The Dynamics of Wordplay

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Wordplay and Metalinguistic / Metadiscursive Reflection

Authors, Contexts, Techniques, and Meta-Reflection

Edited by
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Peter Koch (1951–2014) in memoriam

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Contents

Angelika Zirker and Esme Winter-Froemel
Wordplay and Its Interfaces in Speaker-Hearer Interaction: An Introduction — 1

I Authors and Contexts

Martina Bross
“Equivocation will undo us”? Wordplay and Ambiguity in Hamlet’s First and Second Line — 25

Thomas Kullmann
Wordplay as Courtly Pastime and Social Practice: Shakespeare and Lewis Carroll — 47

Maik Goth
***Double Entendre* in Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Comedy — 71**

Sheelagh Russell-Brown
The Serious Work of Play: Wordplay in the “Dark Sonnets” of Gerard Manley Hopkins — 95

II Linguistic Techniques of Wordplay

Vincent Renner
Lexical Blending as Wordplay — 119

Pierre J. L. Arnaud, François Maniez and Vincent Renner
Non-Canonical Proverbial Occurrences and Wordplay: A Corpus Investigation and an Enquiry Into Readers’ Perception of Humour and Cleverness — 135

Sebastian Knospe
A Cognitive Model for Bilingual Puns — 161

Ian Duhig
Interview: A Perspective from Practical and Professional Experience – Wordplay in Poetry — 195

III Genre and Meta-Reflection

Johannes Kabatek
Wordplay and Discourse Traditions — 213

Svea Schauffler
Wordplay in Subtitled Films – An Audience Study — 229

Monika Schmitz-Emans
Plays around Surfaces and Depths: Transitions between Two- and Three-Dimensionality Reflected by Wordplays and Puns — 245

Matthias Bauer
Secret Wordplay and What It May Tell Us — 269

Appendix

List of Contributions and Abstracts — 291

List of Contributors — 301

Index — 309

Angelika Zirker and Esme Winter-Froemel

Wordplay and Its Interfaces in Speaker-Hearer Interaction: An Introduction

Abstract: Taking the ubiquity and variety of wordplay in both everyday communication and literary texts as a starting point, this contribution sets out to present two different perspectives that allow for a profound interdisciplinary approach. Firstly, the metalinguistic / metadiscursive point of view helps us analyze how wordplay is used and interpreted in various communicative situations. This metalinguistic / metadiscursive perspective reflects on both the linguistic code (or linguistic codes in cases of multilingual wordplay) and on the act of communication itself. Secondly, we are looking at various interplays of wordplay, including linguistic, cognitive, social, etc. forms of such interplay. Our approach foregrounds not only the complexity of wordplay as an interface phenomenon but also allows for a better understanding of wordplay as employed in speaker-hearer interaction and thus also unravels fundamental aspects of language and communication.

Keywords: auto-referentiality, everyday communication, fraternization, interdisciplinary approach, interfaces, interplay, metalinguistic function, poetic function, Roman Jakobson, speaker-hearer interaction

1 Introductory Remarks

Wordplay is a genuine interface phenomenon to be found both in everyday communication and in literary texts and is thus part of various discourse traditions. It may fulfil a wide range of functions and be entertaining and comical, it may be used to conceal taboo, and it may influence the way in which a speaker's character is perceived. The interdisciplinary approach to the study of wordplay proposed here thus combines literary and linguistic analysis and integrates various kinds of text types, genres as well as contexts of usage. For instance, linguistics is interested in the semantic connections between the lexical units involved and, more generally, in linguistic motivation / transparency as illustrated by wordplay, as well as in its pragmatic use in communication. Literary studies analyzes autoreferentiality of wordplay, for example in nonsense literature. Methods and tools of analysis may therefore be combined and lead to broader perspectives with regard to functions, effects and the systematics of

Sutherland, Robert D. 1970. *Language and Lewis Carroll*. The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.
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Matthias Bauer

Secret Wordplay and What It May Tell Us

Abstract: This article describes wordplay which does not aim at an immediate, general effect but stays unnoticed for some time and / or by a part of the hearers. Such unobvious and sometimes even secret wordplay has not yet been regarded as a kind of its own, even though it has features and functions that distinguish it from wordplay that is perceived immediately. It is also to be distinguished from related phenomena such as wordplay whose meaning is "unharnessed" (Womack 2002). When secret wordplay is noticed, it is found to enhance the meaning of the text. Whereas open wordplay flouts several maxims belonging to the cooperative principle in communication, the maxims are apparently not flouted by secret wordplay. At the same time, secret wordplay makes us see more clearly the range of features and effects of wordplay in general. For example, it helps us realize that wordplay is a scalar phenomenon. The less obvious a wordplay is, the stronger it must be so as to avoid being contested. When analysing secret wordplay, at least four parameters should be taken into account: its linguistic features (such as homonyms of synonyms, frequently in different languages), its contextual integration (such as its contribution to thematic unity, its communicative functions (such as underscoring the speaker's and the hearer's wit), and its social functions (such as excluding certain hearers). Finally, we see that analysing secret wordplay contributes to the discussion of wider issues, such as the relation of word knowledge and world knowledge in the appreciation of literature.

