

Shakespeare in Period Speech: Seven Types of Pronounceability

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There's a moment in William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* when he is uncharacteristically tentative. It's in the middle of Chapter 2 (p. 81). He's writing about his second type of ambiguity, in which two or more alternative meanings are fully resolved into one, and he introduces a Shakespearean digression with these words:

Some readers of this chapter, I should like to believe, will have shared the excitement with which it was written, will have felt that it casts a new light on the very nature of language, and must either be all nonsense or very startling and new. A glance at an annotated edition of Shakespeare, however, will be enough to dispel this generous illusion; most of what I find to say about Shakespeare has been copied out of the Arden text. I believe, indeed, that I am using in a different way the material that three centuries of scholars and critics have collected; without such a claim it is impertinent to add to the vast library about Shakespeare...

And of course he does use it in a different way, later producing a series of highly insightful essays on Shakespeare.

Can one add something startling and new to the vast library about Shakespeare? At least as far as Shakespeare's language is concerned, the Internet has shown that we can. The accumulation of contemporary online texts has allowed us to develop a new and more realistic sense of Shakespeare's linguistic creativity: for example, many of the words whose first recorded usage was formerly ascribed to him by the *Oxford English Dictionary* have been found in earlier authors whose work are now online. And the ready availability of search has meant that we can ask questions about the usage of words and constructions that were inconceivable a decade ago. A well-founded Shakespearean stylistics is appearing on the horizon.

In this paper I want to highlight a further area of study which can add something startling and new to our understanding of Shakespeare - it startled me, at least, when I began to explore it, and new findings there have certainly been. This is the study of the plays and poems in their 'original' or 'period pronunciation' - the phonology (sound system) of Early Modern English as it would have been around the year 1600. OP for short. It is an area which has been curiously neglected since the seminal work of Helge Kökeritz half a century ago. And it is highly relevant for a lecture remembering William Empson, who was especially alert to the phonic dimension of text. 'The sound must be an echo to the sense', he states in the opening chapter of his classic (p. 10), and,

in relation to Shakespeare, he asserts that no other poet has been more able to 'exploit their sensitivity to the sounds of language' (p. 88). In which case, it seems to me, we need to find out as much as possible about the sounds that Shakespeare himself would have heard and used, and not rely for our conclusions on the auditory effects introduced by a modern sound system.

Thanks to several decades of research by philologists and historical linguists, we now know a great deal about the pronunciation system of Shakespeare's time - or I should say 'systems', for the period in which he lived is characterized by huge social and linguistic variation and change. Shakespeare himself shows that he was well aware of it. Tybalt is contemptuously described as one of the 'new tuners of accent'; Holofernes is appalled that someone can do something so absurd as not pronounce the 'b' in 'debt'; disguised Rosalind is nearly caught out by Orlando noticing her refined accent. There are several such examples, showing that we must be careful when talking about Early Modern English pronunciation. One of the first things a historical linguist has to do, accordingly, when presenting the notion to people for the first time, is disabuse them of the idea that OP is a single 'accent'. It is not. There were as many accents of English in 1600 as there are today, all related to the same underlying sound system.

Think of it like this. Any one phonology can be realized by several phonetic accents. I am using a modern English phonology, but within it you hear traces of my Welsh/Liverpudlian background. Others in this room might have exactly the same phonology, but the units of the sound system will be articulated in different phonetic directions, so that they sound Yorkshire, or Scots, or whatever. It was the same in Shakespeare's day. Doubtless his personal accent was a mix of his Warwickshire origins and accommodation to the London accents of his time. And others who were on the Globe stage with him would display their regional origins too - Robert Armin was born in Norfolk, John Heminges in Worcestershire, Henry Condell probably in East Anglia, Lawrence Fletcher probably came down from Scotland, and so on. But they would all have reflected the phonology of their time, Early Modern English. So when you hear examples of period pronunciation in a few moments, bear in mind that you are hearing it with a Crystalian accent. Listen to some of the recordings by other people which have been made and you will hear other accents. In the Globe production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 2004, you heard a Scots-tinged Juliet, a Cockney-tinged Nurse, an RP-tinged Romeo, and a Northern Irish-tinged Peter, for example. But they all used the same segmental phonology: they all said *musi-see-on* or *musi-shee-on* and not *musi-shun*; they all rhymed *love* and *prove* or *one* and *alone*; they all stressed *advertise* on the second syllable and *perspective* on the first; and so on. (I say 'segmental', because apart from syllable stress we know little about the nonsegmental phonology of Early Modern English - the intonation and tone of voice of the period, and to that extent any version you hear of period pronunciation is inevitably unauthentic - the segmental phonology of 1600 accompanied by the

nonsegmental phonology of 2000) - though from the descriptions we have there probably was very little difference.

