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FATAL CLEOPATRAS AND GOLDEN APPLES

Economies of Wordplay in Some Shakespearean 'Numbers'

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5.1 A MATRIX FOR LOOKING AT SHAKESPEAREAN WORDPLAYS (IN POETRY)

Shakespeare's wordplay is no country for people committed to the idea that language should be a transparent and efficient medium of communication. Those who like their language plain tend to find wordplay an 'exercise of virtuosity to no profit, without economy of sense or knowledge'. That description comes from Jacques Derrida, who argues that wordplay (*jeu de mots*) is not a luxury or a 'diversion' but rather a necessity for all language users.[1] There have been and continue to be debates in many languages about whether wordplay, like poetry, is an ornamental phenomenon that, in a pinch or in a hurry, we could do without. Following Derrida, and Shakespeare as well, I suggest

[1] Derrida, 'Proverb: 'He that would pun ... ", in John P. Leavey, Jr, *Glassary* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 17. Derrida's title, to the best of my knowledge his only use of the English word 'pun', alludes to the proverb 'He that would pun would pick a pocket', attributed to the Augustan critic John Dennis and cited by Pope in a note to Book IV of the *Dunciad*. For 18th-century critiques of the pun as a low form of 'diversion', see Simon J. Alderson, 'The Augustan Attack on the Pun', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20, 3 (1996) 1–19. For a broad view of the pun's economy, see Jonathan Culler, 'The Call of the Phoneme', *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, Jonathan Culler (ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 1–16, with further bibliography.

in this chapter that wordplay is integral to the work—or 'path'—of language; I also suggest, through a re-reading of Samuel Johnson's famous attack on Shakespeare's *excessive* love of 'quibbles', that we can usefully approach Shakespeare's practice of wordplay with specific reference to 'numbers': one of Shakespeare's most interesting synonyms for poetry.[2]

As a verbal practice marked both by a concern for 'measure' (as in syllable or line counting) and by a tendency toward 'license' (as in rule-breaking and a love for excess), poetry enacts and reflects on many meanings of 'numbers'. I have selected my main examples of poetic wordplay to illustrate, first, the range of Shakespeare's concern with the concept of numbers and, second, the different kinds—and tempos—of interpretive response he invites from his audience. Some wordplays come in many 'parts', requiring the interpreter to travel slowly, often through notes and translations consulted after a performance or during a re-reading. The main example I adduce here, suggested by Samuel Johnson's oblique reference to the myth of Atalanta, requires us to consider the place of classical allusion in Shakespeare's extended meditation on the relation between 'parts' and 'wholes' in both human and textual bodies. Another type of wordplay, fast cooking as opposed to slow, seems to hit the reader over the head, as it were, with an 'overplus' of plays on a single word: my main example involves the plays on '[W]ill' (as noun, verb, and proper name) from Sonnet 135.

Full of competing names and definitions for its many rhetorical types and/or parts, Shakespearean wordplay in poetry is not something that exists 'out there' for readers or auditors simply to discover.[3] On the contrary, Shakespearean wordplay arguably comes into existence only when two or more human agents meet with the text as a game board. The educated, historically situated writer and the auditor/reader in the past or present create meanings from the enormously unstable annotated text which shows signs of compositors and in some cases actors at work as well as the 'original' writer. As an object of attention that recalls Shakespeare's many puns on 'noting' as 'nothing', 'quibbling' can be compared to an unsettling kind of game in which the rules are not completely known: as Gregory Bateson suggests in his 'Theory of Play and Fantasy', some games are constructed 'not upon the premise "this is play" but rather around the question "is this play?"'[4]

Shakespearean wordplays are complex effects both of syntactic and lexical choices on the writer's, editor's, printer's, reader's, and actor's parts. In poetic texts, features of metre,

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[2] For incisive discussions of Shakespeare's 'numbers' see Paula Blank, *Shakespeare and the Mismeasure of Renaissance Man* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 41–79; and Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Blackwell, 2007) 74–88. For a methodological discussion of puns that anticipates parts of my argument, see Patricia Parker, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor and Shakespearean Translation', *Modern Language Quarterly* 52(3) (1991): 225–61.

[3] For a different view, see Sophie Read's fine essay 'Puns', in Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (eds), *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 88.

[4] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Chandler, 1972) 182.

iguage; I also sug-

rhyme, and line-shape also contribute to the wordplay's mode of existence. Shakespeare's wordplays rarely come singly; they come rather in battalions—or in groups and shapes more nebulous, intertwining different figures of rhetoric that often require the reader to decode inversions of 'normal' word order. Shakespeare's wordplays call attention to the opacity of their medium (or mixed media) of communication.

The ability to shuttle from ear to eye and back again is critical for students of Shakespeare's wordplay. The reading eye (I/ay), however, is often neglected in critical discussions of Shakespeare's wordplay. Theories about how Shakespeare and his contemporaries pronounced words are of course crucial to our appreciation of his many plays on words in different genres; some of these plays were clearly meant to be translated from page to stage. It is useful to recall, however, that our evidence of Shakespeare's acoustic world, brilliantly analyzed by Bruce R. Smith, comes largely from written sources, some accompanied by musical notation and others consisting of measured poetic lines, including those that end in rhymes close enough (in letters) to be debated as 'exact', 'near', or 'slant'.[5]

Some critics define Shakespeare's puns, his most famous species of wordplay, simply as 'acoustic knots'; and some believe that early modern 'speakers' saw puns in writing as 'a representation of language, not the thing itself'.[6] Both views arguably flatten the phenomenal complexity of Shakespeare's wordplays, which reflect a wide range of theories about what a 'word' is and how—and by whom—it may be 'mistaken'. Separations between words were not marked in the *scriptio continua* of ancient and early medieval manuscripts, but 'mistaking' distinctions between words and word-parts—syllables, endings, sounds, and letters—is considered a 'vice' in an ancient tradition of rhetorical discourse that continually had to modify its terms for, and conceptions of, linguistic error in relation to complex processes of cultural translation, including translations from speech to writing as well as from one language to another.[7] In his *Garden of Eloquence* of 1577, Henry Peacham finds an instance of dialectal variation (a northern versus a southern pronunciation/spelling—'wull' for 'will') to illustrate the vice 'antisoecon', or the 'replacing of one letter in a word by another'.[8] We shall later see examples of such

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[5] See Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); see also Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), both with further bibliography.