Keywords: communication in drama, communication in poetry, Edmund Spenser, Emily Dickinson, *Hamlet*, *Henry 5*, homonymy, John Milton, paronomasia, paronymy, Paul Grice, *Romeo and Juliet*, Speaker-hearer interaction, secret wordplay, synonymy, William Congreve, William Shakespeare

1 What Is Secret Wordplay?

Wordplay frequently aims at effects that go along with a certain processing effort: the reader or hearer must notice that there is a play on words intended, must realize its meaning, and will, as a rule, take pleasure in the discovery. Wordplay thus establishes a bond between speaker and hearer: the speaker assumes that the hearer will be able to get it and thus pays his audience a compliment, which is returned by their appreciation and expression of delight. Au-

thors, however, may wish to heighten the pleasure by deferring it, or they may have other reasons for raising the hurdles, turning the play on words into a mystery that is only to be solved by a select, knowledgeable audience.

In this paper, I will be concerned with such unobvious, mysterious or even secret wordplay by focusing on examples mainly from English literature. How is this kind of wordplay brought about? What are its functions? And how can we know, especially when confronted with instances from earlier periods, that the secret nature of the wordplay is the result of a communicative strategy rather than just the outcome of linguistic and cultural change that makes the wordplay go unnoticed? By considering these questions, we may even hope to learn more about wordplay in general. At the same time, secret wordplay shares features with other forms of secrecy in communication, such as the riddle or unexplained allegory (*tota allegoria*).[1] As regards the reader's task of discovery, the secret pun comes very close to a riddle, with the difference that the riddle is, in most cases, exhausted once you have found the solution, whereas the wordplay that you discover opens up a new dimension of meaning. The riddle is a text that exists for its answer[2]; the discovery of secret wordplay exists for the text in which it is made.[3] This distinction also points to a difference between open and secret wordplay: a more or less obvious pun may need very little text (a short sentence may be enough: "An archaeologist's career ended in ruins"; Pollack 2012: 42) but secret wordplay as a rule needs more embedding, and this is why it is especially at home in literary texts.

1 For the relation of wordplay and riddle, see Cook (2006), especially chapter 7 (on Lewis Carroll and the *Alice* books). See also Green and Pepicello (1978). Quilligan maintains that "the generation of narrative structure out of wordplay" (1979: 22) is a defining feature of allegory. Quilligan in fact strives to redefine allegory by a "fundamental shift in emphasis away from our traditional insistence on allegory's distinction between word said and meaning meant, to the simultaneity of the process of signifying multiple meaning" (26). Ambiguity and wordplay are thus to replace "the time-honored definition of allegory" which tends to see allegory disintegrating into "a process of verbal legerdemain designed to hide, rather than to reveal, meaning" (26–27). Quilligan criticizes this tendency but could well have integrated established notions of allegory as the "hidden" expression of meaning with her approach to allegory via puns and "verbal ambidextrousness" (26): when she stresses that the allegory of Despair in Book 1 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* depends on the punning evocation of "dis-pair" (37), she realizes that "many have seen the Despair episode as a conflict between the teachings of the Old and New Testaments without noticing the pun" (40). Thus the wordplay may be just as hidden as the allegorical meaning.

2 Apart from possible social communicative functions, of course.

3 For this reason, riddles can be translated easily, whereas the translation of wordplay is, in most cases, quite difficult.

Let me explain, by means of an example, why I think that there is such a thing as "secret wordplay" and that, even though it may not be categorically different from other kinds of wordplay, it is still something special. Why, for example, is it that Elizabeth's neck, in Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* 64, smells "lyke to a bounch of Cullambynes [columbines]" (Spenser [1595] 1997: 94)? As Alastair Fowler (1975) has noted, it is not just because columbines are white but also because *collum* means 'neck' (96).[4] We see that such unobvious wordplay may be based on expressions that are not even mentioned in the text, e.g. words in another language which provide the link between different parts of an utterance. In the case of Spenser's poem, the wordplay is semantically fitting but does not add any new denotations to the line. The link between *neck* and *columbine* is underscored by letting the one expression participate in the meaning of the other through wordplay. The evocation of Latinity through combining *neck* and *columbine* may also strengthen thematic coherence, since it serves as an indirect reminder of the fact that the columbine, in classical antiquity, was a plant connected with the goddess of love.[5] The wordplay makes the expression serve, in this poem of praise, not only to show a quality of the admired lady but the attitude and the wit of the speaker (and of the poet); it furthermore invites readers to be delighted by their own wit in making the discovery. This involvement and exposure of qualities by all participants agrees with the way in which the *blason* or beauty catalogue is reduced (or enhanced) to absurdity in this poem, where the various body parts are associated with different smells and the speaker implicitly claims to be able to distinguish, for example, between the smell of the lady's eyes and that of her brows.[6] The interlingual pun thus shows very clearly that the point of the description is the description itself, the playfulness, secrecy and process of discovery that go along with it.

It seems to me that systematic descriptions of wordplay have neglected to consider the place and nature of this kind of "secret wordplay," which also has been given the mock-learned name "paronomasia celata" (Bauer 1995). Jacqueline Henry (2003) distinguishes between wordplay (*calembour*) "*in absentia*" and

4 In his edition of Spenser's *Amoretti and Epithalamion* ([1595] 1997: 197), Larsen expatiates on this in his annotation: "*neck* ... *bounch of Cullambynes*: an extended etymological pun: 1. *collum* = neck + *bynde* = bunch (*OED* bind 9); but 2. also *columbine*: like a dove (= *columba*) or of the color of a dove's neck (*OED* 3)."