Oh for a Muse of fire that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling stream;
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels
Leashed in like hounds, should famine
Sword and fire crouch for employment.

/o: fəɪ ə muse ə fəɪ that would ascend
the brætɪst evn əv invention
a kingdom fəɪ a stɛ:ge, princes to act
ən monɑ:ɪchs to beo:ld the swellin stre:m;
then should the wɑ:lək arry, lək imself,
assume the pɔ:ɪt ə mɑ:ɪs: and at is e:ls
ləɪshed in lək əʊnds should famine
sword ən fəɪ crəʊtʃ fəɪ empləɪmənt./

Reconstructions of this kind are based on four kinds of evidence, meticulously collated by scholars such as Kökeritz and Dobson. First, spelling. The orthographic system had achieved only a partial standardization by 1600, and provides important clues to pronunciation. When Mercutio describes Queen Mab as having a ‘whip of film’, the Folio and Quarto spellings of *philome* clearly indicate a bisyllabic pronunciation; ‘fillum’ (as in modern Irish English). The omission of *h* in *orthography* and other such words suggests that it must have been pronounced with a /t/ (again as in present-day Irish English, or as in RP *thyme*). Second, rhyme. There are hundreds of rhymes in the texts that do not work in Modern English, such as *love* and *prove*, and these provide an indication of vowel qualities in 1600. (Eye-rhymes were not fashionable at the time, and would in any case have been difficult to exploit, as they presuppose what did not exist around 1600 - a stable, standardized spelling system.) I illustrate some rhymes further below. Third, puns. There are many cases where a piece of wordplay works only if a particular pronunciation is assumed (see also below). And fourth, and most important of all, there were several commentaries on English orthography and pronunciation written throughout the period by people concerned with spelling reform and poetic

performance. How do we know, for example, that *love* and *prove* rhymed? Because writers tell us so. Ben Jonson, for example, in his *English Grammar*, says of the letter *o*: 'In the short time more flat, and akin to *u*; as... *brother, love, prove*'. Combining these four kinds of evidence produces an account of period pronunciation which, while never going to be 100 percent accurate, is sufficient to add a new and illuminating dimension to our appreciation of the plays and poems of the time.

I have chosen Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* as my stimulus for this lecture because it seems to me that period pronunciation is a perfect example of his definition of ambiguity: 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language' (p.1). So I was rather pleased to find, when reflecting on the nuances added by this perspective, that there were seven types. But perhaps I had better say, seven types so far, for only a fraction of Shakespeare's plays and poems have been thoroughly explored from this point of view. To be precise: I am aware of only five full play productions, three more that are in preparation, and an OP rendition of the Sonnets, and I have no data, other than oral memory, of the first two. These were John Barton's production of *Julius Caesar* for the Marlowe Society in Cambridge in 1952, and a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1954 at the Yale School of Drama in which Helge Kökeritz was the adviser, about which I have only a review and a recollection from someone who was there. My seven types of reaction are based on my experience of working with Shakespeare's Globe on a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 2004 (see Crystal, 2005), and of *Troilus and Cressida* in 2005; in 2010 working with a company from the theatre department of Kansas University on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Paul Meier (see <<http://www.paulmeier.com/shakespeare.html>>); and providing a transcript for an as yet unproduced *Twelfth Night*. OP productions of *Hamlet* and *Henry V* are at an early stage of planning. In addition, there has been a full version of the Sonnets made for performance sonneteer Will Sutton, and a few transcriptions of isolated extracts made for various theatrical events in the USA (such as at the Blackfriars project in Staunton, Virginia, and an OP evening at The Playwright in Times Square, New York City in 2007, directed by Alex Torra). In addition, of course, we have Kökeritz's transcription of 21 extracts from the plays and poems at the end of his book.

