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TRUE MUSICAL DELIGHT: POINTING AND COUNTERPOINTING

Since around the middle of the twentieth century there has been, in English poetry studies, a growing awareness, both critically and historiographically, of the enormous import due – in terms of influence on later modes of versification, be they metrical[1] or «free» – to the peculiar style of verse composition made manifest in John Milton's magnum opus, the verse epic of *Paradise Lost*.

Milton

The reason Milton wrote in fetters
when he wrote of Angels and God,
and at liberty when of Devils and Hell,
is because he was a true Poet
and of the Devil's party without knowing it.
- Blake

I

Music, as the etymology of the word suggests, comes to us from the muses. Heaven, God, the Devil, or perhaps only the poet, Milton himself, knows which muse was called upon, at the outset of his creation, *Paradise Lost*:

[1] Especially pentametrical as in blank verse, cf. Brogan & Weismiller (1993: 137): «His [Milton's] influence was so powerful that the form [blank verse] bore his impress up to the 20th c[entury].»

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.

In this the very first verse paragraph of Book One, while apostrophising the «Heav'nly Muse» without whose inspiration his aspiration would come to nothing, Milton, well aware of the poetic innovativeness of his creation, thus self-consciously states his ambition as that of accomplishing «Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme». On the level of explicitly stated content, this attempt has to do with «justifying the ways of God to men», the poem a kind of theodicy. On another level, one having to do less with thematic content than artistic form, what the poet deems «unattempted yet in prose or rhyme» – in other words that which, in the very act of attempting it, he may be said to admit to being tempted to – is precisely to transcend, or to transgress, established modes of literary form, prosaic or poetic.[2] That is to say, by inventing noting short of a new kind of verse.[3]

[2] As will be appreciated, «rhyme» here is used as a metonymy of «poetry», which makes sense, historically, to the extent that, in Milton's day, poetry tended be characterised by the formal convention of rhyme to a degree so absolute as to be virtually identifiable with this aural device.

[3] The poem in its thematic capacity as an act of theodicy, then, at the same time acts, in its formal capacity of a 'semiodicy' (cf. Kjørup 2003)

Miltonic blank verse,[4] now, as has long been recognised, grew out of how Shakespeare managed to transform this format, in his later plays,[5] into one characterised by the highest degree of syllabic and phrasal flexibility[6] – a development radicalised by Milton's hyperfrequent use of the device of enjambement. Reflecting on his own awareness of the importance of enjambement to his poetic invention, Milton had the fourth (1668) imprint of the first (1667) edition of *PL* be prefixed by a note on «The Verse». Here, Milton explains that «true musical delight» is derivable, not from the use of rhyme («th'Invention of a Barbarous Age»), but the combined forces of poetic form constituted by metre and enjambement – expressed thus, as «true musical delight», which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another.[7]

We shall turn to consider the implications of this famous passage presently.

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by which its own strategy of signing or creating meaning is called into question. This we may see as the condition of the modern poem of artistic ambition in general, and perhaps that of *Paradise Lost*, the first instance of this very kind of poem, in particular.

[4] Blank verse, as indicated by its name, is verse without rhyme. As *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (eds. Preminger & Brogan, 1993) may remind us, «B[lank] v[erse] first appeared in It[alian] poetry of the Ren[aissance] as an unrhymed variant of the *endecasillabo* […], then was transplanted to England as the unrhymed decasyllable or iambic pentameter.» (Brogan & Weismiller 1993: 137).

[5] Cf. Bathurst's (1857) theory in which a chronology of Shakespeare's plays is established on the hypothesis that later works contain higher frequencies of enjambement than do earlier works.

[6] Wright: «The play of line and phrase in Shakespeare».

[7] Milton, ed. Teskey 2005: 2. – It will be noted that Princeton Encyclopedists Brogan & Weismiller misquote the phrase as follows: «He [Milton] needed «the sense variously drawn out from one line [sic] into another.»» (1993: 139). While perhaps seemingly inconsequential, replacing «verse» with «line» does impart to the statement a shade of anachronism in that, while the two do form perfect synonyms, «line» is a term somewhat more modern (not least by rather strongly connoting graphico-spatial linearity) than is «verse».

First, let us have a taste of that «forbidden fruit» of hitherto «unattempted» verse art (the writing of which Milton may have been thus tempted to), and to some of the effects of this artistic style. In John Hollander's (1973) ««Sense Variously Drawn Out»: Some Observations on English Enjambement» the following lines (286-287) from Book Four of *Paradise Lost*:

> Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
> Of living creatures . . .

are commented upon as an instance of the characteristically Miltonic manner of creating «ambiguities» at «line-terminus» as a function of enjambement: here, as will be seen, «kind» invites, first, the adjectival interpretation («benevolent») only to be revealed, in the next line, as a nominal synonymous with «type» (Hollander 1975 (1973): 96). The essay containing this and similar observations is included in a collection aptly titled *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (Hollander 1975), a title itself resonant with age-old theoretical controversy.