5 For symbolic meanings of the columbine, see Kandeler and Ullrich (2009).

6 "Her lips did smell lyke vnto Gillyflowers, / her ruddy cheekes lyke vnto Roses red: / her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures, / her louely eyes lyke Pincks but newly spred" (Spenser [1595] 1997: 94, l. 5–8).

"*in praesentia*" (288),[7] which takes cognizance of the fact that the wordplay may be contained in a single plurivalent textual element (*in absentia*) or in the combination of several (*in praesentia*). This distinction, however, does not really tell us much about secret wordplay. We might perhaps assume that secret wordplay is always wordplay *in absentia* but this need not be the case. In the Spenser example, the wordplay is based on the combination of several textual elements (and is therefore "present"), but it is nevertheless "absent" in the sense that we will not notice it unless we switch to Latin. So how do we know that there is a play on words? It seems to me that two conditions must be fulfilled: there must be a semantic, phonetic or graphic plurivalence, which may be translingual, and the textual and / or situational context must warrant that the different forms and meanings are related in a way that may be unexpected and go unnoticed for some time but is still relevant to what the discourse is about. The discovery of that relevance or aptness is part of the game in secret wordplay. (Thus it may be doubted that secret wordplay is possible in nonsense literature, but it may be equally doubted that there is, strictly speaking, a lot of such literature.[8]) This is analogous to a phenomenon such as the Metaphysical Conceit, in which a seemingly far-fetched metaphor may turn out to be particularly appropriate.[9]

We may describe the difference between "open" and "secret" wordplay by referring to Grice's maxims that substantiate the cooperative principle (Grice [1975] 1991). Wordplay that has been noted by the hearer or reader can be described, in most cases, as a flouting of the maxims of relation (be relevant) and manner (be perspicuous, e.g. avoid ambiguity). According to Grice, the flouting of maxims "characteristically gives rise to a *conversational implicature*" (30). In the case of wordplay, the implicature may be that the speaker wants to be deliberately ambiguous (as in *double entendre*).[10] By contrast, in secret wordplay the speaker apparently does *not* flout the maxims, whereas in fact they are being flouted – that is to say, we discover the flouting of the maxims only after we have noticed the wordplay. Accordingly, the conversational implicature is a different one. It is not just delayed but gains the additional feature of unobviousness, i.e. becomes much more implicit than ordinary implicatures. In that way, secret wordplay, once it has been noted, creates an awareness of the implicature; it is seen as a reflexion on communication-by-implicature itself.

7 This is taken up by Rabatel in *The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2.

8 For the absence of any coherent meaning would make the discovery of pertinent meanings impossible. But even in texts frequently counted among nonsense literature, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), there is usually a level of coherence or a frame to be discovered in which the wordplay makes sense. See the chapter on "Sprachspiel und Nonsens" by Zirker (2010: 220–264, e.g. 236–237).

9 For a discussion of the appropriateness versus arbitrariness of the conceit, see van Hook (1986). For a general survey, see Johnson (2012).

10 See the contribution by Maik Goth in this volume.

2 What Is Not Secret Wordplay?

Considering critical views on related forms of wordplay helps us get a better idea of what secret wordplay entails and what it does (and is) not. Womack's study of "Undelivered Meanings" (2002) is most helpful in this respect. The examples and critical reflections he mentions are similar to and yet different from what I am after. Womack discusses "unharnessed meanings" (e.g. 2002: 147) in wordplay, i.e. meanings that are neither promoted by the context nor contribute to the meaning of the text. To Womack these are "unnoticed but poetically effective puns" (146). Apart from the fact that puns are not the only form of wordplay to be taken into consideration, Womack mixes up two different issues here: the question whether the wordplay "reaches our conscious attention" or remains unnoticed (148), and the question whether the meanings connected to the expressions involved are pertinent to the context in which they occur or whether they stay "undelivered, potential, nascent" (148). The secret wordplay with which I am concerned does not, at least not immediately, reach our attention but definitely enhances the meaning of the passage or text in which it occurs.

Womack is interested in the aesthetic effect of wordplay (what he calls "poetically effective") rather than in the integration of its meaning. But there is a problem with this distinction: other than the modes and techniques with which he compares wordplay, namely "the modulations in key and rhythm in a musical composition" (142), or "the patterns of shape, color and light in a painting" (142) which need not have related functions or meanings, wordplay only exists because meanings are joined and played off against each other. In paronomasia, the play on meanings is realized by a play on sounds and their similarity, but it is still a play on meanings. What distinguishes such wordplay from other forms of soundplay, such as rhyme or alliteration, is that the meanings necessarily play a significant role, whereas in rhyme and alliteration the identical sounds may suggest a semantic relationship but need not do so.

