

# STEPPING OUT OF NARRATIVE LINE: A BIT OF WORD, AND HORSE, PLAY IN *VENUS AND ADONIS*<sup>1</sup>

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Imperiously he leaps, he neighs, he bounds,  
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder;  
The bearing earth with his hard hoof he wounds,  
Whose hollow womb resounds like heaven's  
thunder;  
The iron **bit** he crusheth 'tween his teeth,  
Controlling what he was controllèd with.<sup>2</sup>

Picked out in bold type here is a piece or 'bit' of word-play in Shakespeare's erotic narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*, which has not been noticed, or at least not recorded, and which has ramifications far and beyond its immediate context which I shall explore in what follows. Briefly, it consists in a verbal mimesis of the violence done by the horse to its 'iron bit', an image which thus acquires an emblematic metatextual significance as well as inter- and extra-textual significances.<sup>3</sup> More precisely, the formation of 'tween' from *between* – a formation exemplary of poetic linguistic licence, as I shall indicate – is reactivated by a virtual homophone of the elided syllable or 'bit' before the verbal phrase 'he crusheth'. Releasing the polyvalency of the word *bit* this evokes at the same time its relation to the word *bite*, from which it is formed (again by elision), together with the relation of both to the body's organs of articulation ('tween his teeth'). Evoking these relations this bit of word-play makes them new, illustrating a poetics of re-creative licence, a stepping out from narrative and syntactic linearity in a discursive equivalent to the intemperance of holiday, which, breaking with common or ordinary discourse,

liberates and regenerates desire in a pleasurable re-creation of relations, especially of the body to the body.

In her pioneering work on Shakespearean word-play Patricia Parker has pointed to the ideological implications of such discursive stepping out of line for class and gender relations. These are indeed made explicit in the retrospective version of the horse's act by the poet, an embodiment of unruly female desire, who describes the act as an heroic '[e]nfranchisement of 'his mouth, his back, his breast' from 'petty bondage' of his prior condition.

<sup>1</sup> What follows was first presented at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) and Chambéry (France). I am much indebted to suggestions made by the distinguished company present on both occasions. I record my acknowledgements below; aberrations remain my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Venus and Adonis*, lines 265–70 in William Shakespeare, *The Poems*, edited by John Roe (Cambridge, 1994). Citations (henceforth given in parentheses) will be to this edition. Citations from the plays will be to the *Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore et al. (Boston, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to Brian Vickers for pointing out the impossible character of the horse's action and the failure of verisimilitude in a poem traditionally praised for its 'truth to nature' strengthened by the motivation by another mode of mimesis.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Reading Property* (London and New York, 1987); *Shakespeare the Margins* (Chicago and London, 1990). Parker's analyses show how various kinds of linearity outside the text are interrogated both by the significance of Shakespearean word-play and by the structure of extra-textual structures.

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'[s]ervilely mastered' (lines 396, 394, 392). Though necessarily attending to these ideological implications, I want to focus primarily on the intertextual as well as formal – and meta-textual – aspects of our example. For this bit of word, and horse, play has an intertextual significance, which we may describe as an 'enfranchising' of the 'mouths' of Ovid and Virgil from the constraints of the imperative to moral instruction and, more specifically, the imperative to temperance, an imperative which the Ovidian and Virgilian intertexts in play here had been made to serve by a dominant moralizing interpretative discourse. The liberation from this imperative – for poetic discourse more generally as well as for Ovid and Virgil specifically – is indeed signalled in the meaning/function of the preposition which the verbal phrase 'he crusheth' divides (and iconically usurps the place of). For the place *between* is the place at once of interpretation (that which comes between the reader and the text), and temperance, the virtue which Edmund Spenser, for instance, in the second book of *The Faerie Queene*, 'Of Temperaunce', represents as the place between when he describes Medina in relation to her two sisters: 'Betwixt them both the faire Medina sate'.<sup>5</sup> The image and its word-play emblemize, finally, a rupture which may be taken, I shall suggest, as the rupture, at once of Renaissance and of modernity.

Technically or formally, 'tween' is an example of *Aphaeresis*, which Thomas Wilson and Henry Peacham both place in the first group of rhetorical schemes – defined by Peacham (following Susenbrotus) as 'a fashion of writing or speaking, made new by some Art'.<sup>6</sup> The group is classified by Wilson as 'Figures of a worde' and by Peacham more specifically as 'Schemata Orthographicall', 'which be occupied about letters, and sillables of wordes, lawfull only to Poets . . . unlawfull in prose'.<sup>7</sup> That such figures of the word are peculiar to the poet – instances of poetic licence – is reiterated by George Puttenham, who, without distin-

gushing them as schemes, likewise treats them first in his 'division of figures' describing them as 'auricular figures appertaining to single wordes'.<sup>8</sup> True to his advertised intention to exercise his own bit of 'licence' by imitating the 'liberty' of the Greeks and inventing 'new names for every figure' (*The Arte*, pp. 157, 156), he coins his own vernacular term for the figure of *aphaeresis*:

<sup>5</sup> E. Spenser, *Poetical Works*, edited by J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (Oxford, 1970), p. 80 (book 2, canto 2, stanza 18) (my emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577), reprint (Menston, 1971), fol. 81v (my emphasis) and fol. 82r. All citations will be from this edition (contracted forms normalized, i/j u/v spellings modernized). Compare Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* 1553, reprint (Amsterdam and New York, 1969), fol. 94v (where *Aphaeresis* is translated as 'Abstraction'). My thanks to Maya Mortimer for suggesting the relevance of *tnesis*, which Peacham, again following Susenbrotus, defines: 'when a compounded worde is parted by the interposition of another word, and sometyme of many', giving his own vernacular example, 'you ryse I perceyve early up . . . here the compounded word, ryseuppe is parted, and other wordes put *betwene the partes*' (fol. 84v, my emphasis). For Peacham (as for Servius (see note 12)) *tnesis* may be used only with a compound of two complete words, which *between* is not. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is turned into a virtual compound by the word-play, we may say that we have a twofold figure, which, moreover, iconically reflects on *tnesis* as well as on *aphaeresis*. Though not mentioned by Wilson or Puttenham, *tnesis* is included by Richard Sherry, who also includes *aphaeresis*. Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550), introduced by Herbert W. Hillebrandt (Gainesville, Florida, 1961), pp. 26, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, *The Arte*, fol. 94r. Peacham, *The Garden*, fol. 81v (my emphasis). In the 1593 edition of *The Garden* this group has been dropped as has the group of syntactic schemes which include *tnesis*. See William G. Crane, 'Introduction' in Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593), (Gainesville, Florida, 1954), p. 10. Quintilian treats the addition or omission of a letter or syllable as a poetic licence ('poetico iure'), which should otherwise be shunned as a barbarism. See *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, translated by H. E. Butler, rep. 4 vols. (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1980), vol. 1, pp. 82–85 (Book 1, v. 10–14).

<sup>8</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, edited by Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker, reprint (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 158, 161. All citations will be from this edition (u/v i/j spellings modernized).



*rabbate*. A word, he writes, may be altered in poetic discourse, 'sometimes by adding sometimes by *rabbating* of a syllable or letter . . . either in the beginning, middle or ending . . .' (ibid. p. 161). Having illustrated the figures of addition he goes on: 'And your figures of *rabbate* be as many, videl. From the beginning, as to say [*twixt* for *betwixt*] . . .' (p. 162), which is, almost, to say *tween* for *between*.<sup>9</sup>

Puttenham's term *rabbate* is formed from the French *rabat*, a noun closely linked to (and in modern French largely replaced by) *rabais*, both derived from the verb *rabattre* (cf. Puttenham's verbal form *rabbating*). The semantic overlap of the two nouns is signalled in Randle Cotgrave's French-English dictionary, which glosses *rabat* first 'as Rabais', which is, in turn, glossed '[a]n abatement, deduction, defalcation, diminution, extenuation;' a gloss echoed by the gloss to *rabattre*: 'To abate, deduct, defaulke, diminish, lessen, extenuate.'<sup>10</sup> It is clearly these first senses of *rabat/rabais/rabattre* that Puttenham had in mind when he coined his term for the figure of *aphaeresis*. But both the noun *rabat* and the verb *rabattre* carried other specific (no longer extant) senses which bear directly on our Shakespearian bit of word-play. While under *rabat* Cotgrave gives the idiom 'Un rabat de bride', which he translates, 'A job, or checke which a horse gives himselfe with his bridle', he concludes the gloss to *rabattre*, 'also, a horse to rebate his curvet'. According to the *OED* this expression means simply to perform the *curvet*, a term which has a specific technical sense in the lexicon of *manège* as well as a more general sense of prancing. Either of these may be intended when *curvet* is used, as a verb, of Adonis' horse nine lines after our bit of word-play: 'Anon he rears upright, curvets and leaps' (line 279).

These adjacent senses of *rabat/rabattre* and the implied discourse of *manège* invite us to understand Shakespeare's reactivation of what is virtually Puttenham's instance of *rabbate* as a self-conscious bit of verbal curvetting done in the spirit of Puttenham's creative 'licence'. It is,

in short, another instance of the Shakespearian 'paranomastic play on tropes' to which Parker's work has drawn our attention.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, word-play is explicitly figured as the *curvet* in *As You Like It*: Celia, finding her communications with regard to Rosalind's object of desire, Orlando, constantly interrupted by her cousin's diversionary and often punning glosses, attempts to curb her with the rider's verbal equivalent or supplement to the bit: 'Cry 'holla' to thy tongue, I prithee; it curvets unseasonably'.<sup>12</sup> Rosalind's verbal curvetting is done under the pressure of what Montaigne calls 'cette naturelle violence de leur desir', the natural violence of women's sexual desire, which is held in check 'tenu . . . en bride' (like a horse) only by a learnt fear of dishonour; nature, that is, is restrained by forms of socialization.<sup>13</sup> A similar point is made by Myrrha, mother of Adonis, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to (principal source for *Venus and Adonis*), in her speech justifying her incestuous desire for her father. Her justification rests on examples from the animal world where there is a happy freedom not allowed humankind, for, to quote Golding's translation,

<sup>9</sup> Presumably Shakespeare opted for 'tween' because of the assonance with 'teeth' (discussed below). In a modern grammar the two forms are grouped in a note as 'reduced forms' that 'may occur' in 'poetic style'. They remain, that is, grammatical anomalies specific to poetic discourse. Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London and New York, 1985), p. 667, note c. (My thanks to Liliane Haegeman for this reference.) There is no typographic sign of the elided syllable either in Puttenham's text or in the quarto text of Shakespeare's poem.

<sup>10</sup> Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611), introduced by William S. Woods, reprint (Columbia, 1968) (u/v i/j spellings modernized).

<sup>11</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *As You Like It*, 3.2.239-40. The figure of the horse that 'gambol(s)' is also used of the verbal symptoms of 'madness' by Hamlet, who elsewhere practises such verbal 'gambols' himself. *Hamlet*, 3.4.135.

<sup>13</sup> Michel de Montaigne, 'Sur des vers de Virgile', in *Essais*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1979), vol. 3, pp. 36-112 (p. 72).