Until around 1960 mainstream criticism did not begin to subscribe to the notion of poetic form as vision in the sense of visuality. An eye-opening piece of criticism, prefiguring Hollander and others, is Donald Davie's «Syntax and Music in *Paradise Lost*» (1960), an essay to prove seminally influential, and whose critical insights, in metacritical retrospect, will be seen to mark the beginnings of the end of unquestioning adherence to what was until then a tenet of literary theory all but unquestioned, namely, that the poetic phenomenon of verse be one of purely oral/aural performance/perception; or, conversely, that the graphical aspect of the verse line be of no essence, with the possible exception of certain recent 'decadent' manifestations, along with manifestos, of Modernism.

What Davie, by contrast, suggests, forcefully if tacitly, is that Milton is to be considered a Modern; that, essentially, the

acquisition of the graphical line as an integral device of verse writing, therefore, is not a recent one; that, in fact, far from being the province of modernism, or any recently manifest ism of literary culture, graphics informs literary modernity as such – as *literacy* – indeed as formulated, most conspicuously, if never consistently, because incipiently, innovatively, in Milton's grand style verse epic.[8] That is to say, aside from the evident classicism of many a Miltonic device (a classically periodic sentence style, complete with a certain preference for word order sometimes perversely contortedly Latinate; the ubiquity of iconographic reference to the Ancients; to name but a few aspects of 'form' and 'content', respectively), Milton's style of versification is such that it depends, for its full effect – its effect including, not least, the semantics of syntax as manipulated, spatially, hence temporally – on the turnings of verse itself; or, to invoke an insightful phrase of Davie's, that which may be identified, physically, as «the swing of the eye

[8] To be sure, the fact that eighteenth century critic Sheridan, a lone genius in his age, can be seen to show, thanks to Bradford's (1985, 1993) unearthing of his perceptive work, as deep an understanding of Miltonic verse aesthetics as any modern critic, or even deeper, now, should be taken as a sign that modern criticism in this respect – rather than anachronistically projecting its own tenets of formal autonomy etc. onto the text of the defenceless poet only to 'variously draw out' from his texture such interpretive insights as may delight, say, mid- to late twentieth century aesthetic sensibilities – might have moved just a little closer to being in touch the sensibilities inhering in Miltonic aesthetics itself than were at any point the insights of the intervening three hundred years of mainstream critical commentary. (Need anyone be reminded that both the poet of revolutionary disposition (such as Milton) and the sympathetic critic, of like-minded perceptiveness (such as Sheridan), are individually streams unto themselves so generously generating out of this very streaming their creations for others to see, or to remain blind to, while it may take generations for the collective to arrive at the point where what was then grasped by the few is now beheld by the many?) Unfortunately, Bradford seems only too eager to discard the critics of his own paternal generation (Davie, Hollander, Ricks) as being «pre-empted» by his own historical find, that of their collective great-great-grandfather (Sheridan).

round the corner of the line». For occasionally, crucially, such «swinging», in the course of the reader's observing the shape and function of end-line «corners» (implicitly spatial), can be seen to imply, as Davie detects, a certain (inherently temporal) «flicker of hesitation» (Davie 1960).

When on the move in an environment whose basic spatio-temporal, graphico-rhythmical structure happens to prescribe the emergence of a corner or 'line-bend' at the interval of every tenth syllable – the metric from which the Miltonic line, with its constant masculine endings, never deviates – the reader is apt to pause, not only in the sense of perceiving to have reached a point of temporary closure in the flow of formal unfolding, but also in the sense of cognizing this very point as being one upon which to stop to ponder on what time and space to come may bring. What potentials of meaning are lying there, in waiting, around the next corner?

Such 'line-turning', implicit in the very concept of verse itself (etymologically, Lat. *versus*, a turn), is called by various names in various languages, within various periods and critical contexts within or across languages: in English, as amply witnessed, *enjambment* (from Fr. *enjamber*, 'to straddle', i.e. syntax straddling the space between two lines) is the common denomination, along with the 'vernacular' variant that is the *run-on line.* This latter term, in its turn, is used in contrast to the *end-stopped line* defined as one of syntactic terminus at line-end. Significantly, now, to widen the perspective from lexical to cultural history, the concept of a line being thus «run on» may be seen to reflect a certain mode of critical conception, in fact perhaps one not aligned with what we have described as the principle of Miltonic verse aesthetics, or the practice of poetic reading so pre-eminently modern, namely, that of observing corners as places at which to pause, to muse, as it were, upon the depths and potentials of music unfolding. Running on, as the concept has it, would seem to imply the opposite stance, namely, a practice of reading

according to which no such pausal gesture is performed: encountering a stretch of syntax obviously incomplete, the reader, thus urged onwards, on the quest for completion, simply runs on. That is, irrespective of whatever visual closure might otherwise, within the framework of another kind of aesthetic, be seen to inhere in the line-*end*. On the part of the 'run-on reader', consequently, the line is taken to elicit no semantic or other aesthetically-motivated response to the very extent that no stimulus is perceived to have been given, no graphically-constituted object to emerge in readerly perception.