Accordingly, let us briefly consider the distinction between "harnessed" and "unharnessed" or "undelivered" meanings discussed by Womack. As an example of "harnessed" meanings, he cites the words of the mortally wounded Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, "Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a

grave man" (Shakespeare 2008: 3.1.93–94; Womack 2002: 149). The pun on the noun "grave" is obvious, and the meaning contextually appropriate, since Mercutio is about to die. Nevertheless, Womack claims that Mercutio's "wordplay calls attention to the wit that produced it rather than to some profound connection between tombs and dignity" (Womack 2002: 149). This reminds us of the example from Spenser (and of communication-by-implicature): there is frequently a self-reflexive dimension in wordplay which draws attention to the speaker's disposition. In neither case, however, does this detract from the semantic link. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it actually enhances the profound connection between tombs and being serious and grave: the very words that Mercutio utters show him to be anything but grave while he is alive; only death will bring about this change. To him, living means *not* being "grave".[11]

Womack contrasts the Mercutio example with Hamlet's words after the death of Polonius: "This counsellor / Is now most still, most secret, and most grave, / Who was in life a foolish prating knave" (Shakespeare 2008: 3.4.213–15). As Womack points out, "the context for a pun on *grave* is at least as rich here as in *Romeo and Juliet*" but it "is not harnessed to bring the potential for punning to our conscious attention" (149). Again, it is a bit confusing to find the question of our attention mixed up with the question if the meanings are connected. The two issues may but need not go together. Instead, I suggest we consider briefly why the *Hamlet* expression does not inevitably work as an example of wordplay. I think there is much less of a surprise in it. Mercutio astonishingly maintains his lack of gravity on the brink of its inevitable preponderance. With Polonius, gravity is less surprising, even though Hamlet contrasts his now being most still and secret and grave with his having been "a foolish prating knave." If there is a wordplay, it is based on the repeated use of "most," which points to the absolute stillness, secrecy and gravity of death, three qualities which, in a less absolute fashion, mark the councillor. Polonius possesses them now that he is dead, whereas he was an imperfect councillor before, as he lacked them while he was alive. Furthermore, the reading of "grave" as a noun fits better syntactically in Mercutio's than in Hamlet's utterance.[12] This is not a requirement, and

11 Winter-Froemel and Zirker (2015) cite this example as a case of ambiguity produced by the internal vs. external level of dramatic communication (323). While this may be right (trying to be funny may be inappropriate at this point in the play world and the pun might therefore be primarily considered as a moment of comic relief for the audience), I think that the wordplay eminently fits the character within the world of the play – not so much because Mercutio cannot help cracking jokes, but because his play on words is a very serious self-characterization.

12 Leech (1969), cited approvingly in Delabastita (1993), seems to think otherwise, when he writes (cf. Bross 36 in this volume) about Mercutio's pun: "Yet, the strength of such syntactic

Hamlet actually does play on the word just as he plays on the notion of the "secret" councillor – in fact, as soon as Polonius is dead, he starts being jocular. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the less fitting the second meaning is syntactically (or the less similar the forms involved), the stronger the combination of semantic surprise and appropriateness must be (the unexpected link that is then realized to be most fitting) in order to establish wordplay. In that respect, Hamlet's wordplay on "grave" is a rather weak one, but so are all his rather desperate attempts at being witty in this scene. The more secret a wordplay is, the stronger it must be in order to avoid being contested.

3 Scales of Wordplay

Neither of the two passages in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* is an example of secret wordplay, but both of them help us to see, together with our first example from Spenser's *Amoretti*, that wordplay is a scalar phenomenon: it may be stronger or weaker, and it may be perceived at once or it may be less obvious, even secret. Both scales are dependent on a number of factors and are interdependent. A play on words may justly be called strong when a fairly wide gap between meanings expressed by the same or similar forms is surprisingly made relevant to the textual or situational context (as in the case of Mercutio); the context – especially, but not only in a literary work – may be manipulated accordingly. The relationship may involve contrast as well, as a recent non-literary example from the British election campaign shows. It is a quip by the London Mayor, Boris Johnson: "Vote Tory, get broadband. Vote Ukip, get Miliband" (Hyde 2015). The basis of this play on words is the (apparently inappropriate) semantic relationship discovered between the two forms *mili-* and

constraints must not be overestimated, as considerations of syntactic well-formedness can sometimes be seen to give way under the pressure of other (semantic, non-verbal, etc.) contextual constraints. Using a term from Leech (1969: 211), one may call such wordplay asyntactic" (Delabastita 1993: 71). Leech actually writes about Mercutio's pun: "The sinister meaning of grave hinted at here is that of grave as a noun, although in the given construction 'a grave man,' it can only be an adjective" (Leech 1969: 211). This is of course incorrect. Nominal collocations and compounds including "man" were common even in Shakespeare's time, familiar examples being "bellman," "cellarman," and "waterman" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2014: "waterman" *n.* 2.a. "A man working on a boat or among boats, *esp.* a boatman (as the licensed wherry-man of London) who plies for hire on a river, etc."). Even though "graveman" is not lexicalized, there is no problem in forming it analogously to the other examples mentioned. Therefore, the syntax of "you shall find me a grave man" is perfectly regular.

milli- (wordplay *in absentia*), the former being part of the Labour leader's name and the latter being a prefix indicating smallness ('a thousandth part'). We read the politician's name as a compound in this way because it is paired with a compound whose first part, "broad," stands in a relation of opposition to the implied meaning 'milli' (wordplay *in praesentia*). The surprise is enhanced by presenting the primary wordplay (*mili- / milli-*) only after the seemingly innocuous context has been introduced. Secret wordplay in the sense described above only works, I think, if the play on words is a fairly strong one—only that the surprise is delayed, and the uncovering of the secret is part of it. The Johnson example fulfils the requirement of strength but, in spite of its complexity, is still a rather obvious one, at least as regards its verbal material. It presupposes a certain kind of cultural knowledge (about current issues, about politicians) but it is still not secret. It is not made in such a way as to be recognized only after overcoming a big hurdle. The hurdle is low enough to make hearers jump it (almost) immediately, yet big enough to make us realize the wit of the speaker.