[6] Many linguists define puns as soundplays; see for instance A. S. Partington, 'A linguistic account of wordplay: The lexical grammar of punning', *Journal of Pragmatics* 41 (2009): 1794–1809, quoting Arthur Koestler on the pun as 'two strings of thought tied together by an acoustic knot'. For the claim that 'early modern people' saw writing as a 'representation' of language, see Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare and Language: Reason, Eloquence and Artifice in the Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 2010). For a counterview, see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[7] On *scripta continuo* see Peter Stallybrass, 'Introduction', in Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass, and Nancy J. Vickers (eds), *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 5.

[8] Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577, rev. 1593), cited in William Poole, 'The vices of style', in Adamson et al. (2007) 236–51, at 239.

'vices' that could also be classified as 'virtuous' ornaments: how is the reader/auditor to draw the line between a 'proper' figure and an 'abuse'?

Fascinated by the border between licensed and unlicensed word use, Shakespeare often explores it by giving us communicative misfires between speakers of different social ranks and genders; both gender and rank affected one's access to grammar school education. Consider for example the moment in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* where the 'clownish servant' Speed asks another servant, Lance, 'what news with your mastership?' Lance fails to grasp the irony of Speed's address, which promotes the servant to the master's role, and thus Lance replies, 'With my master's ship? Why, it is at sea', to which Speed, who seems to have some acquaintance with grammar school rules of rhetoric, retorts, 'Well, your old vice still, mistake the word' (III.i .276–9).[9] Lance goes on to accuse Speed of being unable to read 'news' that's 'black as ink' on the page. Speed roundly denies being an 'illiterate loiterer'. The modern reader or auditor is invited to think about how discrepancies in linguistic 'wealth' can occur as one travels from hearing a word to reading it. Travels of all kinds affected early modern English readers' and auditors' understanding of specific words and of the 'word' as a concept. New words were entering the language constantly, sometimes as contraband ('low' French and Italian words for diseases, for instance), sometimes as imports of the kind Spenser's teacher Richard Mulcaster legitimates as 'enrichments' of the English tongue.[10] Shakespeare is credited with coining some 1700 new words, not all of which stayed in the language.

One that still exists according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* but that may well not look 'native' to most Anglophone readers today is 'dis-eate', as it is printed in the First Folio version of *Macbeth*, or, as it is printed in the Oxford Shakespeare, 'disseat': 'This push | Will cheer me ever or disseat me now' (V. iii. 22–3). For William Empson, the author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, this is a rich wordplay illustrating an 'intentional' creation of interpretive alternatives. Empson speculates that Shakespeare wrote 'something a little removed from any of the approximate homonyms, to set … reader[s] groping about their network'. We can translate 'disseat' most obviously as 'unseat' or 'dethrone'; Empson argues persuasively for additional associations to the words 'disease, disseizes, and defeat', with a further play on the word-part 'eate', suggesting both Macbeth's fear of the hostile army regarded as a hungry ogre and the remorse already 'gnawing' at Macbeth's entrails.[11] Empson allows, however, that the new-coined

[9] Renaissance readers might have classified this 'mistaking' as a 'barbarismus' (mispronunciation); see Richard Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) 18–19. Shakespeare is particularly interested in errors of 'hearing' caused by unevenly distributed alphabetic literacies in Latin and in English. On his rich puns on 'ear', 'air', 'hear', and 'heir', see Philippa Berry, 'Hamlet's Ear', in Catherine M. S. Alexander (ed.), *Shakespeare and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 201–12. See also Margreta de Grazia's discussion of malapropisms in 'Shakespeare and the Craft of Language', de Grazia and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 59–60.

[10] Richard Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementarie VVhich Entreateth Chefelie of the Right Writing of Our English Tung. 1582*. Facsimile edn (Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1970) 168–9.

[11] William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1930) 83.

verb—which Shakespeare perhaps used to spread our attention 'over a wide map of the ways in which [the word] may be justified'[12]—could look simply like a mistake to a printer or to later editors (or, I would add, to some among Shakespeare's first readers or auditors). How different is Shakespeare's coinage in *Macbeth* from Fluellen's inadvertent but politically rich Welsh-dialect deformation of a phrase describing Alexander the Great as 'Alexander the Pig' (for 'big'; *Henry V*, IV. vii. 12–13)?

As Margaret Tudeau-Clayton has astutely argued, 'the playwright-actor's stage and the translator's page "rhymed" in early modern English culture inasmuch as they both constituted sites for the production, regulation, and interrogation of the boundaries of "our English tongue".[13] Wordplays often arise in the territory between languages or dialects—two terms not distinguished in the Renaissance in the way they commonly are today.[14] This is a territory where speculative etymologies flourish and where George Puttenham finds many instances of 'mingle-mangle', his name for a broad category of 'vices' in ancient rhetoric that included both 'unnatural word coinage' and mistakes in pronunciation such as 'illiterate' males and females often perform in Shakespeare's plays; my favorite example occurs when Mistress Quickly hears 'nouns' as 'wounds' (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV. i. 22).[15]

In zones between times, languages, cultures, and differently educated people, wordplays may easily be mistaken for something foreign and without value; they may also be simply missed, as no doubt continues to happen for Shakespeare's auditors and readers—including editors—today. The history of wordplay is tied up with the history of censorship: editors may deal with perceived 'mistakes' by cutting or emending them. The history of wordplay is also intertwined with differing modern understandings of the (linked) institutions of lexicography, of publishing, and of education. Samuel Johnson contributed to all three of those institutions in a passage that defines Shakespeare as an unthrifty 'traveller' in the world of words; I want to suggest, however, that the famous critique of Shakespeare's passion for the 'quibble' also shows Johnson himself travelling from trope to trope in a way that raises questions about the 'economy' of wordplay.[16]

[12] Empson (1930) 84.