What accounts for the flurry of productions in the past decade? It is entirely a result of the Globe initiative. Sam Wanamaker's inspired reconstruction of the Globe Theatre in London in 1997 led to a renewed interest in 'original practices' - such as original costumes, music, instruments, and movement - and it was only natural that in due course they would experiment with original pronunciation. That it took so long to mount a production was due to a suspicion that OP would not be intelligible; and for a theatre which was open only six months of the year, and where the lack of a public subsidy demanded full houses to ensure survival, management was reluctant to support any venture which might have put off an audience. Once the realization dawned that the differences

were not as great as feared, and that OP was no more difficult for an audience to understand than any modern regional accent, director Tim Carroll was able to get a proposal accepted to include a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Globe's 2004 season. It was a 'toe-in-the-water' acceptance. The Globe was still uncertain about how an OP production would go down, so they devoted just one weekend in the middle of the season to OP performances; the rest of the run was in Modern English. The poor actors, of course, had to learn the play twice, as a result. I tell the full story in *Crystal* (2005). However, it was a successful experiment, and it led to a follow-up production (*Troilus*) the next year. Several of the visitors to those performances became enthused, and subsequent talks and workshops on OP were held in various settings, including the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon, and it was a summer school visit of Kansas University students to Stratford in 2007 that led to the 2010 production of *Dream*. Nor is it only Shakespeare who has been the focus of interest. OP has been used to read texts of other poets, playwrights, and prose-writers (such as John Donne). People interested in early music have experimented with using OP (eg William Byrd), as have people involved in tourism (to Jacobethan-period locations).

So, to my seven types of pronounceability. First, puns. Empson would have been delighted with the pun discoveries which OP brings to light, as he would have found no reference to them in the notes to his Arden editions. The homophony between *lines* and *loins*, for example, /lɔɪns/, adds a genealogical nuance to the physical sense of the word in the *Romeo* Prologue: 'From forth the fatal loins of these two foes'. The pronunciation of *Ajax* as 'a-jakes' /əjɛ:ks/, makes intelligible the force of the insult when Thersites rails at him with 'But yet you look not well upon him; for whosoever you take him to be, he is Ajax', for *jakes* also meant 'lavatory' (as Touchstone is also well aware in *As You Like It*, when he euphemistically refers to Jaques as 'Master What-ye-call't'). One of the most important pieces of wordplay comes from the homophony of *hour* and *whore*, /o:ɪ/, which deserves fuller explanation. It is not that every instance of *hour* yields such a nuance, for a pun is only legitimate if the context permits, as Empson puts it (p.2), but in several cases the text is inexplicable if we fail to recognize the pun. The clearest case is in *As You Like It*, where the question is simply: 'Why does Jaques laugh for an hour?' Jaques has been walking through the first and overhears Touchstone's self-reflections:

And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it, with lack-lustre eye,
Says, very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock.'
'Thus we may see', quoth he, 'how the world wags:
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,

And after one hour more 'twill be eleven,
 And so from hour to hour we ripe, and ripe,
 And then from hour to hour we rot, and rot,
 And thereby hangs a tale.' When I did hear
 The motley fool thus moral on the time,
 My lungs began to crow like Chanticleer
 That fools should be so deep-contemplative;
 And I did laugh, sans intermission,
 An hour by his dial. O noble fool!

In Modern English there is no motivation for such a long laugh at all, and it is always embarrassing to see the actor playing Jaques trying to give plausibility to the lines. It simply can't be done, in Modern English. But as soon as we know that there is a pun on *hour/whore*, the lines take off.

Second, end-rhymes. There are several plays which rely greatly on rhymes, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and of course the poems totally rely on rhyme. So it is real problem when we hear a couplet that fails; and it is a real discovery when we realize that in OP we can repair the failure. The fairies speak rhyming verse in *Dream* - but not in Modern English, as we hear when Puck says (the OP version is on the right):

Then will two at once woo one –	...o:n
That must needs be sport alone.	... alo:n
...	
Thou coward, art thou bragging to the stars,	...sta:ɪs
Telling the bushes that thou lookest for wars,	...wa:ɪs
And wilt not come?	