4 Four Parameters of Secret Wordplay

We are beginning to distinguish several parameters for analyzing the textual strategies of secret wordplay. For in order to come to terms with secret wordplay, we must assume that the secrecy is intentional – even though, especially when dealing with examples from the past, we may find it difficult to decide if the unobviousness is deliberate or not. Linguistic and cultural change will have to be taken into account. We have already seen that (1) linguistic features (e.g. similarity of form, syntactic appropriateness) play a decisive role, as does (2) the contextual integration. Both are linked with (3) communicative functions (e.g. in the Spenser example, enhancing the impression of wit; the reflexion on implicature) and with (4) social functions, i.e. with the relation to the hearer or reader, who has to fulfil certain requirements. A special case in this respect is presented by the double (internal and external) communication of fictional texts and especially drama. All these four parameters are interdependent but it may be helpful to focus on each of them individually.

4.1 Linguistic Features

As to the linguistic material, its special nature and arrangement is the primary cause for wordplay going unnoticed. If, however, the second meaning in a pun

does not fit syntactically, or the similarity of two forms in paronomasia is but slight, it is all the more imperative that the above-mentioned requirement of appropriateness and surprise be fulfilled. It is no coincidence that unobvious wordplay frequently involves synonymy rather than (or besides) homonymy or paronymy. For in that case the morphological aspect is unproblematic (or deceptively harmless) and still the intended effect of deferral or hurdle-raising may be achieved. A not very secret example is to be found in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, where Touchstone says to Audrey, "I am here with thee and thy goats as the most capricious poet honest Ovid was among the Goths" (Shakespeare 2008: 3.3.5–6). The paronomasia goats / Goths is the obvious case of wordplay; the slightly more secret one is the explanation why Ovid is capricious: because *capra* means 'goat.' The fact that this case of wordplay reminds us of the columbine / *collum* example above points up the historical distance which may play a role in turning it more secret than it used to be: at a time when Latin was still omnipresent (and the main subject at school), switching from English to Latin even without an injunction to do so was a much more frequent activity than it is today.

But of course Latin was not the only language involved in this technique of unobvious wordplay. An example is Milton's translation of Psalm 88:

> 3 For cloyed with woes and trouble store
> Surcharged my soul doth lie,
> My life at death's uncheerful door
> Unto the grave draws nigh.
>
> (Milton 1981: 317, l. 9–12)

This is particularly interesting since the other translations are very different. The Authorized Version, for example, simply has "For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave" (*The Bible* [1611] 1997: 688, Ps 88.3). Why does Milton introduce "cloyed" and "surcharged" to describe the fullness of the soul, thus adding a graphic image of surfeit? I suggest it is because Milton's brain, as is well known (cf. Hale 1997), constantly worked in several languages at once, which is why *soul* to him evoked the homographic French *soûl*; Cotgrave in his 1611 French-English dictionary has the spelling *saoul* and gives the equivalent (for the adjective) "*Full, glutted, cloyed, saciated, that hath so much of a thing as he is readie to loath it*" ([1611] 1971)[13] *Soul* seems to

13 Perhaps John Donne had this in mind when death, in one of his Holy Sonnets ("This is my Play's last Scene"), is called "glutt'nous" and, true to this quality, begins to "unjoint / My body and soul" (Donne 2010: 531).

be especially suited to Anglo-French connections. For example, Gilian West has noted (1998: 156–157) that Shakespeare has quite a preference for associating the soul with the willow, as when Desdemona sings "the poor soul sat sighing, by a sycamore tree / Sing all a green willow" (*Othello* 2008: 4.3.40-41). This is an appropriate association, for the willow is "worne of forlorne Paramours" (Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, [1590] 1977: I.1). The obvious pun on the sycamore tree (i.e. *sick-amor*, which suggests the meaning 'love-sick,) fits in perfectly. It is furthermore secretly obvious that the willow is such a soulful tree (and herb) because its French name is *saule* (Cotgrave [1611] 1971).

Foreign language expressions, however, are not an absolute requirement in order to produce this kind of unobvious wordplay. Emily Dickinson uses it in an ironical poem about one of the Old Testament stories most irritating to the modern mind, Abraham and Isaac (Johnson no. 1317):

> Abraham to kill him
> Was distinctly told —
> Isaac was an Urchin —
> Abraham was old —
>
> Not a hesitation —
> Abraham complied —
> Flattered by Obeisance
> Tyranny demurred —
>
> Isaac — to his children
> Lived to tell the tale —
> Moral — with a Mastiff
> Manners may prevail.
>
> (Dickinson 1979, vol. 3: 911)

This is of course not a poem that teaches us how to appease unpleasantly large animals. The last lines only make sense if we remember that the generic term (or synonym) for mastiff, dog, is a conventional euphemism (or rather dysphemism) for "God" (cf. Bauer 1995 / 1996).