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'mans malicious care /Hath made a brydle for  
itself, and spyghtfull lawes restreyne / The  
things that nature setteth free'.<sup>14</sup> Significantly,  
Golding has exercised a bit of translator's  
licence here, for the Ovidian text runs,  
'humana malignas / cura dedit leges, et quod  
natura remittit, / invida iura negant'.<sup>15</sup> Though  
the image of the bridle may be implied in  
'remittit' since the verb is used, especially by  
Ovid, in collocation with *frenum* (Latin for bit  
or bridle), it is Golding who inserts it explicitly  
as a figure for the laws introduced by human-  
kind, laws which divide humans from the  
animal world as well as from their own sexual  
impulses.

Bit, bridle and reins are of course recurrently  
used in Western forms of representation from  
Plato on to figure constraints on the body's  
natural, especially sexual, impulses, as other  
scholars have amply illustrated, including, most  
pertinently, Robert P. Miller, who reads the  
episode of the horses in *Venus and Adonis* as an  
endorsement of 'conventional Renaissance  
morality' advocating control of the body's  
affections by reason, which is to say temper-  
ance.<sup>16</sup> It is indeed with this cardinal virtue that  
bit and bridle are specifically associated in what  
Emile Mâle called the new iconography of the  
virtues, which, spreading from fifteenth-  
century France, manifested itself in various  
forms of visual representation in Europe in-  
cluding, in England, the emblems of Henry  
Peacham (the younger), who, like Ripa, repre-  
sents Temperance with a bridle in her hand,  
though not with a bit in her mouth, as in the  
earliest examples mentioned by Mâle, and as in  
what is perhaps the most well-known example  
by Peter Bruegel (dated 1560) (illustrations 1  
and 2).<sup>17</sup> Like Mâle's earlier examples, Bruegel's  
figure advocates a stopping both of the  
(woman's) mouth – a constraint on speech  
which is explicit, though not gender specific, in  
the gloss quoted by Mâle<sup>18</sup> – and of female  
libidinal desire – the shape of the bit, bridle and  
reins as well as their suggestive relation to the  
woman's body underscoring the association of

mouth and genitalia which is a commonplace in  
modern psychoanalytic discourse as it is in a  
wide range of earlier discourses.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the

<sup>14</sup> *The XI' Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, entytled Metamor-  
phosis, translated . . . by Arthur Golding* (London, 1567)  
reprint (Amsterdam, 1977), fol. 128r. All citations will  
be from this edition (u/v 1/3 spellings modernized).

<sup>15</sup> Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, translated by  
Frank Justus Miller, 3rd edn: 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass  
and London, 1977), vol. 2, p. 86 (book 10, lines  
129–31). All citations will be from this edition.

<sup>16</sup> Robert P. Miller, 'Venus, Adonis, and The Horses',  
*ELJL*, 19 (1952), 249–64 (p. 263).

<sup>17</sup> Emile Mâle, *L'Art Religieux de la Fin du Moyen Age en  
France* (Paris, 1908), pp. 334–43; Henry Peacham,  
*Mimosa Britannia* (London, 1612), reprint (Amsterdam  
and New York, 1971), p. 93; Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*  
(Padua, 1611), in *The Renaissance and the Gods* (New  
York and London, 1976), p. 509; Bruegel, *The Drawings*,  
edited by Ludwig Müntz (London, 1961), plate 145.  
For the iconography of temperance and its 'submerged'  
presence in Renaissance literature, see Bart Westerweel,  
'The Well-Tempered Lady and the Unruly Horse:  
Convention and Submerged Metaphor in Renaissance  
Literature and Art' in Teo D'huyn, Rainer Gröbel and  
Helmut Lethen (eds.), *Convention and Innovation in  
Literature* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1989),  
pp. 105–21. For literary uses of the figure of the  
uncontrollable steed, with a focus on later German  
literature, see Sander L. Gilman, 'The Uncontrollable  
Steed: A Study of the Metamorphosis of a Literary  
Image', *Euphorion*, 66 (1972), 32–54. Some of the same  
ground, though with a focus on the association of the  
horse with the body, the rider with the soul, is covered  
in Joan Hartwig, 'Donne's Horse and Rider as Body  
and Soul', in Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M.  
Malpezzi (eds.), *John Donne's Religious Imagination,  
Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross* (Conway, 1995),  
pp. 262–81. For the association of women and horses  
and their 'management' in the Shakespearian corpus,  
especially *The Taming of the Shrew*, see Joan Hartwig,  
'Horses and Women in *The Taming of the Shrew*', *The  
Huntington Library Quarterly*, 45 (1982), 285–94.

<sup>18</sup> Mâle, *L'Art Religieux*, p. 336; cf. Westerweel, 'The  
Well-Tempered Lady', p. 108.

<sup>19</sup> See Ivan Fonagy, *La vive voix. Essais de psycho-pho-  
nétique*, reprint (Paris, 1991), pp. 85–88; Parker, *Literary  
Fat Ladies*, especially pp. 26–7, 106–7; Lynda E. Boose,  
'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the  
Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42  
(1991), 179–213 (my thanks to François Laroque for  
this reference); Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Nets and Bridles:  
Early Modern Conduct Books and Sixteenth-Century





1. 'Temperantia' by Peter Bruegel (the elder) (1560).

figure implicitly calls for, even as it endorses, the social practice of the 'scold's bridle', 'a kind of chastity belt for the tongue', as Patricia Parker calls it, which, as Lynda E. Boose has shown, was one of the more brutal material instruments of 'women's socialization into shame' (and silence) in early modern England.<sup>20</sup>

It is in the mutually implicated contexts of this social practice and the iconographic tradition that Golding's insertion of the 'bridle' of the law into the mouth of Myrrha acquires its full significance. More immediately, it recalls his own earlier elaboration of the Platonic instance, done perhaps with the narrative of Phaethon as well as the iconographic tradition in mind,<sup>21</sup> in lines in the dedicatory epistle

which at once rehearse moral readings of particular tales and aspire to assert control over '[t]he

Women's Lyrics', in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (eds.), *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality* (New York and London, 1987), pp. 39–72.