Rhymes add atmosphere, such as Oberon's speech while anointing Titania's eyes with love-juice:

Flower of this purple dye,	... dəɪ
Hit with Cupid's archery,	...a:cherəɪ
Sink in apple of his eye.	...əɪ
Let her shine as gloriously	glo:riʊsɪəɪ
As the Venus of the sky.	...skəɪ
When thou wakest, if she be by,	...bəɪ
Beg of her for remedy.	remedəɪ

Rhymes are also an important index of play structure, being a frequent marker of scene closure: 55 per cent of all verse scenes in the canon (376 out of 684, using the *Oxford Shakespeare* scene divisions) end in a rhyming couplet or have one close by. And when a rhyme fails - something that happens in 12 per cent of cases (44 times) - the effect is really noticeable, as in this example from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.2):

Romeo: O, let us hence! I stand on sudden haste. ...hast
Friar: Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast. ...fast

The effect is even more noticeable when it's the final couplet in a play, as at the end of *Macbeth*, or in this example from *King Lear*:

We that are young ...yʊŋg
Shall never see so much, nor live so long. ...lɒŋg

In the *Sonnets*, which are supposed to operate with a clear-cut rhyme scheme, no less than 96 of the 154 have couplets which fail to rhyme in Modern English. In two cases, four of the seven couplets fail to rhyme: *Sonnets* 72 and 154. Here are the last ten lines of 154:

The fairest votary took up that fire, ...fəɪɹ
Which many legions of true hearts had warmed, ...wɑɹmɛd
And so the general of hot desire ...desəɪɹ
Was sleeping by a virgin hand disarmed. ...dɪsɑɹmɛd
This brand she quenched in a cool well by, ...bəɪ
Which from love's fire took heat perpetual, ...pɜːpɛtʊəl
Growing a bath and healthful remedy ...rɛmɛdɪ
For men diseased; but I, my mistress' thrall, ...θrɑɹl
Came there for cure, and this by that I prove: ...prʊvɛ
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love. ...lʌvɛ

Third, word-internal rhyme, which usually goes under the heading of assonance. The vowels and diphthongs of EME vary in different ways, compared with Modern English: some pure vowels become diphthongs, some diphthongs become pure vowels; some articulations are further forward in the mouth compared with today, some more central, some further back, some higher, some

lower. As a result of these shifting values, there are many cases where lines present a totally different auditory impression. The Sonnets provide some excellent examples:

No matter then although my foot did stand

Upon the farthest earth removed from thee... (44: *earth* has the /ɛ/ vowel of *farthest*)

This told, I joy, but then no longer glad... (45: *I* and *joy* had the same diphthong, /əɪ/)

When wasteful war shall statues overturn,

And broils root out the work of masonry,

Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn

The living record of your memory. (55: the underlined words all had similar open vowel qualities of /a/ or /ɑ/)

Fourth, character notes. One of the most unexpected moments in the first Globe production was when the Master of Movement observed that the actors were holding themselves differently, and moving about the stage differently, in the OP production compared with their performance in the Modern English one. For a start, the OP was spoken more rapidly, ‘trippingly upon the tongue’ as Hamlet recommends, with full attention paid to the elisions indicated in the orthography (*i'th*, *woo't*, etc). An OP rendition of a speech like ‘It is my lady. Oh it is my love. O that she knew she were’ is a couple of seconds faster in OP, lacking the fuller articulation of the unstressed syllables usually heard in a Modern production. In fact the entire OP production was a full ten minutes shorter than the Modern one - and it took the company a little by surprise, especially when it proved necessary to integrate the language with other activities, such as in the fight scene, or in the banquet scene (where the speaking and the dancing was carefully choreographed in Modern English, but in OP the speaking finished well before the dancing did). At a personal level, every actor I interviewed said that the OP changed their perception of their character. Juliet felt she could stand up more to the Nurse and her parents in OP. Mercutio felt that he could, for the first time, do justice to the ‘earthy’ quality of the Queen Mab speech, which he always found uncomfortable when spoken in the cerebral tones of RP.