The examples confirm that, whereas obvious wordplay is based on the juxtaposition of meanings produced by words that sound or look similar, secret wordplay goes one step further in that it combines homonymy or paronomy with synonymy (and similar semantic relationships). This is frequently the reason why it may take a couple of centuries to spot it. In the Dickinson example, we have seen that paronymy (the anagram *dog-god*) is combined with a sort of synonymy (*mastiff-dog*). Frequently the synonymy consists in foreign-language equivalents of the native word, so that either the English homonym of the foreign synonym (as in *columbine* and *collum*) or the English synonym of the foreign homonym (as in *soul* / *soûl* / *saule* and *surcharged* / *willow*) is used. John Florio, in his famous Italian-English dictionary called *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598), defines synonym ("Sinonimo") as a "word of one signification" (Florio [1598] 1972: 373), which is quite striking, for we would rather expect it to be defined as *two* words "of one signification." It seems that Florio chooses to define synonyms in this way in order to mirror his English translation of "Homonimia, when divers things are signified by one word" (163). The notion of "one word" can thus comprise, firstly, words that have the same sense (cf. *Oxford English Dictionary* 2014: "synonym" *n.* 1.) and, secondly, words that have the same "name" or form (cf. *OED* 2014: "homonym" *n.* 1.). This clearly suggests the close conceptual relationship of homonym and synonym at Florio's time.

As regards the way in which language is used in secret wordplay, however, this combination is not the only one. It may also, for example, involve merely conceptual links. The rich tradition of Roman stage wordplay will provide an example. In the opening scene of Plautus's *Cistellaria* (*The Casket Comedy*), the (apparent) courtesan Selenium engages, over breakfast, in witty wordplay with the (actual) courtesan Gymnasium and her mother. Selenium has fallen in love with a young man, a fact that is called by Gymnasium the perfidy of love. In spite of her emotional state, Selenium has resources for a witty rejoinder: "ergo in me peculatum facit" (Plautus 2011: 142, l. 72). The wordplay is not based on homonymy or paronymy or synonymy here but on a conceptual connection: it is not only that Selenium describes love's action as a robbery (*peculatum*). As Auhagen explains (2004: 193), when Amor makes a courtesan fall in love with a particular man, his action is like the embezzlement of public money, for this is what *peculatum* specifically means.[14] The courtesan, who belongs to all, should not become private property. In order to get this wordplay, we must know that *peculatum* combines two concepts: robbery and the public; the notion of the public is shifted from the area of the state to the area of eros without turning

14 Cooper ([1578] 1958), s.v. "Peculâtus," gives the English equivalent "Robbery of a common treasurie." A nineteenth-century dictionary, Georges's *Handwörterbuch*, translates the expression from Plautus as an example of figurative [bildlich] usage: "bild., amor in me peculatum fecit, spielt an mir Betrug, Plaut. Cist. 72" (Georges and Georges [1913] 1988, vol. 2: 1529).Thus the lexicographer does not seem to have got the wordplay, or would not admit it for reasons of delicacy, for it is the very point of Selenium's joke that *peculatum* literally refers to a common treasury.

peculum into a metaphor.[15] Hearers of course must know what the occupation of the ladies is.

4.2 Contextual Integration

The example also serves to show – in agreement with Juliet's injunction that conceit should be "more rich in matter than in words" (Shakespeare 2008: 2.5.30) – that secret wordplay is a particularly intricate device of linking matter (i.e. meaning) and words. In particular, it may establish or reinforce coherence in a text which otherwise may seem to consist of disparate elements. My case in point is John Donne's poem "The Canonization," in which the speaker starts by defying the world that apparently interferes with his love; a generalizing "you" is told to mind their own business since the world will not be affected by the speaker's cold or heat anyway, e.g. "Soldiers find wars, [...] / Though she and I do love" (Donne 2010: 151, l. 16–18). At this point we are utterly at a loss about the poem's title; we might even suspect a pun on the title word (just as Shakespeare has Timon of Athens pun on "Religious canons" that are "cruel"; 2008: 4.3.60). But in the third of the five stanzas there is a shift. The lovers who at first were nothing are now anything and everything, "Call us what you will, we are made such by love" (Donne 2010: 151, l. 19); the lovers' power of transformation is so great and so mysterious that they give new meaning to the "phoenix riddle" (23), as they "die and rise the same" (26); the speaker envisages "Us canonized for love." He finally calls upon the addressee to invoke him and his beloved, and, in the last two lines to "beg from above / A pattern of your love" (44–45). This last line has frequently been misunderstood; the most authoritative recent critical and annotated edition, for example, prints it as if it was the lovers who were to beg such a pattern:

> And by these hymns, all shall approve
> Us canonized for love.
>
> And thus invoke us: 'You, whom reverend love
> Made one another's hermitage;
> You to whom love was peace that now is rage;
> Who did the whole world's soul extract, and drove
> Into the glasses of your eyes

15 Cf. Knospe (this volume), who deals with the kind of conceptual blending taking place in bilingual wordplay.

> (So made such mirrors and such spies
> That they did all to you epitomize)
> Countries, towns, courts—beg from above
> A pattern of your love!'
>
> (Donne 2010: 154–155, l. 35–45)

The quotation marks provided by the editor obscure the sense, for the point is that the speaker and his beloved themselves become such a pattern. If one wishes to add quotation marks, the stanza should look like this:

> And thus invoke us: 'You, whom reverend love
> Made one another's hermitage;
> You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
> Who did the whole world's soul extract, and drove
> Into the glasses of your eyes;
> (So made such mirrors and such spies
> That they did all to you epitomize)
> Countries, towns, courts.' Beg from above
> A pattern of your love.