Culture, in this sense, will be seen to determine, to delimit, nature: what one has not learned to look for, one cannot see. And so, the spatiality of the line, as a potential object of visual perception, is not realised – not consciously, much less theoretically so – as giving rise to such temporal complexity in the process of reading, indeed interpretation, as indeed informs the very basis of «hesitation» (or, as it happens, or can be made to happen, interpretive complication; see Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*). Culture, of course, as a historical dynamic of continual (re)construal, never was prone to settle for very long, let alone permanently, on any one tenet of interpretive preference; as in politics, social thought, or taste, the pendulum swings on. Within contemporary literary studies generally and, most interestingly, within Milton studies in particular, there may be certain indications of a movement back – from the inherently modern Daviean «swing» (attentive to visually perceptible, semantically informed spatiality) – towards the traditional conception of versification, in this case, most particularly, Milton's, as something purely oral/aural.

An index of such latter 'reaction' (classicist antimodern?) may be found in an edition of *Paradise Lost* as recent as that of the *Norton Critical Edition* (ed. G. Teskey, 2005). Here, by way of a preface, the editor states:

> Milton's poems are not so much works on the page, meant to be interpreted as texts, as they are structures of sound meant to be heard, to be listened to, even when one is silently reading. (Teskey 2005: xii)

Continuing:

> *Paradise Lost* is modeled on the epic poems of Homer and Virgil, which were intended for memorization and oral recitation, and Milton's verse is strongly influenced by Greek and Latin oratory, which was written to be publicly declaimed. (There is as much Cicero as Virgil in the fabric of *Paradise Lost*.)

Indeed, in Milton's famous note on «The Verse», the poet does set out by noting: «The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin, rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse» (Milton (1668) in Teskey 2005: 2). So far, so good, it would seem. Then, however, the assertion goes:

> It is this declamatory character of *Paradise Lost* that prompted Samuel Johnson to call it «that wonderful performance,» and that is what *Paradise Lost* is: a wonderful performance, which the reader recaptures by listening to the poem as physical effort and physical sound. (Teskey 2005: xii)

Was «wonderful performance», on the other hand, all that Johnson had to say about the versification in *Paradise Lost*? To be sure, the good doctor, deeming Milton's blank verse rather alarmingly dependent on visual rather than auditory cues, did go so far as to say this be «verse only to the eye». As we shall see, a critic as recent as Attridge quotes, with consent (in the context of discussing the general perceptual qualities of pentameter rhythm), this famous criticism of Johnson's:

> the liberal use of run-on lines […] will create a continuous movement in which the line-divisions may not be very apparent – Johnson's complaint that Milton's verse is verse only to the eye is not without foundation.[9]

What is important, for now, is not so much the fact that Attridge might or might not be viewed – depending on one's culturally-determined aesthetic point of view – as being at fault for agreeing with Johnson in finding Milton's heavily enjambing blank verse 'blurry' as to the perceptual shape of its line-ends: the crucial point to observe, rather, is the very fact of Milton's lines being, thus consensually, across centuries of critical attention, from critics as diverse as Johnson and Attridge, viewable, in the first place (of which we are likely, then, not to have heard the last), as «verse only to the eye».

Milton's poetic line, as far as readerly perception is concerned, then, would seem not to remain just a matter of hearing, it is as much there to be seen, for good or for worse as the taste may be: Indeed, according to quite an influential strain in the critical tradition since Johnson, as we have witnessed, the line in question, questionable as it may seem, then, may in fact be primarily visual, however unsettlingly so. For, naturally, culturally, what it unsettles would be the traditional notion of the primacy of speech over writing.

II

One crucial point in Walter J. Ong's seminal study of *Orality and Literacy* (1982) is that «writing transforms consciousness». Writing, as materially, hence perceptually (hence mentally), distinct from mnemonic speech, is the cornerstone of intellectual culture as we know it. The more intellectual the cultural expression, the more it will tend to crave the medium of writing. As noted, interestingly, by Wimsatt (1944):

[9] Attridge 1982: 133.

> The more primitive and forthrightly emotional the poetry, as in balladry, the less it may demand the sensory resistance of verse nonparallel to logic. The more sophisticated and intellectualized the poetry, the more it will demand such resistance. The point is worth illustrating from the blank verse of *Paradise Lost* – one of the most artful verse forms in the range of English literature.

Continuing:

> An important phrase in Milton's own prescription for blank verse is «sense variously drawn out from one verse into another.» This various drawing out he accomplishes for the most part by his ever various, subtly continuous, confused and tenuous syntax, by which the sense drips down from line to line and does not usually run parallel in any successive lines.[10]

Here, by way of a metaphor most revealing, Wimsatt, in the course of referring to Miltonic «drawing out» of sense, will be seen to have this latter concept be synonymous with sense as «drip[ping] down": one metaphor of spatial movement and direction, imaging the process of readerly movement in textual space, is explicated by another metaphor, the direction of movement shifting from horizontal «out» to vertical «down», that is, the direction of the moving eye exactly.

Teskey, by contrast, in reference to the same famous note of Milton's (while identifying «*the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another*» as «the most important part of this statement»[11], thus echoing Wimsatt), proceeds, perhaps somewhat problematically, to hold that what Milton is referring to, here, be the

[10] Wimsatt (1954 (1944)): 155.