[13] Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, 'Scenes of Translation in Jonson and Shakespeare: *Poetaster, Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Translation and Literature* 11 (March 2002): 3–4.

[14] On the Renaissance meanings of 'dialect', see Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996); on the difficulty of distinguishing linguistic 'mistakes' from neologisms, see Sylvia Adamson, 'Literary Language', in Roger Lass (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language: 1476–1776* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1999) 3: 539–653.

[15] See de Grazia (2001) 59. On 'mingle-mangle' as a term in rhetorical treatises and in antitheatrical tracts, see Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, 'Richard Carew, William Shakespeare and the Politics of Translating Virgil in Early Modern England and Scotland', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 5 (1999) 507–27, esp. 525–6.

[16] In its earliest appearances in English, according to the *OED*, 'quibble', like 'pun', appears as a member of a sleazy group: 'We old men have our crotchets, our conundrums, / O[o]ur figaries, quirks and quibbles /A [a]s well as youth', says a comic character in 1611, illustrating *OED* 1. n. But 'quib', the word's short form, appears much earlier and in ways that support the *OED* editors' speculation that the word comes from the Latin *quibus*, a word associated with the 'quirks and quillets' of the law.

Johnson defines Shakespeare's love for quibbles in a way that pertains to concepts of number and measure; for Johnson, Shakespeare loves quibbles to excess: 'A quibble', Johnson writes,

> is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveler; 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 for him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.[17]

William Empson sees Johnson here illustrating a typical 18th-century assessment of the pun as a 'petty' thing.[18] Ironically, however, Empson himself implies that there may be a significant similarity between Shakespeare the quibbler as Johnson describes him—pursuing 'luminous vapours' in a strange land—and the modern critic attempting to grasp the meaning of a pun in Shakespeare's (to us somewhat foreign) English. 'It is clear', Empson states, 'that we have to exercise a good deal of skill in cutting out implications that aren't wanted in reading poems.... [O]ne does not want merely irrelevant ambiguities.... [T]he question how far unintended or even unwanted extra meanings do in fact impose themselves, and thereby drag our minds out of their path ... is obviously a legitimate one.'[19] In the notion of 'unwanted' meanings beyond authorial 'intention', Empson allows for a certain blending of interpreter's and writer's dilemma: both grapple with an English language that Empson constructs here as potentially filled with spectres that may 'mislead' the critic trying to stay on his reasonable path through thickets of ambiguities; it is dangerous also, perhaps, to the critic's readers, especially if they are foreigners; 'as a teacher of English literature in foreign countries', Empson states, with irony, 'I have always tried to warn my students off [my] book'.[20]

The dangers of annotating or explicating Shakespeare's wordplay have long included the possibility of bringing sexual and scatological meanings into clear though not clean view from what Johnson vividly calls 'the mire'.[21] The dangers also include the possibility that the critic may be unable to defend an essential(ist) distinction between 'the puns

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[17] Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare', in Arthur Sherbo (ed.) *Johnson on Shakespeare, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) 7:439.

[18] Empson (1930) 87–8.

[19] Empson (1930) xiii.

[20] Empson (1930) xii.

[21] This is a rhetorical territory brilliantly explored by Poole, "The vices of style', in Adamson et al. (2007) 236–51.

that are under discussion and [the interpreter's] own discursive prose'.[22] Johnson himself offers a 'pregnant quibble' in his critique of Shakespeare: Cleopatra was 'fatal' in being 'both the death and destiny of Antony'.[23]

Johnson's pun initially seems safe from and indeed a bulwark against infection by the kind of quibbles he is critiquing. His use of 'fatal' is epistemologically manageable: it activates a witty pair of meanings, not a series stretching off into a vapourous twilight. Johnson's pun has a 'point' and performs closure, not openness, both in terms of rhetorical structure and in terms of semantic statement. By embedding his pun on 'fatal' in the third and last of three sentences that each begins with the phrase 'A quibble', Johnson builds toward a climax through the trope of anaphora—a 'repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive clauses or verses';[24] he then offers another series of three (but no more) in the daring metalepsis of the final period. (I use the Greek term 'metalepsis' here in the sense given in one early modern English treatise of rhetoric: the figure occurs when we 'goe by degrees to that which is shewed'.)[25] In Johnson's final sentence, we move from the nugatory little quibble to the big Egyptian queen to the whole 'world'. The steps of the series, rising in size and cultural value, come to an end and are neatly contained as a single enormous loss imputed to Shakespeare as an experience that made him 'content'. He is thus equated with his own character Mark Antony, but not the Antony hugely discontent with Cleopatra—and his loss of epic stature—after the battle of Actium; instead, the 'content' Johnson bestows upon Shakespeare is a state that Antony entered completely, we may surmise, only after his death; before then, his passion for Cleopatra '[o]'erflows the measure' (I. i. 2) without giving him—or her—full satisfaction.

Johnson captures Shakespeare both as a motionless Mark Antony inhabiting the timeless space of the infinitive 'to lose' and as a memorable lover yoked with his 'fatal' beloved. The author and his quibble are captured in prose that has some of the sonorous and measured qualities we expect from neo-classical poetry. Anaphora, like 'parison'—the balanced clauses of 'it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire'—are tropes that regularly cross the line between prose and poetry in classical and in English letters.

Posing a subtle threat to the economy of the quibble as Johnson defines it, however, and moving us closer to quibbles as they work in some selected passages of Shakespearan verse, is the figure of Atalanta. She is present in Johnson's passage only as a metonym, a 'golden apple'; the surmise that it is *her* apple—though bearing vapourous traces of other famous apples in classical, biblical, and perhaps even Norse literature—is supported by

[22] Catherine Bates discusses this distinction astutely in 'The Point of Puns', *Modern Philology* 96, 4 (May 1999): 421–38, quotation from 430.