<sup>20</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, p. 27; Boose, 'Scolding Brides', p. 189. See too Hartwig, 'Horses and Women', pp. 289–91. Both Hartwig and Boose relate this social practice to *The Taming of the Shrew*, which they see as endorsing the gender hierarchy it enforces.

<sup>21</sup> Gilman suggests that Plato's image of the uncontrolled steed may itself owe something to the myth of Phaethon (Gilman, 'The Uncontrollable Steed', p. 14). The most influential version is Ovid's in *Metamorphoses*. The myth is used by Shakespeare to represent 'unbridled' female desire in *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.2.1–4.



2 'Temperantia' in Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britannia* (London, 1612), p. 93.

use of this same booke' (*The XV Booke*, fol. b3v). They attempt, that is, to control – or manage – readers' responses to the tales of sexual licence which follow, including the particularly dangerous story of the incestuous desires of Myrrha.

The use of this same booke therefore is this: that every man

... should direct

His mynd by reason in the way of vertue, and correct

His ferce affections with the bit of temperance, least perchaunce

They taking bridle in the teeth hyke wilfull jades doo  
prauce

Away . . . (ibid. my emphasis)

<sup>22</sup> The tale of Tereus is rather moralized as illustrating 'the man in whom the fyre of furious lust dooth reign: Dooth run too muche like a horse that getteth loose the reyne' (ibid. fol. 43r; see Miller, 'Venus, Adonis and the Horses', p. 256). Compare Prospero: 'Do not go dalliance / Too much the rein' (*The Tempest*, 4.1.51) – a paternal imperative which uses the same imagery. Golding's authorial prescriptions to attempt to assert well as to represent control over (in this instance that) sexual desire.



The licence Golding allows himself as translator in putting the 'bridle' into Myrrha's mouth serves then his controlling aspirations as moralizing interpreter coming between the reader and the Ovidian text to draw Myrrha's speech within the framework of the exhortation to temperance. This clearly bears on the Shakespearean image and its word-play, all the more so given that Shakespeare's embodiment of 'unbridled' female desire identifies with the argument from nature made by Ovid's when she appeals to Adonis, 'O, had thy mother borne so hard a mind, / She had not brought forth thee, but died unkind' (lines 203-4).

There is in short an intertextual significance here, which, like the implied poetics of recreative licence, aligns immanent (male) authorial agency with these unbridled female voices, and which I have suggested we might describe, in the words of Venus, as an 'enfranchising' of the 'mouth' or voice of Ovid. For the material Ovidian poetic texture dense, as Frederick Ahl has demonstrated, with word and syllable play, is thus symbolically liberated from the 'woven girths' (line 266) or textual strait-jackets of the dominant, moral interpretative discourse, exemplified by Golding's translation and practised in the grammar schools.<sup>23</sup> More generally, the image represents an enfranchising or liberation of libidinal desire, while the (male) narrator's verbal mimesis together with the example of Rosalind's verbal curvets cited earlier, make the material turns, or swerves, of poetic figuration and word-play privileged occasions for this liberation of desire – male as well as female – in language. This is especially important because, although, as Thomas Laqueur remarks, 'libido . . . had no sex' in the dominant one-sex model of the body, the vagaries of figuration, especially word-play, were frequently sexed in discourse on rhetoric, as Parker points out, a sexing which is merely more specifically inflected by critics from Samuel Johnson to William Empson who disparagingly characterize Shakespeare's 'unbridled' word-play as 'feminine'.<sup>24</sup> The

frequently expressed imperative to control figuration is thus tied up, often explicitly in discourse on rhetoric, with the imperative to control gender relations, as, more generally, linguistic 'licence' is tied up with social disorder – and loss of control – as, for example, in Ben Jonson's exhortation against excessive use of figures, especially word-play: 'Marry, we must not play, or riot too much with them, as in *Paronomasies*.'<sup>25</sup>

In our instance, however, it is not loss of control but, on the contrary, its achievement that is affirmed: 'The iron bit he crusheth 'tween his teeth / Controlling what he was controllèd with.' In order to think about this affirmation of control in relation to the performed bit of word-play I want to return to the point I made at the outset, namely, that it has not been recognized by editors and critics, and consider the obstacles to recognition. These are formal as well as ideological for, as John Roe notes, the episode of the horses 'conduct[s] the narrative', thus adding the momentum of narrative to the relentless linearity of English syntax.<sup>26</sup> To recognize the word-play requires

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations. Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and other Classical Poets* (Ithaca and London, 1985). For the moral emphasis in the teaching of classical authors, see Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 72-6.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1990), p. 43; Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, pp. 107-11; on Johnson, see Christopher Norris, 'Post-Structuralist Shakespeare: Text and Ideology', in John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (London, 1985), pp. 47-66 (p. 51); on Empson, Frederick Ahl, 'An Est Celare Artem', in Jonathan Culler (ed.), *On Post* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 17-43 (p. 22). Contrast the affirmation of Rosalind's affinity to her author in Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human* (New York, 1998), pp. 206-9, 225.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Jonson, *Timber: or Discoveries*, in *Ben Jonson*, edited by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford, 1925-52), vol. 8, p. 623.