[11] Teskey 2005: 2.

> use of enjambment to run one line into another without a pause, allowing the rhythms of the syntax to assert themselves on a longer scale than that of the individual line.[12]

And yet it seems strange to say that Milton's peculiar interest in drawing out the sense (as of course carried by syntax), from one line to the next – that is to say, using the line as an instrument of syntactico-semantic manipulation – be proof of «syntax assert[ing] [it]self» at the expense of the line. This view, as we might add, forms part of the argument in Abrams (1942), where it is held that «Milton's blank verse […] used as its structural unit not so much the single line as the full sentence or paragraph»[13], while it is refuted as «the assumption that in Milton's prosody the blank-verse line is deliberately swaped in the larger units of the sentence and 'verse-paragraph'» in Prince (1958). Logically, it would have to be the other way around, the line asserting its poetic supremacy vis-à-vis such sense as can be carried by syntax alone.

So much for theory; if not invariably consistent, theoretically, Teskey's edition might still have something to offer in practice. Let us sketch, then, a few textual implications of what turns out to be Teskey's editorial practice.

[12] Teskey 2005: 2.

[13] Abrams 1942: 241.

III

As for the principles underlying his practice, Teskey states that «I have […] punctuated as lightly as possible»:[14] «Light punctuation is also crucial for hearing the rhythm»,[15] and

[14] On the grounds that, according to Teskey, «[t]he punctuation of the two editions of *Paradise Lost* to appear in Milton's lifetime has […] no authority. The supposition that the original punctuation reflects the poet's intentions has caused a fashion for centaur-like editions of *Paradise Lost* in which the spelling is modernized and the heavy, often misleading seventeenth-century punctuation retained. In Milton's day punctuation was more the concern of copyists and printers than of poets, still less of blind poets.» (Teskey 2005: xii).

[15] Teskey 2005: xii. To be sure, Teskey's practice of repunctuation serves the educational purpose of his edition well, and, of course, to this extent, justly so: «This edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is intended for the general reader and for students encountering the poem for the first time. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized [...]» (Teskey 2005: xi)

Indeed, the modernised punctuation may well succeed in clarifying many a moment of syntactic obscurity, hence of potential confusion, such as might result in the modern novice reader being deprived of a first chance to comprehend the basic lexical, syntactic and semantic goings-on in the poem, hence the rationale for «modernisation».

Yet, the device of modernised punctuation which may thus serve to promote, or ideally facilitate, basic comprehension of meaning, can be seen to serve as instrumental in undermining basic readerly pleasure – if not to the «general reader» (hence Teskey's submission) uninformed by historically given conventions or strategies of reading/interpreting the signs of poetry, i.e. the semiotic procedure of making sense of poetic form, then to the reader specifically informed by, or interested in, such procedures. I shall give but a single example, one illustrating the consequences of 'de-semicolonisation'.

On Teskey's punctuational palette, semicolon is all but inexistent; *semicola* as compositional units are put out of existence.

Among the many pleasurable features of semicolonic composition quite effaced by repunctuation is an instance of euphonically invested grammetrical structure, as complex in structure as rewarding to perceive, stretching through the nineteen and a half lines of *colon* 1 (IV.268-287) as composed of *semicola* 1-4. It unfolds as follows.

First end-line word of *semicolon* 1 (mid-line to mid-line, IV.268-272), enjambing «field» (IV.268), consonates with the semicolonic end-word itself ("world», IV.272), no like consonance intervening:

«rhythm», to Teskey, as we recall, amounts to «the rhythms of the syntax […] assert[ing] themselves on a longer scale than that of the individual line». An example of such lightly punctuated «rhythms», in the context of a typically periodic sentence of Milton's, now, might be the following passage Book

---

. Not that faire field
Of *Enna* **,** where *Proserpin* gathring flours
Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie *Dis*
Was gatherd **,** which cost *Ceres* all that pain
To seek her through the world ;

First end-line word of *semicolon* 2 (mid-line to mid-line, IV.272-275), enjambing «Grove» (IV.272), consonates with the semicolonic end-word itself, precaesural «strive;» (IV.275), no consonance intervening:

; nor that sweet Grove
Of *Daphne* by *Orontes* **,** and th'inspir'd
Castalian Spring might with this Paradise
Of *Eden* strive **;**

First end-line word of *semicolon* 3 (mid-line to end-line, IV.275-279), enjambing «ile» (IV.275), assonates with the semicolonic end-word itself, end-stopping «eye;» (IV.279), one like assonance intervening ("Triton», IV.276):

; nor that *Nyseian* ile
Girt with the River *Triton* **,** where old *Cham* **,**
Whom Gentiles *Ammon* call and *Libyan Jove* **,**
Hid *Amalthea* and her Florid Son
Young *Bacchus* from his Stepdame *Rhea's* eye **;**

First end-line word of *semicolon* 4 (line-initial to end-line, IV.280-287), end-stopping «Guard,» (IV.280), does *not* enter into any euphonic relationship with the semicolonic (as well as colonic) end-word, end-stopping «strange» (IV.287):

