THE WAYS OF USING PUN AND ZEUGMA IN ENGLISH POETRY

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Polysemy is a category of lexicology and as such belongs to language-as-a-system. In actual everyday speech polysemy vanishes unless it is deliberately retained for certain stylistic purposes. A context that does not seek to produce any particular stylistic effect generally materializes but one definite meaning. However, when a word begins to manifest an interplay between the primary and one of the derivative meanings we are again confronted with an SD. Let us analyse the following example from Sonnet 90 by Shakespeare[1] where the key-words are intentionally made to reveal two or more meanings."Then hate me if thou wilt, if ever now. Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross."The word 'hate' materializes several meanings in this context. The primary meaning of the word, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, is 'to hold in very strong dislike'. This basic meaning has brought to life some derivative meanings which, though having very much in common, still show some nuances, special shades of meaning which enrich the semantic structure of the word. They are: 1) 'to detest'; 2) 'to bear malice to'; 3) the opposite of to love (which in itself is not so emotionally coloured as in the definition of the primary meaning: it almost amounts to being indifferent); 4) 'to feel a repulsive attitude'. Other dictionaries fix such senses as 5) 'to wish to shun' (Heritage Dictionary); 6) 'to feel aversion for' (Random House Dictionary); 7) 'to bear ill-will against'; 8) 'to desire evil to (persons)' (Wyld's Dictionary). There is a peculiar interplay among derivative meanings of the word 'hate' in Sonnet 90 where the lamentation of the poet about the calamities which had befallen him results in his pleading with his beloved not to leave him in despair. The whole of the context forcibly suggests that there is a certain interaction of the following meanings: 2) 'to bear malice' (suggested by the line 'join with the spite of fortune')—4) 'to feel a repulsive attitude'—5) 'to wish to shun' (suggested by the line 'if thou wilt leave me do not leave me last' and also 'compared with loss of thee')—7) and 8) 'to desire evil and bear ill-will against' (suggested by the line 'join with the spite of fortune' and 'so shall I taste the very worst of fortune's might'). All these derivative meanings interweave with the primary one and this network of meanings constitutes a stylistic device which may be called the polysemantic effect.The word 'bent' in the second line of the sonnet does not present any difficulty in decoding its meaning. The metaphorical meaning of the word is apparent. A contextual meaning is imposed on the word. The micro-context is the key to decode its meaning.The past participle of the verb to bend together with the verb to cross builds a metaphor the meaning of which is 'to hinder', 'to block', 'to interfere'.The polysemantic effect is a very subtle and sometimes hardly perceptible stylistic device. But it is impossible to underrate its significance in

discovering the aesthetically pragmatic function of the utterance.Unlike this device, the two SDs—Zeugma and Pun lie, as it were, on the surface of the text.Zeugma is the use of a word in the same grammatical but different semantic relations to two adjacent words in the context, the semantic relations being, on the on hand, literal, and, on the other, transferred."Dora, plunging at once into privileged intimacy and into the middle of the room". (B. Shaw)'To plunge' (into the middle of a room) materializes the meaning 'to rush into' or 'enter impetuously'. Here it is used in its concrete, primary, literal meaning; in 'to plunge into privileged intimacy' the word 'plunge' is used in its derivative meaning.The same can be said of the use of the verbs 'stain' and 'lose' in the following lines from Pope's "The Rape of the Lock":

"...Whether the Nymph

Shall stain her Honour or her new Brocade

Or lose her Heart or necklace at a Ball."