[23] Molly Mahood, 'The Fatal Cleopatra', in *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957) 9.

[24] Lanham (1968) 8; other names for this trope are repetitio, iteration, epanaphora, epembasis, and, in Puttenham's English rendering, 'report'; see his *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), facsimile edition with Introduction by Baxter Hathaway (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1970) 208.

[25] Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, as cited in the epigraph of Brian Cummings, 'Metalepsis: the boundaries of metaphor', in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, 216–33.

her brief appearance in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, in a passage upon which Johnson comments. The apple that Johnson selects as the second of his three main images for Shakespeare's beloved quibble (first the 'vapours', third the 'fatal Cleopatra') is itself one of three distractions thrown in the virgin Atalanta's path by a suitor named Hippomenes in some versions of the story.[26] Her dispersed larger story—which has parallels to Cleopatra's and which has many more parts than Johnson mentions in his preface to his edition of Shakespeare—has significance for our understanding of Shakespeare's wordplay beyond the apparent boundaries of Johnson's preface. His allusion to Atalanta has not (to my knowledge) been much commented on; but she can arguably serve as a useful guide into one species of wordplay common in Shakespeare's poetry: a 'quiet' kind with dispersed riches that we can collect (in part) by the labour of interpretive tracking across textual and linguistic borders. Before illustrating such a labour by moving from Johnson's preface to his note on Atalanta in *As You Like It* to Ovid's two stories about a heroine who has a single proper name (from the Greek *atalantos*, meaning 'equal in weight') but two different fathers, possibly two husbands, and an illegitimate son, I want to pause to reflect on poetry as a mode of language formally and semantically concerned with 'numbers' and with the question of measure and thus of *limits* to one's erotic and verbal powers of play.

5.2 WORDPLAYS IN NUMBERED LINES

'These numbers will I tear, and write in prose', declares Longueville in *Love's Labour's Lost* (4.3.54). The line is delivered by a character whose name puns bilingually (in a promiscuous example of the trope 'mingle-mangle') on 'langue'—French for tongue and language—and on the English words 'long', 'town', and 'vile'. Despite expressing frustration with his poem—he fears that his 'stubborn lines' will fail to 'move' his even more stubborn lady—Longueville reads it aloud and sends it as a letter. It introduces two punclusters that are important to Shakespeare's theory and practice of love poetry, and of his parodies thereof. The first cluster—what Gregory Ulmer aptly names a 'puncept'—focuses our attention on the word 'lines'.[27] This, in its noun-forms, can signify not only the 'black lines' of poems on a page but also the male and female reproductive parts; scholars hypothesize a homophonic pun on 'lines' and 'loins' in Shakespeare's England.[28] In yet other shades of meaning, 'lines' can signify wrinkles on a face and, more generally, marks distinguishing some 'parts' of the human body, and/or of the world, from other

[26] For her different genealogies and appearances in classical sources, including as the 'virgin' mother of an illegitimate boy, see <http://www.theoi.com/Heroine/Atalanta.html>.

[27] See Ullmer, 'The Puncept in Grammatology', in Jonathan Culler (ed.), *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 164–89.

[28] See for instance Stephen Booth's astonishing comments on the phrase 'lines of life' in Sonnet 16.9 (*Shakespeare's Sonnets*, xi–xvii).

parts: Stefano in *The Tempest* bawdily conflates the terrestrial and female equator-lines, and King Lear shows Goneril her future lands as they appear on a map—'Of all these bounds even from this line to this' (I. i. 63).[29]

The second puncept to which Longueville introduces us centers (eccentrically) on the word 'tear'. This can morph from verb to noun in a way that transforms the sonnet— from the Italian word for 'little sound'—into an emission from the eye. In its noun form as a drop from an eye, 'tear' appears earlier in the same scene of *Love's Labour's Lost* in which Longueville promises to write henceforth in prose. Another amateur sonneteer, the King of Navarre, writes to his beloved, 'Thou shin'st in every tear that I do weep' (IV. iii. 31). His sonnet likens his tears both to water (in 'the deep' and as a 'drop'); and to glasses (as mirrors). A complex site for reflection on language itself as a far from 'transparent' medium, the King's sonnet goes beyond conventional limits of the form (it is sixteen rather than fourteen lines); it conveys sadness and frustration to its 'queen of queens' and offers her crafted lines like trembling liquid drops. These look forward to the bawdy pun on sexual orgasm in the iambic pentameter couplet that immediately follows the sonnet:

> How shall she know my griefs? I'll drop the paper.
> Sweet leaves, shade folly. Who is he comes here?
>
> (IV. iii. 40–1]

The end-rhyme on 'paper' and 'here' awkwardly pairs a feminine with a masculine final foot. Both formally and semantically, the couplet lacks closure. And, indeed, it opens wittily into the King's next line, in which he answers his own question with yet another rhyme conjuring up the 'tear' phoneme (also a grapheme): 'What, Longueville, and reading—listen ear!' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV. iii. 42). Both 'tears' and 'lines' emerge from this comic scene of writing and reading sonnets as sites of rich wordplay yoking sight and sound, seeing and reading, male and female—and also male and male.

Shakespeare's rhyming numbers here, as in the Sonnets, explore modes of 'increase' that both mirror and mock the 'reproductive marital economy of early modern England'.[30] I take that phrase from Mary Bly, whose study of bawdy wordplay and queer virgins in Jacobean drama helps me make my way back to Johnson's figure of Atalanta. She, as you will recall, is figured in Johnson's preface as a single golden apple. In Book 8 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, she is an Arcadian maiden whose father, Iasus, exposes her on a hillside because he wanted a son; suckled by a she-bear, Atalanta is protected by Diana (Artemis in Greek versions of the story) and is the first to wound a boar in the famous Calydonian hunt. In a better-known story, part of a monitory tale that

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[29] For *The Tempest*'s play (IV. i. 235) on a 'jerkin' taken off a clothes 'line' that turns into a site of equinoctial venereal disease, see Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language* (London: Athlone Press, 1997) 189.