Nor where *Abassin* Kings thir issue Guard **,**
True Paradise under the *Ethiop* Line
By *Nilus* head **,** enclos'd with shining Rock **,**
From this *Assyrian* Garden **,** where the Fiend
Saw undelighted all delight **,** all kind
Of living Creatures new to sight and strange **:**

Four passage from which we have already quoted:

> A whole day's journey high, but wide remote
> From this Assyrian garden where the Fiend
> Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
> Of living creatues […]

However, as may be seen, in light of the editorial intention being that of punctuating the text lightlier, the practice of Teskey's actual editing, by omitting many a comma while repunctuating heavily in terms of both indentation and pointing, could be described as a punctuational economy peculiarly 'penny-wise and pound-foolish'. Thus, in lines 295-296, instead of the original semicolon « ; though both», Teskey gives us:

> Whence true authority in men. Though both
> Not equal as their sex not equal seemed:

By what must be deemed the agency of overpunctuation a full stop is placed right between subordinate clauses, originally separated by semicola (1667 edition, quoted in Lennard 2005):

> Whence true autoritie in men **;** though both
> Not equal **,** as their sex not equal seemd **;**

Thus, what was originally a colonic superstructure is shattered as a whole new period is allowed to interfere with it, indeed to supplant it.[16] – As we can see, then, alterations of

[16] As may be noted, however, this interference does however entail quite a notable aesthetic side-effect, namely, that of bringing to the fore an otherwise rather less salient aspect of the line's sound shape: «Though», both unstressed and metrically weak, being now capitalised as the initial word in the disyllabic segment bordering on line-end, is thus raised to a much higher degree of perceptibility, which in its turn makes clearer the assonance in «Though both», in itself emphasised by being framed by, or filling completely, the contre-rejet.

formal shapes effect changes in the force dynamics of formal elements. When the qualities of the actors are altered, the course and consequences of their actions change: the script of the drama of reading is rewritten.

Returning, finally, to the passage previously commented upon, let us consider the effects, semantic and aesthetic, indeed semantic *as* aesthetic, of Teskey's edition thereof. How does this edition differ from the original 1667 edition of PL? The latter looks as follows (quoted from Lennard 2005):

A whole dayes journey high **,** but wide remote *+contre-rejet*
From this *Assyrian* Garden **,** where the Fiend *+contre-rejet*
Saw undelighted all delight **,** all kind *+contre-rejet*

As noted in the grammetrical analysis above, each end-line segment, thanks to being sett off by punctuation, is a contre-rejet. As noted in the metrical analysis below, this sequence of contre-rejets displays the following rhythmic characteristics:

Contre-rejets:	Rhythmic analysis:	
, but wide remote	oÓoÓ	tetrasyllabic regular
, where the Fiend	OoÓ	trisyllabic promoted weak stress
, all kind	óÓ	disyllabic demoted strong stress

Particular attention is due to the end-line word «kind»; firstly, it constitues, intralinearly horizontally, within the assonantal [aɪ] sequence, the third, culminating member; secondly, interlinearly vertically, it continues the consonantal [-nd] sequence begun with «Fiend»; thirdly, grammetrically, it is the last word in the third and last member of a sequence of syllabic diminuendo; syntactically, it invites closure, if only momentarily, in that the retrospectively perceived enjambement effects the very garden path ambiguity-ridden line «[…] all kind / Of living creatures» commented upon already as such a characteristic example of Milton's enjambing style, cf. Hollander (1973/1975). Teskey's version, however:

A whole day's journey high, but wide remote +*contre-rejet*
From this Assyrian garden where the Fiend –*contre-rejet*
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind +*contre-rejet*

would seem to manage to dissolve the increasingly focused, 'funnel-shaped' series of contre-rejet leading 'down' to the garden path, at the end of the third line, beyond which ambiguity is finally revealed. Here, then, by having the middle member lose its comma, the triple, gradually diminishing movement in terms of syllabic length is lost, and, with it, the sense of gradually building up, through formal focusing, to a semantic climax.

As can be seen, the very enjambemental interplay of syntactic and linear (metrical and graphical) structure, or what is traditionally hailed as the contrapuntal effect of Miltonic versification (the pertinent phenomenon of enjambement being itself conceived in terms of counterpoint), can be shown to rely, to quite a significant degree, on punctuational structure: without Miltonic pointing, no correspondingly characteristic counterpointing.

Wordsworth

I

In what follows, I shall attempt to consider, while proceeding to focus on the contrapuntal interplay of enjambing syntax and punctuation, a number of implications of the historical fact of poetic visuality, particularly concerning readerly perception (interpretation) of the tradition of Miltonic blank verse as continued, perhaps most prominently, by Wordsworth. Indeed, «[a] return to the 'Miltonic' use of enjambment may be found in the blank verse of Wordsworth.»[17]

[17] Bradford 1983: 204.