<sup>26</sup> *Venus and Adonis*, note to lines 263-70. Roe's point needs nuancing inasmuch as, although the episode does

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an openness to diversion by relations of sound and sense counter to narrative and syntactic linearity. The horse, writes John Eliot in 1593, that 'plaieth . . . with his bit' 'sheweth that the bit is not his maister'.<sup>27</sup> Stopping or tarrying out (see note 26) to play with the bit, which actually requires reading backwards, readers may enjoy an enfranchisement, if a small and temporary one, from the laws of narrative and English syntax, and the linear, sequential sense of time they dictate. In the alternative temporal and spatial economy of word-play, which we might call, again quoting Venus, the 'time-beguiling sport' (line 24) of the curve[t], they are called upon to dwell upon the pleasurable proliferation of relations of signification as well as on the material excess to signification of the signifier. In short, they are called upon to take a holiday – or stop out – and delight in verbal intemperance.<sup>28</sup> An original intervention in language such verbal intemperance not only liberates from linearity – and so from the imperative to closure/containment – but regenerates desire in a re-creation of relations, especially of the word to the body (recurrently figured by the horse in early modern discourses<sup>29</sup>) with the effect, for reader as well as writer, precisely of controlling or managing where they feel habitually controlled.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed Frederick Ahl has argued that the practice of word-play not only offers 'a measure of freedom from the constraints that our societies and linguistic training impose upon us', and a sense of controlling rather than of being controlled, especially in relation to the 'tyrant' sequential time, but works 'to destroy death or at least our subservience to death', our subservience, that is, to a sense of (and drive towards) closure.<sup>31</sup> Still more importantly for our purposes, he shows definitively that the practice is not merely incidental but germane to Ovid's poetry. For this bears out my point that this word-play is not only exemplary of the recreative licence of poetic intervention, but an intertextual intervention, symbolically enfranchising the material Ovidian poetic texture

from the controlling moralizing interpretative discourse, emblemized in Golding's 'bit of temperance'.

Still more prominent here, however, than the voice of Ovid is the voice of Virgil, whose practice of word and syllable play has again been underscored by Ahl.<sup>32</sup> Scholars have

not (pace Miller) suspend the time of the main narrative (Miller, 'Venus, Adonis and the Horses', p. 251), it has its own internal structure and rhythm as a narrative within the narrative. Formally, it may be classed as a *digressio*, which, according to Peacham, is a virtue if properly used, but otherwise a vice 'that doth difforme and patch . . . with broken peeces' the whole of which it is a part and from which it should not be a 'longe taryance out' (Peacham, *The Garden*, fols. 048–049). In its evocation of a temporal delay, or stopping out, this bears on the episode (or interlude, as Miller calls it) of the horses, as we shall see.

<sup>27</sup> John Eliot, *Ortho-epia Gallica* (1593), reprint (Menston, 1968), p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> That sequential time is a manifestation or function of temperance is signalled by the clock of the iconographic tradition (illustration 1). See too the passage from *Hamlet* cited in note 12, where a condition of health, in contrast to a condition of madness marked by verbal gambols, is marked by temporal regularity: 'My pulse [ . . . ] doth temperately keep time' (*Hamlet*, 3.4.131).

<sup>29</sup> Joan Hartwig, 'Donne's Horse and Rider as Body and Soul', *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> The economy outlined here is an open, expansive and non-teleological alternative to the end-oriented economy of desire augmented by the constraints of resistance/delay which according to Joel Fineman motivates the narrative as well as the rape in *The Rape of Lucrece*. Joel Fineman, 'Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape', in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1991), pp. 165–221. It is, we might say, an economy of flirtation rather than rape, an economy, moreover, in which the imperative to linearity and the will to consummation/closure themselves constitute constraints augmenting desire.

<sup>31</sup> Ahl, *Metaformations*, pp. 291–2.

<sup>32</sup> Ahl, *Metaformations*, *passim*. Worth noting specifically is the example of mimetic *tnesis* in *Aeneid* 1 (which Ahl does not mention): 'et multo nebulae circum dea fudit amictu' (and round them, as goddess, she poured a dense cloak of cloud) (*Aeneid* 1, line 412; split verb emphasized). The figure is pointed out in the early commentary by Servius (usually included in larger sixteenth-century editions of Virgil), who recommends



indeed recognized a relation between this Shakespearian episode and the passage on the rearing of horses in *Georgics* 3, although they have confined their comments to noting parallels between the poets' descriptions of the ideal horse and, in the case of T. W. Baldwin, what he sees as a shared emphasis on the aggressive sexuality of mares.<sup>33</sup> What has not been recognized is the shared association of the figure of the horse (male as well as female) liberated from the constraints of bit/bridle/reins with the release of libidinal energy in a transgressive, material and mimetic poetic texture. To reproduce this association in a 'Virgilian' episode is again to 'enfranchise' the voice of a poet, who was bound, more tightly still than Ovid, within the terms of a dominant moralizing interpretative discourse. For, if Ovid was sometimes represented, as by Jonson in *Poetaster*, as '[l]icentious' – both sexually and linguistically – Virgil was almost always portrayed, as by Jonson, as 'grave Maro', of 'chaste . . . ear'.<sup>34</sup> More specifically, this passage in *Georgics* 3 had been drawn within the frame of a moral discourse advocating temperance by Gavin Douglas, in the prologue to his translation of *Aeneid* 4, an interpretation of the passage which was doubtless echoed throughout the sixteenth century by English schoolmasters trained in morally oriented Erasmian pedagogic strategies.<sup>35</sup>

Virgil first yokes the figure of the horse to his own writing through the unusual trope (of unyoking) with which he represents the closure of *Georgics* 2 as: 'time t'unlose the smoking necks of sweating horses'.<sup>36</sup> It is then in the passage on the raising of racehorses (*Georgics* 3, lines 197–208) that the writing is twined, sensibly, with riding, for, as R. A. B. Mynors points out, the stages of the colt's education 'are marked out in decreasing detail and with increasing intensity, until as though it could be controlled no longer the narrative erupts into a six-line simile',<sup>37</sup> a simile which is without end-stops for four of its six lines. Comparing to fierce northern winds the colt released from hard training, galloping 'liber habenis' (line 194)

– suggestively glossed by Fleming, 'Free or discharged of his reins, unbridled, loose and at libertie' (Fleming, *The Bucolics*, p. 43, note 'd') – the simile suspends the narrative to mime the liberated energy it describes.