[30] Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queans on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 9.

Ovid's Venus relates to Adonis in *Metamorphoses* 10, Atalanta the fleet-footed daughter of Schoenus loses a race to Hippomenes when he follows Venus' advice to distract Atalanta by means of three golden apples. Offended by Hippomenes' failure to thank her after winning Atalanta as his bride, Venus decides to 'make an example of them both' (Atalanta being guilty by marriage, as it were); the goddess fills Hippomenes with 'incontinent desire' as the couple is passing the temple of the mother goddess Cybele. They defile the temple with their lust and are about to be killed by Cybele when Venus decides that such a 'punishment was light'. Measurement of many kinds is important to the story. Venus turns the couple into savage lions of just the kind that her 'internal' auditor, Adonis, should avoid, lest 'your manly courage be the ruin of us both'.[31] When Shakespeare takes THAT story up in *Venus and Adonis*, he challenges the way Ovid's goddess metes out blame.

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare groups Atalanta with three other ancient women who illustrate a fatal knot between love and death. The yoking, which I read as an intriguing poetic paratext for Johnson's prose critique of Shakespeare's 'barren' quibbles, occurs in a set of thirty rhyming lines praising Rosalind in Act III, Scene ii. Touchstone deems these lines 'bad fruit' and Rosalind herself judges them to be poorly measured; written in the seven-syllable tetrameter that Shakespeare uses in other riddling play-songs, the lines in Orlando's poem oscillate between being best construed as 'tailless' trochees or as 'headless' iambs; they have in them, Rosalind remarks, 'more feet than the verses would bear' (III. ii. 162–3).[32] The author of the verses bears a name that comes, as Longueville's does, from outside of England's borders: Orlando harks back to the love-mad hero of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and the English Orlando moves his comically uncertain poetic feet in a literary zone that is both mock epic and mock Petrarchan. Not yet a master of his medium, Orlando tries pastiche, and specifically, the method made famous by the Greek painter Zeuxis, who allegedly painted a beautiful woman by copying different parts of her body from different models. Orlando credits 'Nature', but we credit Shakespeare, for having 'distilled' Rosalind in these lines:[33]

> Helen's cheek, but not her heart,
> Cleopatra's majesty,
> Atalanta's better part,
> Sad Lucretia's modesty...
>
> (III. ii. 142–5)

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[31] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10, 688–707, Frank Justus Miller (ed. and trans.), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916) 112–15.

[32] Rosalind describes the metrically ambiguous poem's feet as 'lame' (III. ii. 163). Shakespeare uses seven syllable lines in other 'riddling' songs, for instance, 'Tell me, where is fancy bred' (*Merchant of Venice*). Puttenham discusses this phenomenon as 'catalecticke' and 'anacatalecticke' verse ('odde vnder and odde ouer the iust measure of their verse') in *The Arte*, 142.

[33] On the verb *distil* ('to drip or trickle down' [*OED*]) in Shakespeare's sonnets see Jeffrey Masten, 'Gee, Your Heir Smells Terrific: Response to [Richard Halpern's] "Shakespeare's Perfume"', *Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar*, <http://emc.eserver.org/1–2/masten.html>.

What is Atalanta's 'better part'? Is there a play on 'part' as a part of 'partner' (as lover or husband)? Is there an allusion to Christ's praise of Mary (sister of Martha) for playing a 'good' part (or better or best part, depending on the translation) in Luke 10:42? There, 'part' is a woman's well-chosen role in a mini-drama that values an act of listening to Christ's words over toiling in the house. Johnson considers neither of these possibilities, but he does find the phrase more puzzling than modern editors do; whereas they usually gloss the phrase in a marginal word or two that presumes only one possible interpretive context ('beauty' and/or 'fleetness'), Johnson ponders (and constitutes) a larger problem, wondering whether Shakespeare perhaps knew more than one Atalanta composed of higher and lower parts; for him, the baffling word has both physical and moral connotations, though the former are present only by circumlocution:

> I know not well what could be the better part of Atalanta here ascribed to Rosalind. Of the Atalanta most celebrated, and who therefore must be intended here where she has no epithet of discrimination, the better part seems to have been her heels, and the worse part was so bad that Rosalind would not thank her lover for the comparison. There is a more obscure Atalanta, a huntress and a heroine, but of her nothing bad is recorded, and therefore I know not which was the better part. Shakespeare was no despicable mythologist, yet he seems here to have mistaken some other character for that of Atalanta.[34]

Johnson's tone is as puzzling to me as the Shakespearean phrase was (it seems) to him. Is he being ironic? Only a few lines earlier in this same scene, Touchstone gives us license to read Orlando's phrase 'better part' in terms of the 'worse part' Johnson mentions but disavows (as in the classic illustration of the presence of the negated phenomenon in language, 'do not mention white elephants'). Mocking Orlando's metre and his high Petrarchan register as well, Touchstone 'turns' Orlando's own apparently novel use of the word 'lined' as a past participle for an artistic act of 'outlining' or sketching—'All the pictures fairest lined | Are but black to Rosalind' (III. ii. 90–1)[35]—into a bawdy glimpse of a dark space inside a body likened both to a piece of 'wintered' clothing and to a female dog in the act of copulation: 'Wintered garments must be lined, | So must slender Rosalind' (III. ii. 103–4).[36] The couplet employs a comically close rhyme and sucks

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[34] Cited from *As You Like It*, Variorum, Horace Howard Furness (ed.), 6th edn, (Philadelphia: J. & B. Lippencott, 1890) 8, 153. Alan Brissendon, in his 1994 Oxford edition of the play, glosses 'the better part' as 'Atalanta's beauty, compared with her swiftness'. Atalanta's son Parthenopaios, whose name stresses his birth to an unwedded female, is not mentioned in Ovid, but he is mentioned in many other classical sources that Shakespeare—and Johnson—could have known. Johnson sees that a 'worse' part of Atalanta is a logical corollary of Shakespeare's reference to her 'better part'; the 'worse' part belongs to a semantic web well analysed in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (eds), (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) esp. 12–14.