In a famous piece of criticism, Empson's «Sense in The Prelude», mainly focusing on lexical semantics (that of «sense») as a germ of wider conceptual (including cultural) ramifications of meaning, the critic first quotes, then explicates:

> my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being. (Prelude i.392)

There is a suggestion here from the pause at the end of the line that he had not merely «a feeling of» these unknown modes but something like a new «sense» which was partly able to apprehend them – a new *kind* of sensing had appeared in his mind.[18]

As this passage suggests, «the pause» is a readerly response to the fact of «the end of the line» which to Empson must seem so natural as to form part of what verse reading is about in the first place (the point of departure, as it were, from the end of one line to the beginning of the next!); naturally, then, critical reference to it can be made in passing; implicitly, the line-end is a place of pausing. Even in the case of enjambement (Wordsworth's «[…] sense / Of […]») holds this to hold true: enjambing syntax does not imply a «running on» of sense (in this case, of the very word «sense») without the line-terminal word being paused at; a «run-on» line in this sense, in other words, does not exist.

Having quoted at length a passage from Book First of the 1850 version of *The Prelude* (ed. de Selincourt) of which the last five lines read:

> I held unconscious intercourse with beauty
> Old as creation, drinking in a pure
> Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
> Of curling mist, or from the level plain
> Of waters coloured by impending clouds. (1850)

[18] Empson 1989 (1951): 290.

– Empson sees fit to remark: «The 1805 version is noticeably better in the last five lines»,[19] proceeding to quote the lines in question:

> A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
> With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
> A pure organic pleasure from the lines
> Of curling mist, or from the level plain
> Of waters coloured by the steady clouds. (1805)

In what way these lines could be said to be noticeably better, however, Empson does not say,[20] leaving it to the reader to notice for himself – and, as will be known to have happened, to a critic to come, himself a student of Empsonian brilliance, twenty years later, to define as a new critical mission the task of making explicit the quality hinted at: Christopher Ricks, in his now-classic study of Wordsworthian enjambement,[21]

[19] Empson 1989 (1951): 298.

[20] By quoting the lines to the effect of demonstrating their purportedly superior quality, Empson already has taken the liberty – an indication of his deeming the matter one of artistic gravity – to stray from his mission as thematically defined, the investigation of the meaning(s) of the word *sense* in *The Prelude*.

[21] As duly acknowledged by Ricks, «here the classic piece of criticism is by Donald Davie» (1987 (1971): 90). (Tynjanov (1924), we must recall, was to remain untranslated into English until 1981.) Ricks' piece, having become a classic in its own right, extends Daviean methodology of investigating how, in Milton, «a line-ending [...] may create its significance by a momentary ambiguity» to apply to Wordsworth, while an original theoretical contribution is that of pointing to the spatial characteristics of the line as such, including most notably «[t]he white space at the end of a line of poetry», as a structural cause (this space «constitut[ing] some kind of pause») of enjambemental effect. – Furthermore, Ricks provides a historical perspective within which to reflect the intuition of the cause in question on the part of poets, quoting, illuminatingly, the following «very suggestive formulation» (1987 (1971): 89) by Eliot, as recovered by Ricks in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 27 September 1928: «'Verse, whatever else it may or may not be, itself a system of *punctuation*; the usual marks of punctuation themselves are differently employed.'» (Eliot in Ricks 1987 (1971): 89) I am dealing with the deeply important implications of this intuition in my acount of what I call *versificational pseudo-*

«Wordsworth: 'A pure organic pleasure from the lines'» (1987 (1971),[22] subjects to closer comparative analysis the same passages singled out for general artistic comparison by Empson:[23]

> *1850* has the richly proleptic suggestion of 'impending', and it retains the crucial inauguration of the lat two lines, both *Of*. But it weakens the force of the other prepositions, removing *With* from thebeginningof the line and *in* from the end of the line, thereby abolishing the engrossing energy of the enjambment: 'drinking in / A pure organic pleasure'. (The *1850* line-break at 'drinking in a pure / Organic pleasure' is altogether ineffectual.) But the superiority of *1805* is clearest in the change from 'the lines / Of curling mist' to 'the silver wreaths / Of curling mist'. On the one hand, the austerity of *lines* has been sacrified to prettiness; on the other, a suggestiveness too has been sacrificed. For the word *lines* unobstrusively related Wordsworth's delight in 'the eternal

syntax. Now, as for debts, we may perhaps be surprised to find Bradford (1993) noting, while making no note of Ricks, that «in an obscure *TLS* letter in 1928 he [Eliot] acknowledges that something would be lost if the shape of the verse were changed» (1993: 157), then proceeding to quote the exact same passage found in, if indeed not by, Ricks (1971). – Though the following seems historiographically fair enough, insightful even, critically and metacritically: «In 1971 Christopher Ricks published an essay called 'Wordsworth: «A Pure Organic Pleasure from the Lines"' in which he acknowledges a close intertextual relation between Wordsworth's use of 'white space' and its very similar deployment by Milton. This foregrounding of impersonal textuality can hardly be regarded as a continuous feature of his blank-verse technique, but when it does appear it is so striking and conspicuous that we become aware of silent poetics as a phenomenon which predates, indeed transcends, its modernist context.» (Bradford 1993: 65).

[22] Ricks' (1987) investigation of the *The Force of Poetry* in English from John Gower to Geoffrey Hill includes a commendable treatment of Empson's poetry (1987 (1974): 179–243).