Fifth, general auditory impression. When you hear OP for the first time, you think you recognize it. Virtually everyone I interviewed in the intervals of the OP performances at the Globe claimed that ‘we speak like that where I come from’. But of course none of them did. People who live in an area where they use postvocalic /ɪ/ (eg West of England, many parts of USA) will tune in to that feature of OP. Those who notice the long pure vowels in words like *go* will be from a part of

the world (eg Scotland, Ireland) where such vowels are common. The Irish recognize the double stress in such words as *ruminare*. Scots people recognize the pronunciation of *prove* (to rhyme with *love*). Australians notice the high vowel in *yet* - sounding more like /yɪt/. Londoners notice the /ə/ ending of words like *window* and *shadow*. And so on. But the exact combination of sounds we find in OP is to be found in none of these accents, or in any other modern phonology. And several features of OP are to be found nowhere in Modern English, such as the pronunciation of *musician* as /mju-zɪ-sɪ-ən/. The overall effect is unique. As some inner-city London teenagers said to me during one of the Globe productions: they were enjoying the accent because it avoided the 'posh' associations they encountered when they heard a play in RP. 'They're speaking like us' said one of the lads. The actors weren't really, but the lads thought they were. The OP accent seemed to reach out to them in a way that RP did not, and drew them in to the play.

The general effect of OP should be compared with any Modern accent, not just RP, of course. We sometimes find modern productions entirely in a regional accent, such as the productions mounted by the Northern Broadsides theatre company in a Yorkshire accent or a production of *Macbeth* entirely in Scottish. The problem here is that these accents bring modern 'baggage' with them. Because we have grown up with these accents as part of our social milieu, we have developed associations and attitudes relating to them. They may be positive or negative, occupational or aesthetic, personal or public. A Yorkshire accent will remind you of someone you know, or some character of television, or some situation you have experienced, and it will prove very difficult to eliminate these associations from the characters you see on stage. But OP has no such baggage. Nobody has heard it before, and the mixture of echoes which accompany it do not cohere into something recognizable. On the contrary, it is the unfamiliarity of the phonology which attracts the attention, especially when people hear the rhymes working so well.

Sixth, sociolinguistic effects. One of the most important things to appreciate about OP is that the range of accents it generated lacked a single prestige variety such as we encounter in RP. RP was an accent that developed at the end of the 18th century, a class accent contrived to allow the upper-classes to distinguish themselves from the way people from other classes talked. If Cockneys omitted /h/ when it was there in the spelling and inserted it when it was not (as in *I 'urt my harm*), then those who wanted to distance themselves as far as possible from Cockney speech would follow the opposite procedure, and scrupulously, Holofernes-like, follow the spelling. If people from the provinces around Britain pronounced an /ɪ/ after vowels, then those wishing to appear non-provincial would not. And slowly the phonetic character of RP evolved as the prestige, regionally neutral, educated, elite way of talking in England.

No such accent existed in the Jacobethan period. As Empson puts it at one point: 'Elizabethan pronunciation was very little troubled by snobbery' (p. 26). People with strong regional

accents could achieve the highest positions in the land (such as Raleigh and Drake with their Devonshire speech). When James came to the throne in 1603, Scottish accents became the dominant voice of the court. The only way you could show, through the way you talked, that you were a member of the educated elite was to use special vocabulary or grammar. Accent alone would not do it. Educated people would probably display their literacy by having their pronunciation reflect the way words were spelled - a practice that must have been very common, for Shakespeare plainly expected people to recognize the character of Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, with his exaggerated respect for spelling. He is horrified at the 'rackers of orthography' who omit the /b/ in such words as *doubt* and *debt* and who leave out the /l/ in *calf* and *half*.

We cannot rid ourselves entirely of the influence of Modern English phonetics and phonology, of course. The point applies equally to all aspects of 'original practices' productions. That is why Shakespeare's Globe tends to distance itself from the notion that they are being 'authentic'. Nothing can totally recreate the Jacobethan experience. The sounds, smells, and tactility of the Globe is hugely different from how it would have been. No jumbo jets rumbling overhead then. No smell of urine today. And it is the same with pronunciation. Take the use of /h/. Ever since the Middle Ages, English accents have used or dropped initial /h/. In Shakespeare's time, it would have come and gone without notice, in much the same way as people today sometimes vary their pronunciations of *again*, *says*, and *often* - or indeed /h/ itself in unstressed positions (as in *I saw him in the park*). So it would be perfectly possible for an educated person to pronounce a word beginning with h in a stressed syllable either with or without the sound. The evidence is in the spellings, such as *Eracles* for *Hercules*, *Ircanian* for *Hyrceanian*, and *dungell* for *dunghill*, as well as elisions like *t'have* and *th'harmony*.