[35] The *OED* finds this the earliest use of 'line' in this sense (v. 24).

[36] Touchstone's lines are often cut in production, and many editors do not gloss the two bawdy meanings of 'lined'; Frances Dolan does, and I draw on her Pelican edition (New York: Penguin, 2000).

the proper name into the vortex of the wordplay—as occurs elsewhere in Shakespeare's oeuvre. Given the labile eroticism of Touchstone's very name, and his closing ambiguous equation of 'sweetest rose' with 'love's prick', it seems likely that the entire passage plays with Rosalind's dual identity as boy and girl, 'master mistress' of passion, as Sonnet 20 famously puts it. As Rosalind and Ganymede both, s/he is transformed through Touchstone's punning couplet into a sexual container and, at the same time, a piece of winter clothing filled out from the inside. The couplet illustrates Debra Fried's argument that in many rhyming pairs, the second line gives a 'distorted memory of the first' that creates a pun-like wordplay; the verbal play has the potential to create a metamorphosis in our assessment of the situation or character.[37]

Atalanta, like Rosalind, at one time acted like a boy; she may have appealed to Shakespeare as a source for his meditation on Rosalind's multiple 'parts' because Atalanta's participation in a famous foot race conjures up questions about play-acting and bloodlines as well as about strange courtships. Moreover, as Angelo suggests in a complex wordplay in *Measure for Measure*—'And now I give my sensual race the rein' (II. iv. 160)—'race' may signify not only athletic competition but also 'blood' or passion. As the latter, it is something that needs checking, reining in, as a horse does, or as young women's bodies do—especially when they are far from their father's sight in wild forests with a 'heart' (rhymes with 'part') always threatening transgressive action. In Book 8 of the *Metamorphoses*, which is one of Johnson's likely sources for the 'more obscure' Atalanta he mentions in his note, Ovid depicts her as a skilled hunter who competes in a different competition pitting men against women: when she is 'first' to wound a boar, she shames her male competitors, among whom is Ancaeus. 'Armed with a two-headed axe', he is 'swollen with pride and with boastful lips'. The image reminds us that 'part' can also signify the male organ, here presented as the source of a primal competition: Ancaeus commands his audience to 'Learn now ... how far a man's weapons surpass a girl's'.[38] Ancaeus' boast leads directly to his death whereas Atalanta remains, for a time, in a comic romance that turns only at the very end to tragedy.

By comparing his beautiful Rosalind to 'parts' of stories about Atalanta, Cleopatra, Lucretia, and Helen, Orlando inadvertently leaves the reader/spectator with a chance to ponder different possible outcomes of Rosalind's and Orlando's story. The interpreter is in the middle of a riddling tale, part tragedy, part comedy; our situation is similar to Atalanta's at the moment when she consulted an oracle and received the usual opaque message: 'A husband will be your bane ... flee from the intercourse of husband; and yet you will not flee, and, though living, you will lose yourself' (564–66). Terrified of marriage, she devises the race-test for her suitors. Those who lose will die—and they do, until Hippomenes wins with the previously mentioned device of the three golden apples.

[37] Debra Fried, 'Rhyme Puns', in Culler (1988) 83–99.
[38] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8, 392, Miller (1961) 434–5.

The ball-like objects he throws sequentially on Atalanta's path arguably symbolize his masculine parts—perhaps even an 'excess' of them.[39] He symbolically sacrifices some portion of his masculine prowess in order to win her sexual favours. This mythological couple is thus an interesting analogue both for Antony and Cleopatra and for Orlando and Rosalind—and for a theory of wordplay as enabling potentially illicit crossings of boundaries between bodies and genders as well as languages.

By following Atalanta's figure out of Johnson's preface into the semantically and rhetorically fuzzier realm of the footnote and its Shakespearean and Ovidian 'paratext(s)', I have attempted to dramatize my chief concern in this essay, which is with those moments when the quibble's numbers, as I would like to call them, become too many to control with a single explanatory and/or evaluative net. Such moments create epistemological queasiness—what the French call *mise en abŷme*. Shakespeare's writing in numbered measures, especially but not only in metrical lines bonded by rhyme, makes aspects of poetic form cross dramatically with conceptual issues pertaining to the competition between artistic and bio-social forms of 'reproduction', and with concepts of keeping and losing control. In the final segment of this essay, I want to consider several Renaissance discussions of pun-like tropes as frames for thinking about Sonnet 135, an intensely puzzling small poem that seems to offer a type of fast-acting wordplay that contrasts with the slow, vapourish trail we have examined, with Johnson's help, in 'Atalanta's better part'. In both of my main examples, the question of parts and wholes is thematically as well as formally important.

5.3 WORDPLAYS IN OVERPLUS

In the Renaissance grammar school, pupils were repeatedly sent to Latin poetic texts to practice the art of 'double translation'.[40] Through this art, and its accompanying drilling in noting and judging rhetorical tropes as 'licit' or 'illicit', students became involved 'with the difficulties of rhetorical taxonomy'.[41] Those difficulties were dramatized in the terminological and evaluative slippages between multiple versions of an enterprise that involved both finding the 'same' terms across the English/Latin border and simultaneously distinguishing good tropes from 'improper' ones.[42] The rules were numerous,

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[39] On 'ball' as testicle in early modern texts including Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, see Williams (1997) 34–5.

[40] On double translation, see Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 43–4. See also Martin Elsky, *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing, and Print in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 54–6, 122–5.

[41] Poole, 'The Vices of Style' (2007) 243.

[42] For Cicero, metaphorical words are those 'which are transferred and placed, as it were, in an alien place' ('eis quae transferuntur et quasi alieno in loco collocantur'), *The Orator's Education* 3, 37, H. Rackham (ed. and trans.), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942) 2, 118–19.

variably translated from different classical sources, and of course inconsistent; poetry, moreover, was typically a verbal zone 'where the rules were slackened', though not without repeated expressions of concern about how much poetic license was too much. This large discursive field about tropes (which spreads across discussions of logic, grammar, and poetry as well as rhetoric) provides a heuristic frame for thinking about wordplay in Sonnet 135, a poem that explores precisely the conceptual area where 'good figures' (if they exist at all) metamorphose into 'trespasses'.