[23] While not singling out Empson as having preceded him in this particular respect, Ricks makes no secret of Empsonian influence, including the even more important, because general, methodological inspiration of being on the look-out for line-ends in Wordsworth. Thus Ricks notes, in a note, that «Empson's [1951] observation that the word *sense* comes very often at the end of the line is one to which I owe a great deal» (Ricks 1987 (1971): 99).

> Beauty' to his own beautiful lines which are here speaking; we were given a sense of what that 'pure organic pleasure' was, by experiencing its literary counterpart, a 'pure organic pleasure' of a literary kind, drinking it in from these very *lines*.[24]

Following the lead of Davie's (1960) commanding critical insight into Miltonic verse art, then, Ricks (1971) goes on to do for our understanding of Wordsworth's verse, with special focus on enjambement, what Hollander (1973) would go on to do for our appreciation of Milton's.[25]

Vis-à-vis Empson's otherwise brilliant observation on the first passage quoted:

> my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being. (1850)

it might be noted, now – not so much, in what follows, by way of metacriticism, as an attempt at alternative criticism – that the critic, if in this case more centrally interested in

[24] Ricks 1987 (1971): 95f. – Indeed, were Ricks to have made special mention of his critical precursor in this context, he would be under a stronger obligation to observe (which, respectful of the master, he likely would would not prefer), that Empson seems to have detected no poetically self-referential dimension to Wordsworth's use of the word *lines* ("The second sentence, or paragraph, begins by saying that he [Wordsworth] remembers taking a pure organic pleasure in the scenery [...]»). Now, such significance is of course what Ricks does detect, deeming it of such centrality as to form part of his title.

[25] Notice how both Ricks and Hollander incorporate into their titles quotations from the poets investigated, be it from poetic texts (Wordsworth's «A pure organic pleasure from the lines», a complete blank verse line) or critical paratext (Milton's «sense variously drawn out [...]», part of a prose sentence on blank verse writing), as if expecting their critical observations to be met with sufficient metacritical skepticism to need the authority of authorial bolstering. And indeed, Ricks (1971), though prominently placed as the first article of its issue of *Essays in Criticism*, was not exactly supported by editor Bateson who deemed it appropriate, apparently, to publish a disclaimer....

what kind of sense the line itself might make of such syntactic material as may be seen, from the aesthetic perspective of versification, to be bounded by its verse-linear form, would hardly have quoted the text in this particular way.

Thus, the critic is bound to notice that the precaesural part of the first line quoted (in *1850* the line is caesurally tripartite[26]), once reinserted into its versificationally rightful place – i.e. right before the syntactic caesura (omitted from quotation also) – does impart to the line a semantic disturbance which hardly, indeed, would have served as a clear point of departure for reaching a clearer sense of Wordsworth's «sense»:

391 That spectacle, for many days, my brain (1850)

Here, invariably, round the interposed adverbial «for many days», the nominals in the outer positions, by positional equivalence, invite the interpretation of a uniting, cross-linear equivalence of meaning also: «my brain», possibly, becomes a kind of appositional equivalent to «That spectacle» (by way of a metonymic permutation of cause («my brain») for effect («That spectacle»)). In *1805* the danger of such disturbing semantic fusion seems even more impending:

418 That spectacle, for many days my brain (1805)

Perhaps the second comma in *1850*, seemingly safely sealing off «for many days», was inserted in an attempt to avoid this very danger (if so, to no avail, as we have seen, since verse-semantic energy just found another way, invoking symmetry across the line, to upset syntactically intended balances): here, in any case, «my brain» comes even closer to becoming identified with «That spectacle», indeed in the conceptually radical, if formally conventional (hyperbolic), way of suggesting that

[26] In what follows I shall be quoting from the parallel texts of the Norton Edition: *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. J. Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and S. Gill. (1979).

the latter (mental imagery) has filled the former (the poet's consciousness) to the degree of becoming identical to it. This suggestion, then, is mediated entirely by lineation, the line-end pause functioning as such a Daviean «flicker of hesitation» as in fact generates what me may call the effect of a *versificational garden path.* And within the dynamic structure of the text this temporary conceptual identification («spectacle as brain») created by the reader's being led down the garden path of the verse-line, finally, will be seen to prepare for the unfolding of a semantic vista conceptually similar while even more radically generated by the perceptual forces of the verse-linear format:

418 That spectacle, for many days my brain
419 Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
420 Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts (1805)

Upon our reaching the end of line 420 «my thoughts» emerges as so strongly echoing «my brain» at the end of line 418 (similarity aesthetically formal (versificational parallelism: line-terminal positions; grammatico-prosodic parallelism: *my* + monosyllabic noun) as well as linguistically-semantic (*thought* a meronym of *brain*)) that, stimulated by this pattern – responding by a perceptual preference for formal and semantic coherence –, we are likely to retroactively project a similar pattern onto the linguistic material filling the corresponding line-*initial* positions: «unknown modes of being», thus, comes to echo «That spectacle». That is to say, it does so because of the functioning of yet another, even more radical principle of verse-semantic formation, namely, that by which we prefer, whenever such be in any way formally possible, the linguistic material framed by the verse-line to generate a syntactico-semantically rounded-off whole – as if it were a syntactic group (phrase, clause, sentence) itself. From the perspective of this preference, the aesthetic boundaries of the verse-line as such are promoted to the status of sovereign

semantic grouping boundaries, that is, to the exclusion of any such boundaries (major syntactic breaks as marked by punctuation, say) as are intrinsic to the linguistic material. This peculiarly poetic, hence centrally important, yet relatively unexplored, phenomenon of verse art we might well term *versificational pseudosyntax* (Kjørup 2003; Kjørup & Hamann 2008).