This is made evident through wordplay that obviously has escaped the notice of annotators. "Pattern" is, in the Early Modern Period, still an allograph of "Patron" and meant, at the time, what nowadays is usually called "patron saint"; "A saint to whose intercession and protection a person, place, occupation, etc., is specially entrusted" (*OED* 2014: "patron" *n.* 3.a.).[16] Accordingly, the speaker and his beloved both become models or archetypes of love and they become patron saints of lovers; this double process is epitomized in the play on "pattern," which thus literally encapsulates the outline or "ground-plot" of the poem.[17] The "Canonization" of the title word is taken up again in the last line of the poem.

We become aware of a mutual relationship: the unobvious wordplay both depends on thematic context (in this case, the issue of sainthood) and establishes it (in this case, it makes us see the connection between ideal patterns and sainthood). This double function can be found in other poems by Donne as well, for example in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," in which a half-secret interlingual play on the Latin words *aurora*, *aura* and *aurum*, as well as *spero*,

16 The identity of *pattern* and *patron* can still be seen in Irish English; thus the *OED* (2014) lists the meaning of "patron" 3.c. ("patron day") also under "pattern" *n.* 13.

17 The expression "imaginative ground-plot" is to be found in Sidney ([1595] 2002: 103).

spiro, spira, sphaera and *spritus*, provides the coherence of the context by which it is suggested (cf. Bauer 1995).

4.3 Communicative Functions

Apart from the functions mentioned above, unobvious wordplay frequently contributes to strategies of indirectness. This may be motivated by politeness; you do not wish to mention something directly but give a hint, hoping that the addressee may understand a critical remark without being offended or realize a compliment without considering it trivial flattery. Martina Bross (2015) has given an example of such a hidden wordplay which makes disagreement visible but does not openly create offence. When Hamlet, responding to his uncle, states that he is (in the spelling of the Second Quarto) "too much in the sonne" (cited in Bross 36), he punningly rejects his uncle's claims of replacing his father, as he does not wish to be placed in the position of a son by his new "father" Claudius (Bross 40). The example deserves special attention for it shows that even quite obvious wordplay (such as the sun / son pun) may become secret in the sense that its specific, unflattering meaning (out of a range of possible meanings that are evoked simultaneously) is not expressly referred to.

You might say that straightforward wordplay could serve that purpose just as well in that you do not say something directly but evoke it through a pun. But that is frequently still too obvious, too direct. An example of how an unobviously punning mixture of compliment and allegation may indeed serve to declare love better than a complimentary platitude is the wooing of Henry and Katherine at the end of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In this scene, the course of true love does not run quite as smoothly as the English King may have wished. They are having difficulties (or pretend to do so) for the one speaks English and the other French. Thus Henry tells Katherine: "Come, your answer in / broken music – for thy voice is music and thy English broken" (Shakespeare 2008: 5.2.225–226). I think it is not just enough to get the pun here, namely that "broken" is a musical term meaning music arranged for different instruments (*OED* 2014: "broken" *adj.* †15.). The point of the pun is, rather, that "broken" in that sense is a synonym of "consort" (the *OED* 2014 quotes Bacon, "music which we call broken-music or consort-music"), with which it also forms a collocation, "broken consort." In an unspoken pun Henry wishes Katherine to become his consort in the sense of becoming his wife. Of course he also tells her so quite explicitly, but the communicative function of the unobvious wordplay is added, in that it has its very own playful persuasive force.

4.4 Social Functions

Molly Mahood, in her classic study of *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, regards Juliet's words as an example of "unconscious wordplay" (Mahood 1957: 13): "Conceit more rich in matter than in words, / Brags of his substance, not of ornament" (Shakespeare 2008: 2.5.30–31). The fiscal sense of "rich" is enhanced by the context (the ambiguous "matter" and "substance"; Romeo's earlier "dear encounter") while we know that Juliet does not speak of material things. What Mahood therefore means by "unconscious wordplay" is that the *character* at this point does not play on words but Shakespeare does: "The vital wordplay in Shakespeare's writings is that between the characters and their creator, between the primary meaning of words in the context of a person's speech and their secondary meanings as part of the play's underlying pattern of thought" (Mahood 1957: 41). Mahood's term is obviously not the same as secret wordplay, but it is relevant to our discussion. While there may be just a small difference between the two meanings of "rich" involved in the example and the play therefore easy to get, the double communication typical of drama or indeed of almost any literary work of art may turn this play into a difficult one, and we may not find its meaning and purpose obvious.[18]

Dramatists and narrators may play on words behind their characters' backs, so to speak, and even the poet may convey meanings which are different from those intended by his or her speaker or persona. In that case, the wordplay is unobvious or even secret not because the relation of words and their meanings remains hidden but because the ostensible speaker seems largely unaware of it. We can generalize this a bit and say that wordplay may be exclusive as well as unobvious, and that the two features are not necessarily linked, at least not when different levels of communication are involved. In the latter case the wordplay as such may be obvious, but we will have to construct different contexts for the different levels of communication, and we will try and reconcile them, which may not be an easy task. In other cases, however, exclusiveness is brought about by wordplay which is deliberately unobvious to the party who is not to get it. Secret wordplay thus has a social function. You might say that realizing it requires a particular kind of code or knowledge, and for that reason the wordplay acquires a certain degree of secrecy. We find this sort of thing in