This stylistic device is particularly favoured in English emotive prose and in poetry. The revival of the original meanings of words must be regarded as an essential quality of any work in the belles-lettres style. A good writer always keeps the chief meanings of words from fading away, provided the meanings are worth being kept fresh and vigorous.Zeugma is a strong and effective device to maintain the purity of the primary meaning when the two meanings clash. By making the two meanings conspicuous in this particular way, each of them stands out clearly. The structure of zeugma may present variations from the patterns given above. Thus in the sentence:

"...And May's mother always stood on her gentility; and Dot's mother never stood on anything but her active little feet" (Dickens) The word 'stood' is used twice. This structural variant of zeugma, though producing some slight difference in meaning, does not violate the principle of the stylistic device. It still makes the reader realize that the two meanings of the word 'stand' are simultaneously expressed, one primary and the other derivative.The pин is another stylistic device based on the interaction of two well-known meanings of a word or phrase. It is difficult do draw a hard and fast distinction between zeugma and the pun. The only reliable distinguishing feature is a structural one: zeugma is the realization of two meanings with the help of a verb which is made to refer to different subjects or objects (direct or indirect). The pun is more independent. There need not necessarily be a word in the sentence to which the pun-word refers. This does not mean, however, that the pun is entirely free. Like any other stylistic device, it must depend on a context. But the context may be of a more expanded character, sometimes even as large as a whole work of emotive prose. Thus the title of one of Oscar Wilde's plays, "The Importance of Being Earnest" has a pun in it, inasmuch as the name of the hero and the adjective meaning 'seriously-minded' are both present in our mind.Here is another example of a pun where a larger context for its realization is used:

'"Bow to the board," said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that'. (Dickens)In fact, the humorous effect is caused by the interplay not of two meanings of one word, but of two words. 'Board' as a group of officials with functions of administration and management and 'board' as a piece of furniture (a table) have become two distinct words. 1Puns are often used in riddles and jokes, for example, in this riddle: What is the difference between a schoolmaster and an engine-driver? (One trains the mind and the other minds the train.)Devices of simultaneously realizing the various meanings of words, which are of a more subtle character than those embodied in puns and zeugma, are to be found in poetry and poetical descriptions and in speculations in emotive prose. Men-of-letters are especially sensitive to the nuances of meaning embodied in almost every common word, and to make these words live with their multifarious semantic aspects is the task of a good writer. Those who can do it easily are said to have talent.In this respect it is worth subjecting to stylistic analysis words ordinarily perceived in their primary meaning but which in poetic diction begin to acquire some additional, contextual meaning. This latter meaning sometimes overshadows the primary meaning and it may, in the course of time, cease to denote the primary meaning, the derived meaning establishing itself as the most recognizable one. these cases means to leave the domain of stylistics and find ourselves in the domain of lexicology.To illustrate the interplay of primary and contextual meanings, let us take a few examples from poetical works:

In Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the poet, taking delight in watching the snow fall on the woods, concludes his poem in the following words:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep."

The word 'promises' here is made to signify two concepts, viz. 1) a previous engagement to be fulfilled and 2) moral or legal obligation.The plural form of the word as well as the whole context of the poem are convincing proof that the second of the two meanings is the main one, in spite of the fact that in combination with the verb to keep (to keep a promise) the first meaning is more predictable.

Here is another example.

In Shakespearian Sonnet 29 there are the following lines:

"When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,

I all alone beweep my outcast state,

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries

And think upon myself and curse my fate."

Almost every word here may be interpreted in different senses: sometimes the differences are hardly perceptible, sometimes they are obviously antagonistic to the primary meaning.But we shall confine our analysis only to the meaning of the word 'cries' which signifies both prayer and lamentation. These two meanings are suggested by the relation of the word 'cries' to 'trouble deaf heaven'. But the word 'cries' suggests not only prayer and lamentation, it also implies violent prayer and lamentation as if in deep despair, almost with tears (see the word 'beweep' in the second line of the part of the sonnet quoted).It is very important to be able to follow the author's intention from his manner of expressing nuances of meaning which are potentially present in the semantic structure of existing words. Those who fail to define the suggested meanings of poetic words will never understand poetry because they are unable to decode the poetic language.In various functional styles of language the capacity of a word to signify several meanings simultaneously manifests itself in different degrees. In scientific prose it almost equals zero. In poetic style this is an essential property.To observe the fluctuations of meanings in the belles-lettres style is not only important for a better understanding of the purpose or intention of the writer, but also profitable to a linguistic scholar engaged in the study of semantic changes in words.

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