II

Apropos of this centrally important phenomenon, an insight of Mindele Treip's, in her illuminating treatise on *Milton's Punctuation* (1970), concerning the punctuation of Miltonic grammetrics, may be invoked – for, in terms of how to exploit the counterpoint of sentence and line in blank verse, one development of Miltonic practice is exactly that of Wordsworth's:

> Sometimes a single line, apparently in need of punctuation at either midpoint or end, is left open, entirely unpunctuated. The effect is then as if the verse pause itself were lightly supplying the place of the missing syntactical stops.[27]

It is noticeable, here, how «the verse pause» is conceived as implying the equivalent of a «light[...] syntactical stop[...]»; indeed, owing in no small measure to the fact of the ensuing line-initial being capitalised, it may be conceived as a full stop, as we shall presently see, cf. the implicitly metaphorical concept of the-line-end-as-full-stop. The further semiotic implications of this metaphor – the consequent notion of the-line-as-a-kind-of-sentence – is precisely what informs the concept, indeed the poetic response, of *versification pseudosyntax*. In line 418, consequently, as a function of emerging as a pseudosyntactic unit of this kind, what is communicated is the notion that – despite the line-medial full stop separating

[27] Treip 1970: 58f.

«unknown modes of being» from «my thoughts» – the former be conceivable as located *within* the latter. In other words, due to the peculiar syntax of the line:

420 Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts (1805)

what is invited, in terms of poetic response, is an interpretation of the semantics of the line as including the following possibility: «Of unknown modes of being in my thoughts»!

In *1850*, interestingly, the interpretative implications of this potentially radical effect do seem to be succesfully fenced-off:

Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts (1850)

While the intralinear semicolon, substituting for the full stop, is easily overridden, in terms of segmentational power, by the sheer Gestalt force of the line as a unitary whole primarily constituted by its outer boundaries (interlinearly, that is), we find, instead, the fact of the preposition having been substituted (*over* for *in*) to offer rather a stronger degree of resistance to the line as an instance of would-be meaningful pseudosyntax; whatever the «modes of being» might be, «unknown» as they are – though still by force of interlinear patterning evoking the spectre of «That spectacle» (which, as we recall, for some time was the poet's «[my] brain») – they do resist being located, as of *1850*, «[i]n my thoughts». A fundamental conceptual category of space as informing language in the form of prepositional logic, as will be seen, thus defeats the 'superficially aesthetic' attempt at semantic take-over: by rule of the global system of human thought, then, no local instance of «my thoughts» can possess (or, as poetic logic would have it, metonymically reversing causal polarities: be possessed by) anything in this world («unknown modes of being» included) if the object of would-be possession (operative conceptual scheme: containment) be conceived as anything

but *in* the space of the would-be possessing (in fact itself possessed) subject. The fact that everything else – «Of unknown modes of being; [...] my thoughts» – is still in the space of the verse-line, as will be seen, is not enough: the fact that «over» *is*, however, constitutes sufficient lexical meaning to ensure that the poetic dream (nightmare?) of earlier possession (possessedness) is defnitely, indeed, over.

III

In the post-Miltonic, including not least the Wordsworthian, poem, a linear configuration in space, the verse line, as a line of writing, remains, inextricably, an object of visual perception, its conceptual status having changed accordingly. As such, visuality has had an increasingly important role to play in the culture of poetic textuality as indeed recordable by literary historiography. What I have attempted to sketch, in the course of such close spatio-temporal analysis as has been endeavoured above, then, is how the semantics of the blank verse texture of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* may be seen to continue the Miltonic tradition of versification, that of «the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another.»

To be sure, the style of Miltonic counterpointing, the very idea of variously drawing out the sense from one line into the other, as keenly observed by Hollander (1973/1975), has gone on to become a characteristic of modern (including, not least, «free») verse as such. Wordsworth, as Ricks (1971) has amply shown, is fundamentally dependent on similar uses of enjambement. We might venture to stipulate, indeed, that modern, whether Romantic or Modernist (or Postmodernist?), poetic versification be an invention to a great extent Miltonic as far as many an aspect of graphico-semantic technique is concerned, or, to put the same thing differently, that its history be one of later generations of poets continuously reinventing Milton. Without the latter's recasting of Shakespearean blank

verse, heavily enjambed as this form was to become in the Bard's later plays (cf. Bathurst), from the format of dramatic poetry into that of the epic, Wordsworth would have had nothing to work with, going on to successfully recast it into the lyric.

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