Sophie Read offers a lucid analysis of the three classical tropes that she thinks come closest to corresponding to the wordplay-types known in English as 'quibble', 'clench', 'catch', and—after Shakespeare's death—as 'pun'.[43] Her choices are paronomasia (Puttenham's 'the nicknamer'); antanaclasis (Puttenham's 'the rebound'); and syllepsis (Puttenham's 'the double supply'). Read sees the difference between the 'nomenclature of the rhetoricians and the slang terms' (she doesn't mention Puttenham's more decorous English translations) as one of 'precision, and of prestige'.[44] Precision, perhaps, though the rhetorician's definitions, as I've been suggesting, can be baffling. Cultural prestige is also something hard to estimate in retrospect. While for modern readers 'antanaclasis' may carry more cultural capital than 'clinch', we cannot be sure how readers in Shakespeare's time would have measured the phenomena. His texts are full of parodies of those whose small Latin and less Greek leads them into types of ornate diction considered 'vicious', and the cultural interest in rhetorical 'excess' could well have helped determine whether a wordplay under any particular name smelled sweet or weedy. The naming of tropes is clearly important to how modern critics select early modern examples; but the examples we choose in order to illustrate different tropes may in turn work to challenge and even in some cases erase the boundary lines drawn by the naming operations.

In Sonnet 135, 'Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will', there are rich examples of paronomasia, antanaclasis, syllepsis, polyptoton, ploce, and a number of other pun-like wordplays as these are variously defined by some Renaissance rhetoricians and re-described by modern scholars. There are also (I would suggest) vivid illustrations of rhetorical 'vices' such as those William Poole categorizes under the rubric 'inordinate' and defines through phrases drawn from Richard Sherry's *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550). Among those most relevant to Shakespeare's Sonnet 135 are 'aischrologia' (obscenity), 'as when the words be spoken, or joined together, that they may be

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[43] The definitions Read (2007) selects for her tropes differ significantly from Puttenham's definitions—and from some modern critics' understandings of these words for operations in words. Margreta de Grazia, for instance, finds that *none* of the Renaissance tropes correspond to the 'simple definition of a pun as a single sound possessing multiple senses', 'Homonyms Before and After Lexical Standardization', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* (1990), 154.

[44] Read (2007) 82. For Puttenham's terms, see *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) 212 (in the index, he or his compositor calls this trope paronomasia but in the text, it is 'prosonomasia'); 216 (antanaclasis) and 176 (sillepsis).

wronge [wrung] into a fylthye sense'; and 'cacozelia' (affectation), 'as when affecting copy [copiousness], we fall into a vayne bablynge'.

Here is the Oxford version of the poem:

> Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will,
> And Will to boot, and Will in overplus.
> More than enough am I that vex thee still,
> To thy sweet will making addition thus.
> Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
> Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
> Shall will in others seem right gracious,
> And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
> The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
> And in abundance addeth to his store;
> So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will
> One will of mine, to make thy large will more.
>   Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
>   Think all but one, and me in that one Will.

In this sonnet's fourteen lines, the word 'will' appears twelve times—thirteen if you allow the verb form 'wilt' (by polyptoton, 'repetition of words from the same root but with different endings').[45] There are many more plays on 'will' if you count the paronomasias in the poem as including the rhyme words 'still' and 'kill'—and their many cousins from the associative matrix of the sonnet sequence as a whole: 'fulfill', for example, from the next sonnet, and of course 'ill'—the part-word repeated inside and outside the bounds of Sonnet 135; in 144, 'ill' rhymes with 'still' and also with 'evil' and 'devil', while there is a significant slant rhyme, here and elsewhere, on 'well' (as 'vagina') and 'will' in one of its senses. One definition of paronomasia is 'a figure which declineth into a contrarie by a likelihood of letters, either added, changed, or taken away'; that definition certainly covers rhyming puns in which a single letter changes. The poem illustrates 'syllepsis' in its definition of 'when ... one word serveth to many sences'; and the sonnet also abundantly illustrates 'antanaclasis' as 'a figure which repeats a word that hath two significations, and the one of them contrary, or at least, unlike to the other'.[46] Intriguingly, antanaclasis as Puttenham illustrates it looks very like a paronomasia on 'will'/'kill'; Puttenham's example of antanaclasis, which Shakespeare borrows in at least two plays, consists in the subtraction of the letter 'i' in the word 'married': 'The maide that soone married is, soone marred is'.[47]

[45] Lanham (1968) 78; the trope is also named 'traductio' and 'adnominatio'.

[46] These definitions are from Peacham and Day, as cited in and selected by Read (2007) 80. Equally relevant to Sonnet 135 is 'ploce', from the Greek 'plaiting'; this trope is a 'repetition of a word with a new signification after the intervention of another word or words' (Lanham, 1968, 77–8).

[47] Puttenham (1589), 216. Cf. 'A young man married is a man that's marred', All's Well that Ends Well, II. iii. 298.

Our ideas about puns and kindred tropes—and the multitudinous discourse about them—are illuminated, and challenged, by this sonnet's formally bounded but semantically open reflection on 'will' and its mates. David Willburn, who himself participates in the sonnet's play on will as a 'proper' name belonging to many, offers this summary of the multiple meanings of that word 'in' the poem, or rather, as Willburn insists, 'potentially' in the poem's letters if a reader or speaker plays the game: "The term occupies a densely over-determined semantic nexus within which notions of erotic appetite or desire, sexual and procreative organs, aggression (the will to power), wish, whim, inclination, volition, conscious intention, purpose, and bequest or testament co-exist at varying levels of potentiality".[18]

A syllepsis or homonymic pun that is occluded by the modern-spelling edition of the sonnet but that can be readily seen in the original 1609 version sums up the nexus of concerns about verbal excess that I have been exploring in this essay. If I had to pick one word to stand in for my argument here, it would be 'abundance', in line nine of Sonnet 135: in the poem's 'original' version, which of course is not necessarily what was written by Shakespeare's hand, the word is 'aboundance'. The letter 'O', also a number, paradoxically both restores and dissolves the idea of a *limit*; 'bound' lurks in the original spelling of 'abundance', but noting that word-play—actualizing its potential—takes us to an aporia, a conceptual antinomy that we cannot master. 'Bound' is and is not a meaning licensed by this poem's image of 'abundance' as a rich and apparently limitless 'sea' (line 9) whose drops one cannot count.

