does constitute word-play.

’Tis more to *guide* than *spur* the Muse’s Steed;
 Restrain his Fury, than provoke his Speed;
 The winged **Courser**, like a gen’rous Horse,
 Shows most true Mettle when you *check* his **Course**.⁴

Syllepsis

A homonym. Where one word is used in such a way as to denote two or more distinctly different meanings.

As many quit the streams that murm’ring fall
 To lull the sons of Marg’ret and Clare-hall,
 Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport
 In troubled waters, but now sleeps in **port**.⁵

³ Shakespeare, 'Macbeth', V.v.18-19.

⁴ Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', ll. 84-87.

⁵ Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, 4.199-202.

Zeugma

Where one verb rules two objects. Often confused with syllepsis. Zeugma is rarely a pun whereas syllepsis is always a pun.

Where thou, Great Anna, whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel **take**, and sometimes Tea.⁶

⁶ *RL* III.7-8. Bold Mine.

APPENDIX 2

Puns discovered in *Paradise Lost* while researching this thesis.

The puns listed below are designed to stand alongside Le Comte's *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry*. Le Comte's valuable work vastly enriched the potential scope of this thesis and is the major concordance of Milton's English puns in contemporary criticism. The following list of puns is my own effort to add in some small way to Le Comte's dictionary. I hereby offer them to the academic community, both in recognition of the debt that I owe Le Comte, but also because as we are both aware, the task of finding and documenting the puns in Milton's English poetry is ongoing and, as yet, and probably for some time to come, unfinished.

1. Babel–Babels: polyptoton (*PL* 3.466-68).
2. Beest–beast: paronomasia (*PL* 1.84).
3. Beholding–beholds: polyptoton (*PL* 3.77-78).
4. Breathed–breath: polyptoton (*PL* 7.525-26).
5. Build–unbuild: polyptoton (*PL* 8.81).
6. Centric–eccentric: polyptoton (*PL* 8.83).
7. Change–changed: polyptoton (*PL* 96-97).
8. Charge: syllepsis (*PL* 6.566).
9. Contend–contention: polyptoton (*PL* 1.99-100).
10. Creature–creatures: polyptoton (*PL* 7.505-06).
11. Cycle–epicycle: polyptoton (*PL* 8.84).
12. Empire: syllepsis (*PL* 1.114).

13. Entertain: syllepsis (*PL* 6.611).
14. Formed–forming: polyptoton (*PL* 8.469-71).
15. Gathering–gathered: polyptoton (*PL* 4.268-70).
16. Glory: syllepsis (*PL* 1.110).
17. Gracious–grace: polyptoton (*PL* 3.144-45).
18. Heaven–heavens: polyptoton (*PL* 7.552-53).
19. Joynd: paronomasia (*PL* 1.90).
20. Maker–making: polyptoton (*PL* 3.113).
21. Overture: syllepsis (*PL* 6.563).
22. Portentous: syllepsis (*PL* 2.761).
23. Potent: syllepsis (*PL* 1.95).
24. Reigning: paronomasia (*PL* 1.124).
25. Sound–resound: polyptoton (*PL* 3.147-49).
26. Tower–towers: polyptoton (*PL* 12.51-52).
27. Triumph: syllepsis (*PL* 1.123).
28. Unfould: syllepsis (*PL* 6.558).

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