Something of the same effect is produced in lines describing mares under the influence of Venus: 'Love leads them' (Fleming, *The Bucolics*, p. 45) over rivers and mountains, especially in spring, when they turn towards the winds by which they are impregnated and flee, a frenzied flight mimed again by six run-on lines (*Georgics* 3, lines 271–7). These lines constitute the climax of the passage (lines 209–83) following the description of the education of the colt, which Mynors summarizes as '[t]he effects of Sex on the animal kingdom', although the animals of course include humans whose sub-

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it be used only with compounds made of two complete words. See *P. Virgilio Maronis Opera* (Venice, 1544), in *The Renaissance and the Gods*, 2 vols. (New York and London, 1976), vol. 1, fol. 181r. Citations from Virgil are taken from *Virgil*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, 2nd edn. reprint, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1974). Unless otherwise stated translations are my own.

- <sup>33</sup> Carleton Brown, 'Shakespeare and the Horse', *The Library*, third series iii (1912), 152–80; T.W. Baldwin, *The Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Poems and Sonnets* (Urbana, 1950), pp. 23–6.
- <sup>34</sup> Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*, edited by Tom Cain (Manchester, 1995), IV.vi.52; V.iii.160, V.i.108. See Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare and Early Modern Virgil*, pp. 151–2, 169–71, 176.
- <sup>35</sup> Gavin Douglas, *Virgil's 'Aeneid' translated into Scottish Verse*, edited by D. F. C. Coldwell, Scottish Text Society, 4 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1957–64) vol. 2, pp. 147–54 (pp. 148–9). On the teaching of Virgil, especially the *Georgics*, as moral discourse, see Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare and Early Modern Virgil*, pp. 72–7.
- <sup>36</sup> Abraham Fleming's translation of: 'iam tempus equum fumantia solvere colla' (*Georgics* 2, line 542). *The Bucolics of Publius Virgilius Maro . . . Together with his Georgics . . . translated into English verse by A.F.* (London, 1589), p. 36. (Spellings have been modernized where necessary.) My warmest thanks to Jane Griffiths for getting this material to me.
- <sup>37</sup> Virgil, *Georgics*, edited by R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1990), p. 210.

## STEPPING OUT OF NARRATIVE LINE

jection to Venus is illustrated by the story of Leander (lines 238–63). As Mynors comments, the second half of the passage (from line 241) 'is broken up into a series of separate attacks on our feelings, and is full of rhetoric and allusion and in places almost febrile; the whole thing designed to give us the sense that the subject is getting out of hand, so that at 284 the poet has, as it were, to come to our rescue and openly resume control . . .'.<sup>38</sup> He does not, however, remark how, in performing this intervention, the poet represents himself as writing 'capti . . . amore' (line 285), in the grip of the desire driving the animal kingdom – not only the frenzied mares, but also the steeds which 'neither bit and bridle' ('frena') '[n]or cruell yerkings' 'do stop or stay' ('retardant') once they have felt desire (lines 250–4; Fleming, *The Bucolics*, p. 45). Thus possessed, the poet lingers over ('circumvectamur'; literally: circles round) particulars ('singula'), while time flies ('fugit . . . tempus') (lines 285, 284), a representation of what precedes as a temporal diversion which clearly bears on the Shakespearian episode and its word-play, both forms of diversion or 'tarrying out' which 'circle round' particulars, whether the physical features and actions of the horse or the singular verbal event of the word-play with its cluster of sound and sense relations. As I suggested in relation to the second, readers are invited likewise to 'tarry out', 'capti . . . amore' (and Virgil actually uses this phrase of readers in *Eclogue 6* (line 10)<sup>39</sup>), infected by the same love or desire, which both poets represent as released in the intemperance – temporal as well as formal curves – of a specifically poetic writing breaking the constraints of linearity in a miming of the action of the figure of this release – the horse liberated from reins, bridle and bit. Thus to represent poetic discourse as inspired by and inspiring desire is to enfranchise it from the inherited imperative to moral instruction, as it is, more specifically, to enfranchise the mouths of Virgil and Ovid from the 'bit of temperance' inserted by the dominant moral interpretative tradition exemplified by

Golding and Douglas. While the second suggests Re-naissance, inasmuch as it invites a new response to the ancients, the first suggests rather modernity, inasmuch as, breaking with the inherited imperative to moral instruction, it promotes, as the purpose of poetic discourse, re-creative pleasure and the renewal of desire rather than its containment or what we now call repression.

Readers are indeed invited to regard 'this horse' (line 293) as exemplary of poetic discourse by the comparison with painting, which is introduced in a stanza exactly in the middle of this episode – another bit between which summons readers to step out ('[l]ook when' (line 289)), here in order to contemplate two forms of art in their differently inflected relations to nature. Specifically, the representation of the difference of 'this' – the poet's singular – 'horse' from nature's 'common one' (line 293) echoes the terms of a tradition of writing about the difference of poetic language which goes back to Aristotle, as Derek Attridge has shown, and which he illustrates, in a first case study, from *The Art of English Poetic*.<sup>40</sup> Puttenham does indeed rehearse these terms, notably in his description of figures as at once 'trespasses in speech, because they passe the ordinary limits of common utterance', and 'requisite to the perfection of this arte', constitutive of the very texture of poetic discourse (Puttenham, *The Arte*, pp. 154, 137 (my emphasis)). He reiterates the point in the introduction to the figures (ibid. p. 159), which he then divides into three broad classes, the first being 'auricular figures', which, as we have seen, he prescribes as proper (or, as Peacham puts it, lawful) to poetic discourse only. Auricular figures are, that is, those deviations from 'common utterance' which especially serve to differentiate poetic discourse.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 214.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 226.