However, we cannot rid ourselves completely of our modern associations. It can sound anomalous if, for example, people talk of '*Amlet*' and '*Oratio*'. On the other hand it does not sound anomalous if lower-class characters do it, as that conforms to modern stereotypes. So here we have a set of new options for characters. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, we can keep /h/ for Theseus and Hippolyta and the lovers, and omit it for the mechanicals. But what do we do with the fairies? In the Kansas production, we had the fairies also drop their *h*'s. And this allowed Puck, when he is having Leander and Demetrius fruitlessly chase each other around the forest, to mimic their voices by adding *h*'s as required. Another example of a theatrical effect achieved through the use of /h/ is when the mechanicals are putting on their play, and attempting to adopt a high oratorical vein. They know there should be *h*'s somewhere, but are not entirely sure where. Snout, as Wall, for example, might say this:

And such a wall as I would have you think

That had in it a crannied 'ole or chink...

Seventh, pronunciation change. We know from our own time that it does not take long for pronunciation to change. We only have to listen to radio recordings from earlier decades in the 20th century to hear the differences. And older speakers of Modern English are always alert to the way younger speakers differ in the way they speak. I say *schedule* with an initial /ʃ/; my children all say it with an initial /sk/. Similarly we note inter-generational differences such as *controversy* for *controversy* and *research* for *research*. It has always been this way. The generation which criticizes the speech of young people today was itself criticized in its time by elders; and they too in their turn. In Victorian times, people were highly critical of the 'new tuners of accent' who were pronouncing the word *balcony* with the stress on the first syllable: *balcony* instead of the desired *balcony*. And it was the same in Shakespeare's day. ('New tuner of accent' is of course Mercutio's dismissive description of Tybalt, who was adopting the fashionable usages of his time.)

Shakespeare lived through a time of great pronunciation change in the history of English, brought about largely by the increased mobility of people in England (the great movement south to London from East Anglia and the Midlands had been a feature of the social scene for some decades) and the huge increase in the number of immigrants, making London a highly multilingual (and thus multidialectal) city. In population it had grown from around 120,000 in the mid-1500s to around 250,000 in 1600. Dialect and accent diversity was an inevitable consequence, and norms were shifting as time passed. We know this not only from Mercutio's observation but from the accounts of contemporary pronunciation written by the orthoepists of the period. Those who wrote in the 1580s often describe sounds differently from those who wrote in the 1620s and 1630s. In some cases, the differences are probably due to the differing regional background of the writers, or to the likelihood that they are thinking of different sections of the population when they make their descriptions. But sometimes opinions coincide in such a way that they point to a genuine language change. A good example is words like *musician* and *invention*. In the 1580s these seem to have been pronounced /mjuzisɪən/ and /invensɪən/. Forty years later we see pronunciations such as /mjuziʃɪən/ and /invenʃɪən/, and soon after we find the modern pronunciation. So in 1600 older people would very likely have said the former, and younger people the latter. And this allows us another theatrical option, which we exploited in *Romeo*. We had the old Montagues and Capulets say the words as /sɪən/ and the young ones as /ʃɪən/. Did anyone, apart from the director, the actors, and me, notice? I do not know.

So, there are seven types of pronounceability. OP allows us to see puns, rhymes, assonance, characters, phonaesthetics, the functions of accents, and accent change in a new light. It provides a new linguistic, literary, and dramaturgical experience. And in much the same way as William

Empson proposed his seven types of ambiguity as a perspective which would be of relevance to the whole of poetry, to 'make poetry more beautiful' (p. 256), so an OP perspective is of relevance to any approach to an earlier period of literature. However, a great deal of research still needs to be done to complete the picture for various periods, and not just for poetry. How should Dr Johnson sound, in the OP of the mid-18th century? How Jane Austen, a generation or so later?

You may remember that remarkable passage in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* - surely one of the most unexpected in any literary critical work - in which Empson refers to critics as two sorts of 'barking dogs': 'those who merely relieve themselves against the flowers of beauty, and those, less continent, who afterwards scratch it up'. He himself, he affirmed, belonged to the second type: 'unexplained beauty arouses an irritation in me, a sense that this would be a good place to scratch' (p. 9). Linguists, as I hope this lecture has illustrated, are scratchers too.

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