18 On the different levels of communication (e.g. interior and exterior communication, but also the levels of experiencing and narrating self in autodiegetic narratives) and the ambiguities triggered by it, see e.g. Bauer, Knape, Koch and Winkler (2010); Winter-Froemel and Zirker (2010, 2015); Bauer (2015).

comedy a lot, especially when there is a dull-witted character who is thus excluded from the fun or who becomes the unknowing victim of the other characters' jollity. In the fourth act of Congreve's *The Way of the World,* Sir Wilfull Witwould has made up his mind to propose to Mrs. Millamant, who of course does not think of taking him seriously. She does not pay attention to him and quotes some lines of poetry to herself:

> MILLAMANT. (*repeating*)
> I swear it will not do its part
> Though thou doest thine, employ'st thy power and art.
> Natural, easy Suckling.
> SIR WILFULL.
> Anan? Suckling? No such suckling neither, cousin, nor stripling;
> I thank heaven I'm no minor.
> MILLAMANT.
> Ah rustic! Ruder than Gothic!
> SIR WILFULL.
> Well, well, I shall understand your lingo one of these days, cousin;
> in the mean while I must answer in plain English. (Congreve [1700] 1994: 4.1.85-92)

This is quite ingenious: Sir Wilfull himself creates the wordplay that remains secret to him. As an ignorant country squire he does not know that Millamant quotes from, and refers to, Sir John Suckling, the cavalier poet. He takes her to refer to a suckling, i.e. a young calf or lamb, and rejects the idea of being treated as a minor. We see how the exclusiveness works: Congreve, Millamant, and we, the knowing urban audience, are "in," and Sir Wilfull is "out." Millamant is "in" even though she does not produce the "Suckling" pun herself – she may have anticipated it – because she goes on referring to "Gothic," which Sir Wilful does not get either but we do. "Gothic" takes up the sheep image in that it is an allusion to the goats / Goths paronomasia, which, as noted, suggests the "capricious" poet Ovid in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

5 Conclusion and Further Questions

Exclusiveness, we see here, is based on knowledge or the lack of it. In that respect wordplay, secret wordplay in particular, is not very different from allusion, which you do not get if you are ignorant. Yet it is not the same as allusion, for when allusion is involved in wordplay, something is done to it, usually by means of homophony, paronomasia, and the other familiar techniques of wordplay. A rewarding research question results from this, namely what kind of

knowledge is involved and what the consequences of this knowledge-involvement may be for the use of wordplay in literary and non-literary utterances. In some ways strong wordplay is always based on some secret, as the semantic link between two forms is mysterious and astonishing, even when the pun itself is not hidden. Thus it is not so easy to construct a meaningful utterance in which you jump casually from "sun" to "son" or vice versa, since the domains of their meanings are pretty far apart. George Herbert, in "The Sonne" ([1633] 2007), links them by providing a Christological context and by including a half-secret pun on the form ("The Sonne[t]"). He presents the knowledge behind the wordplay. Hamlet, with the same pun, counts on the specific knowledge being unequally distributed.

Secret wordplay will give us valuable hints for the kind of knowledge required in understanding wordplay, as it is particularly well suited to show the difference between different kinds of hearers. The hints are directed at principles of coherence in texts, which textual linguistics has described, for example, in terms of frames and scripts; we may also think of discourse topics or of "topics" in the looser general sense of the word, or of isotopy in the semiotic sense.[19] These approaches abstract from the visible or acoustic form of the words and are concerned with semantic features only. By contrast, wordplay is frequently effective because it ignores all those semantic principles of coherence or makes us see coherence where we did not expect it. This is what brings about surprise, laughter, sudden insight. Whereas the meaning-based principles of coherence primarily depend on *world* knowledge (only think of the idea of a communicative frame), the coherence established by wordplay primarily depends on *word* knowledge. It goes without saying that the two belong together but it makes sense to differentiate between two *primarily* relevant kinds of knowledge. And this is even true of secret wordplay when synonymy comes in. You have to know that broken music means consort music in order to realize how Henry gets from one thing to another when he says "broken." You do not even have to know what consort music really is. The differentiation may help us account for a number of things; for the literary scholar, for example, it would be interesting to learn whether the word knowledge required in order to fully appreciate a literary work of art is not more lasting – in spite of language change – than the world knowledge that may be necessary to understand what it is about. In other words, literary texts that significantly depend on forms of wordplay may have a wider and more enduring presence than texts that depend on specialized world

19 Cf., e.g., Lötscher (2008). For a concise statement by A. J. Greimas on his notion of "isotopy of discourse," see Parret (1974: 60–61).

knowledge. This is, admittedly, a somewhat speculative hypothesis that would have to be confirmed or refuted by empirical evidence. My suggestion would be to begin with specific genres: the kind of satirical comedy that is full of allusions to political and other facts may turn out to be much more short-lived than comedy based on verbal wit (which may still be replete with factual references but they are only secondary). In any case, secret wordplay, even more so than wordplay in general, tells us, once we have discovered it, about the ability of language to establish patterns of thought and relationships of meaning that will draw the world along with them.

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Appendix