This sea is a polyvalent and much discussed image; Eve Sedgwick reads it as a darkly funny and deeply misogynist insult to the addressee, signifying 'female sexuality as great sociable melting pot' in which men, or their 'wills', seem to be reduced to the scale of homunculi, almost plankton, in a warm but unobservant sea';[19] Valerie Traub, citing but also swerving from Sedgwick, views the 'sea' as a homoerotic space composed of seminal fluid. For Traub, the sea signals an 'erasure of female reproductive power' that 'compensates defensively for the generative power accorded to male-male love' earlier in the sonnet sequence; but the sea is also the locus—or matrix, I would suggest—in which the female addressee's 'will' is transformed into an abiding threat to the social order. True, her abundant sea is not a cradle for biological reproduction; but it is a place that works, like the 'mother tongue', to remind the speaker that other wordsmiths who have

[18] Willbern, *Poetic Will: Shakespeare and the Play of Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) xiv; see also Booth (ed.), with analytic commentary, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) 466–7. See also Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) esp. ch. 5 and Valerie Traub, 'Sex Without Issue: Sodomy, Reproduction, and Signification in Shakespeare's Sonnet', in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, James Schiffer (ed.), (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999) 431–52, esp. 437–8. There has been an abundance of strong commentary on this poem; see Schiffer and Traub for further bibliography.

[19] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 38.

been there before him will be there still when he is gone. The sonnet's jocular misogyny spills into subtle fears of miscegeny, fears of mixing essences and of thereby losing the boundaries between self and other whether these are construed as separating fair from dark skins or 'male' from 'female' wills.[50] As Kathryn Schwarz justly observes of Sonnet 147, '[W]ill binds together what reason should hold apart'.[51] In Sonnet 135, the speaker argues that he should be allowed to add his liquid 'rain' to the addressee's 'store', her 'will', which can become 'more' without anyone noticing the 'addition'. The all-receiving promiscuous sea offers the speaker what Sedgwick calls the 'pleasure of amalgamation, not in the first place with the receptive woman but with the other men received ("Think all but one, and me in that one will")'. We cannot know, however, whether that 'one will' is a sign of the poet's vision of his phallic triumph, the godlike 'I am that I am' with which the speaker played in Sonnet 121.9;[52] or whether he is acknowledging the dark implications of the Renaissance proverb 'One is no number'[53]—a proverb with which he plays often and which, in an earlier sonnet to the fair young man, served as a warning against dying without 'proper' issue: 'Thou single wilt prove none' (Sonnet 8.14).

The conceptual 'ab[o]undance' of Sonnet 135 spills over its final line's 'one will' into the next sonnet, where the speaker's argument is repeated with a difference—as in line 8, 'Among a number one is reckoned none'. That line continues the sonnet sequence's larger line of inquiry into the meaning of 'none'—as the Arabic number and Roman alphabetic letter 0 signifying the female genitals: Hamlet's 'country matters' or, in the metaphor of Sonnet 136, 'thy store's account' [cunt](10). The 'O' also signifies the 'nothing' that the speaker strenuously protests he would never exchange for 'all thy sum of good' (109.12); and, at the beginning of that same sonnet, the 'O' signifies nothing except the letter or sound of addressing words to someone who evidently has reason to doubt the speaker's erotic and epistemological truth: 'O never say that I was false of heart' (109.1).

Counting and playing seriously in words leads Shakespeare often, as we have seen, to fantasies of sexual pleasure with both male and female bodies—and their parts. As Paula Blank observes, 'part' is a key word of the entire sonnet sequence;[54] moreover, in Sonnet 39, line 2, the poet refers to the young man as 'the better part of me', using the same phrase that Orlando used in his lines about Rosalind/Ganymede as Atalanta.[55] If wordplay in 'numbers' leads to thoughts about bodies joining and reproducing (in flesh and/or in poetic 'lines'), however, such wordplay also leads to thoughts about boundaries, including that 'bourn' that 'puzzles the will' (*Hamlet*, III. i. 81–2). Although Sonnet 135 seems to enact a defense against time's ravages by its circular play on 'will' at the end

[50] On the 'dark lady's' activation of 'the racialized tropes of Western aesthetics', see Traub, 'Sex without Issue', 446.

[51] Schwarz (2011) 134.

[52] Booth notes the allusion to Exodus 3.14 and also that the conjunction of *'wills'* and *'I am that I am'* contains the potential for a pun on 'William', 'Will-I-am' (*Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 410).

[53] For Shakespeare's iterations of this proverb, see Blank (2006) 51.

[54] See Blank (2006) 48.

[55] There are many other textual parallels; see Booth (1977) 198.

of the first and last lines, the last 'will' is not the same as the first. For a poet who shows even his dying heroes repeatedly succumbing to the lure of wordplay ('the *rest* is silence' [V. ii. 310], my emphasis), the lure is arguably not a deviation from the road of reason and propriety but instead (or also) a way of paying homage to the wordplay's generative power. We cannot name the 'nothing' of death without falsifying it as something. But that, perhaps, is one of the points of Shakespeare's exorbitant wordplay, whether in the quick moment of a witty homonym or in the longer, intertextual trails offered by a phrase like 'Atalanta's better part'—a phrase Johnson found himself pursuing despite his view that Shakespeare pursued 'luminous vapours' beyond the bounds of reason.

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