<sup>40</sup> Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language. Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (Ithaca, New York, 1988), pp. 17–45.



As we have seen, Puttenham's first 'division' of this class groups the figures of *addition* and *rabbrate*, the second being illustrated by *twixt* from *betwixt*, virtually the example reactivated in Shakespeare's bit of word, and horse, play. This underscores its significance as emblematic of the licence – or curvetting – of poetic discourse which distinguishes it from nature's 'common utterance'.

Auncular figures are of course designed, as Venus puts it, to 'enchant' the 'ear'. 'Bid me discourse' she urges, 'I will enchant thine ear' (line 145), appealing to readers as well as to Adonis to attend to the aural texture of her discourse, a discourse which makes up much of the poem, and to be held 'capti . . . amore', as the languid object of her desires within the world of the poem is not.<sup>41</sup> For Puttenham the pleasure procured by such figures falls within a more general view of poetry as (courtly) recreation. More implicitly, his 'recognition of the sensory apparatus by which poetry works her (sic) spell' suggests re-creation of the word's relation to the body.<sup>42</sup> In our Shakespearian instance this is done by a conjunction of sound and imagery, notably the assonance of 'tween his teeth' which invites readers to recognize experientially the physical organs/origins which 'let' – allow as well as impede and allow by impeding – the production of sound, especially the initial sound of 'bit', 'utterd', as Jonson puts it, 'with closing of the lips'.<sup>43</sup>

Insisted upon throughout by the poem's aural texture, these organs/origins are also thematized, sometimes to comic effect, as in the lines describing how the language of Venus breaks, as she seeks to stop the lips of Adonis with a kiss (lines 46–8), sometimes more movingly, as: 'And now she weeps, and now she fain would speak, / And now her sobs do her intendments break' (lines 221–2). Language is broken by the body's modes of expression in kissing and sobbing, which compete for the same organs. That language itself may function, like sobbing, as a mode of physical release is suggested by the stanzas immediately following

the horse episode, which recall its image of the release of libidinal energy. Adonis sits, 'swoln with chafing' '[b]anning his boist'rous and unruly beast' (lines 325, 326 my emphasis), and the narrator comments, if ironically, that it is once more 'the happy season' for Venus to plead her cause: 'For lovers say, the heart hath treble wrong, / When it is barred the aidance of the tongue.' (lines 329–30 my emphasis). In the next stanza 'barred' emotion is likened to the confinement of fire and water in '[a]n oven . . . stopped, or river stayed', which, under such confinement, 'burneth more hotly, swelleth with more rage;' (lines 331, 332 my emphasis). The release afforded by words is likened to the release of the 'vent', a release which, in the description of Adonis, 'swoln', like the river, with 'rage', is performed by another figure of sound, which, as it happens, echoes the initial sound of 'bit'. This echo, together with the (ex)plosive character of the sound and the sexual overtones of 'swoln' and 'swelleth', suggest that rather than simply a contrast to his horse, as critics have thought, Adonis shares his mount's 'unruly' libidinal energy, though it manifests itself as rage rather than desire.<sup>44</sup> This

<sup>41</sup> Compare Montaigne (in the essay cited above (note 13)): 'Venus is not so faire, nor so alluring all naked, quick and panting, as she is here in Virgil.' John Florio, *Essays by Michel Lord of Montaigne* 3 vols, rep. (London, 1946), vol. 3, p. 72. Montaigne is referring to Virgil's description of the seduction of Vulcan by Venus (in *Aeneid* 8), which he aligns with the description of her seduction of Mars by Lucretius (in *De Resum Natorum*), both passages illustrating precisely the seductive power of a material, poetic texture.

<sup>42</sup> Willcock and Walker, 'Introduction', *The Arts*, p. 102.

<sup>43</sup> Ben Jonson, *The English Grammar*, in Ben Jonson, edited by Herford and Simpson, vol. 8, p. 480. The paradoxical operations of the Shakespearian 'let', though in relation to the production of narrative rather than sound, are brilliantly explored in Fineman, 'Shakespeare's Will' (cited above, note 30).

<sup>44</sup> In contemporary terms rage and inordinate desire are both manifestations of distemper, a condition which may signal bad horsemanship. The contemporary expert, Thomas Blundeville, advises 'a temperate hand' in using the bit, not the 'rough' 'bit' used by English

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energy is, moreover, released in a figure of sound which, 'let' by the lips, mimes the condition of the 'let' or obstacle said to augment (or swell) desire/rage.<sup>45</sup>

As the 'vent' of words is said here to 'assuage' (line 334) such energy, it is 'their violent passions to assuage' that frustrated lovers of Hero are said, if with a touch of irony, to have recourse to writing poetry in *Hero and Leander* by Christopher Marlowe, who later uses the image of the horse and bit as the images of stopped oven and stayed river are used by Shakespeare, to represent the same erotic economy.<sup>46</sup> Again, 'swollen' desire finds release in a breaking of the forms of restraint, represented again by bit and reins. Significantly, it is the words of Leander's father that are specifically associated with this restraint. For the image of the horse, which here takes the form of a simile, follows a brief scene in which Leander's father seeks 'to quench the sparkles' (line 622) of love's fire with a mild rebuke. The violence done to bit and reins thus represents at once a breaking of paternal law and a release of libidinal energy 'swollen' by the law. As we have seen, Shakespeare likewise associates the 'iron bit' with the obstacle or 'let' of paternal law, including the imperative (of narrative and syntax) to linearity and closure, and the (linked) moral imperative to temperance. Like Shakespeare, and Virgil, too, Marlowe formally mimes his meaning, using assonance together with (ex)plosive consonance, like Shakespeare, and, like Virgil, breaking the line stop as well as suspending the narrative with a simile:

For as a hote proude horse highly disdaines,  
To have his head control'd, but breakes the  
    reines,  
Spits foorth the ringled bit, and with his hoves,  
Checks the submissive ground: so he that loves,  
The more he is restrain'd the woorse he fares, . . .  
(lines 625-9, my emphasis)

It is not only for this mimetic representation of liberated libidinal energy that these poems ask to be read together. For Shakespeare's

narrative is told at the outset of Marlowe's poem in a part – or bit – of the description of Hero's baroque outfit (lines 9–36):

Her wide sleeves greene, and bordered with a  
    grove,  
Where *Venus* in her naked glory strove,  
To please the carelesse and disdainfull eies,  
Of proud *Adonis* that before her lies.  
(lines 11–14)

Like Shakespeare in the stanza discussed earlier, Marlowe brings together a material, visual texture, here embroidered cloth, and the verbal form of art exemplified by his own text,<sup>47</sup> which he then elaborates in an exploration of the relation of art to nature (lines 19–24), though it is not their difference but their likeness, their confusion even, that is pointed up, a confusion which is underscored for readers by the use of the word 'workmanship' (line 20) for the achievements of art, which Shakespeare uses rather of the achievements of nature. Shakespeare's own workmanship consists in the

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horsemen, which produces a 'distempred' 'mouth' and 'headstrong Jades'. In short, as is the (distempred) master so is the (distempred) horse, which appears to be Adonis' case. Thomas Blundeville, *The Arte of Ryding and Breakinge Great Horses* (London, 1560), reprint (Amsterdam and New York, 1969), Book 1, cap. 8; Book III, cap. xx; cap. xxxii.

<sup>45</sup> Compare the economy described here to that explored in Fineman, 'Shakespeare's Will' (see notes 30 and 43).

<sup>46</sup> Citations from *Hero and Leander* are from *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Roma Gill (Oxford, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 173–209 (here lines 126, 625–29). While Gill simply quotes the relevant stanza from *Venus and Adonis* (p. 304), Brown asserts that Shakespeare is consciously copying Marlowe (Brown, 'Shakespeare and the Horse', p. 179). It is as likely that both are drawing on the passage in *Georgics* 3 where the figure of the sexually aroused (male) horse that cannot be restrained by bit/bridle (cited above, p. 21) comes a mere four lines before the example of Leander.

<sup>47</sup> He is also playing on a commonplace trope for rhetorical embellishment, as Gill unwittingly points up in the comment that the 'simple story is heavily embroidered . . .' (p. 179). The difference between the forms of art is suggested by the (comic) discrepancy between the immediacy of the visual and the necessary temporal extension of the verbal.



explication, or unfolding, of Marlowe's hem/ bit of three lines, in an expansion which at once releases and manages libidinal energy through the transgressive and re-creative aural figures of a specifically poetic texture.

I use the verb 'manage' here, as I have throughout, in order to evoke the semi-technical term of *manège*, or 'manage' as Philip Sidney calls it, in a sonnet in which he brings together the two noble arts of poetry and *manège*, as he does in the opening of the *The Apology for Poetry*, which indeed dwells at such length on Pagliano's praise of horsemanship that one of the earliest manuscript copies was miscatalogued at an early date as 'A treatise of Horsman Shipp' and so not discovered until the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> In the sonnet Sidney yokes together what he calls 'our horsemanships' – he on his horse, Love on him as horse – in a conceit which he acknowledges to be 'strange' in the phrase 'by strange work' (line 2), which implies a third level of 'manage' – that done by his verbal work as poet. The pleasure in the achieved management of desire in such 'strange work' is in turn included in the affirmation with which the sonnet closes: 'in the manage my self takes delight' (line 14). The strengthening of the sense of self in the pleasure of 'manage', which in the case of Sidney resonates with the meaning of his own first name,<sup>49</sup> is the aspect of the Shakespearean bit of word, and horse, play with which I shall close. I have argued that this illustrates the licence of a specifically poetic texture which 'steps out of line' in an alternative temporal and spatial

economy, releasing libidinal energy in pleasurable re-creation, especially of the word's relation to the body, through the strange, transgressive, even violent swerves of its singular, material and mimetic figures. In this pleasurable re-creation the writer/reader, like the rider (homonym of writer/reader, like together), acquires a strengthened sense of self in controlling, or managing, rather than being controlled by the otherness within (the body's desires) and without (the given forms of language). It is in its implied model of selfhood as well as in its implied poetics of re-creative licence that this bit of word, and horse, play announces the rupture that is modernity.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *The Nonvich Sidney Manuscript. The Apology for Poetry*, edited by Mary R. Mahl (Northridge, California, 1969), p. xiv. Citations from the sonnet are taken from Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, edited by Max Fleck (New York, 1967), p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Whitney exploits this in an emblem for Sidney which features a horse 'that champes the bit', 'mannag'd' by a rider (Sidney), one of the 'gentlemen of 'highe estate' fit to rule. Geoffrey Whitney, *Choice of Emblemes and Other Devices* (Leiden, 1966 reprint (New York and Amsterdam, 1969), p. 18 (spellings modernized)). This points up the ideological and political implications of Shakespeare's image of horse seizing control of its bit and the performed mimesis, done by one not of 'highe estate'.

<sup>50</sup> And, perhaps, postmodernity: the cluster *morsure* (bite) / *morceau* (fragment/bit) is recurrently exploited for significant word-play in relation to a conscious practice of writing disruptive of linear time. Jacques Derrida, who also uses the *writer/rider* conceit, Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1981), especially vol. 1, pp. 48, 166.