Poetic Neologism in English from the Renaissance to Modernism

by

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In 1971, the poet and academic Philip Martin inspired me as a student of mathematics to a greater awareness and understanding of poetry. Philip’s brief influence has enriched my life.
ABSTRACT

For a minority of poets, the practice of neologism has been a significant feature of their poetics. The prevalence of word coinage in English poetry has varied over time, with two exceptionally rich eras, middle to late Renaissance and Victorian, standing out. In the former period, the rapid rates of language change and expansion of printed text, together with advances in knowledge and the gradual rise of English as the language of the academy, catalysed the production of new words both by poets such as Shakespeare and Milton and by the wider writing public. The liberating effect of the Romantic project on the imaginations of Victorian poets, and the coincident upswing in minority rebellion against norms of society in general, and poetry in particular, provided a setting in which innovators such as Hopkins, the Nonsense poets and (at a distance) Dickinson flourished, often unheralded, in their nonconforming lexes. In a study of neologism across a range of eras and poets, this thesis finds that the nature of the words coined, and the ways in which they contributed to their inventors’ poetics, vary widely; yet many patterns and links in neologicistic practice can be found among the works of these poets, their contemporaries, and their twentieth-century modernist heirs. The generally accepted taxonomy of coinages in English is helpful in describing these relationships. Neologism in poetic practice is found to be associated with certain poetic effects, including defamiliarization, ambiguity, indeterminacy, negation and ellipsis. The process of observing and cataloguing those effects leads to the question of how they are achieved by neologism: is each effect intrinsic to the word itself, or enabled by its poetic context? In answering that question, this thesis isolates certain word characteristics that are not peculiar to neologisms but are especially significant for them in the way that they operate in poetry. Four such attributes are postulated, strangeness, charm, polysemy and breadth, which help to explain the power of poetic neologism.
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Notes on texts

Orthography of source texts has been maintained in quotation, except for regularization of symbol variations in v/u, s/f and i/j/y arising out of early printers’ conventions. For poetry, where possible I have generally chosen editions that use modern spelling. It is preferable that words should not appear unfamiliar because of spellings archaic to us but not to original readers, because such an effect might blur that of a neologism in the passage under discussion. Deliberate exceptions have been made for Spenser, for whom a quality of archaism was significant in his contemporary poetics, and for Dickinson, to whom no “modernized” text can do justice, and whose occasional nonstandard spelling is unimportant.

For all citations of poetry, the original numbering conventions (Arabic or Roman) of each source with respect to sections such as book, canto, act, scene, etc. have been used for ease of reference to the chosen text.

I do not give a citation for every neologism that appears in the text, because to do so for words quoted only in passing would be unwieldy. In general, a contextual line or phrase and a citation are given for a word that occasions any discussion.

INTRODUCTION

neologism, *n.*

...  

1. *a.* A word or phrase which is new to the language; one which is newly coined.

1772 J.-N. DE SAUSEUIL *Anal. French Orthogr.* 163 Observations on this Neologism... I thought indeed I was intirely done with this Canon when I came to the explication of the last word *Hecaterogenosem.*

*Oxford English Dictionary*

1. **Brave new words**

Every poem is a new poem. Almost every sentence in poetry is a new sentence. Even most significant phrases in poetry are new phrases: the simple word pair “alien corn”, on all available evidence, had never been written by anybody before Keats in 1819. The number of available grammatical phrases and, *a fortiori*, sentences, that can be constructed using the 200,000 or so words in current English usage,¹ even under the restrictions of English syntax, rapidly increases with length by orders of magnitude to the point where the combinations are effectively limitless. New poem, new sentence, new phrase: the next level down in this hierarchy is the new word, the neologism. At this point, the pattern of originality breaks down: nearly all words in poetry have been used before. The

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reason is simple enough. The practice of poetry has historically been conducted under a set of structural conventions consisting of the linguistic norms of ordinary communication overlaid with the prosodic norms of verse. Both layers have changed over time: the latter sometimes with startling rapidity, according to the force of originality of influential poets; the former more slowly, because it is moved largely by the collective will of the speaking and writing populace. Hence, over five hundred years, English poetry has seen the successive advents of modes such as blank verse, heroic couplets, complex metres, free verse and visual poetry, continually changing the form to an extent that would render most contemporary examples unrecognizable as poetry to a sixteenth-century reader, and making Renaissance forms mostly irrelevant to modern practitioners. Yet the great majority of words of William Shakespeare and, say, Seamus Heaney or Maya Angelou would, once spelling was taken care of and despite occasional semantic shifts, be mutually intelligible to readers across half a millennium. For all the scholarly debate over that time about the nature of poetic language, some of which will be touched on in this thesis, it is still hard to deny the simple dictum of Gerard Manley Hopkins that it should be “the current language heightened”.2 Elsewhere, Hopkins sought to “modify what Wordsworth says” (in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads), writing that poetry “asks for an emphasis of expression stronger than that of common speech or writing”.3

One of the ways in which some poets, not least Hopkins, have built upon their current language is to invent new words: neologisms. Except in very special

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circumstances this is not an act entered into wantonly or too often, and indeed most poets seldom or never feel the need for it, or if they do they do not act upon it. Yet for those who do, it often contributes significantly to their poetics; and in the academy, unlike other aspects of poetic practice such as metaphor, metre and rhyme, neologism in English poetry has received relatively little critical attention in its own right. The aim of this study is to fill that gap. It will identify the ways in which certain poets employ neologism, how its use varies across their work, and what broader literary or other agendas they may have had for practising it. It will explore how and why the incidence of poetic neologism in English has varied markedly over time, and it will describe patterns and relationships that emerge out of those explorations. Class attributes of types of neologism will be identified, the generic kinds of poetic effects that are achieved or contributed to by the use of neologism will be illustrated, and some relevant strands of existing literary-theoretical approaches to poetry, set out in Chapter I, will be brought to bear in an account of how those effects are realized.

2. Definition

Turning first to the technical questions of how neologisms are formed, and hence how they may be divided into types, we find a perhaps surprising commonality among scholars. Terttu Nevalainen, Geoffrey Leech and Lesley Jeffries have each proposed a basic scheme; the three of them, while differing in how they

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4 In general usage the word “neologism” may signify according to context either (i) a coined word or (ii) as used here for the first time, the practice of engaging in such coinages. Unavoidably, both senses are employed in this thesis, sometimes in close proximity to one another.
partition it, are essentially in agreement as to what constitutes the set of neologisms. Nevalainen’s is the most straightforward, and I will adopt it here. She identifies three basic forms of neologism, *affixation*, *compounding* and *conversion*, that account for the great majority of literary coinages, which I will now define along with a few illustrative examples sampled from authors to be considered in this thesis.

*Affixation* is the addition of a prefix or suffix to an existing word:

- *torturer* (Shakespeare)
- *unlibidinous* (Milton)
- *casuistry* (Pope)
- *disseveral* (Hopkins).

*Compounding* is the formation of a new word by joining two others, with or without an intervening hyphen:

- *fire-new* (Shakespeare)
- *winterworn* (Dickinson)
- *churlsgrace* (Hopkins)
- *chatter-clatter* (Lear).

*Conversion* (often termed “category shift” by linguists) is the changing of a word’s usage category, as from noun to verb or adjective to noun:

- *unsex* as verb (Shakespeare, an affixation/conversion combination)
- *goblin* as adjective (Dickinson)
To these classes we must add other, which is little more than a taxonomic convenience that will be seen to include a number of different cases and is especially prevalent in nonsense poetry. Lewis Carroll’s ‘Jabberwocky’ alone contains, depending on marginal classifications, about 28, from brillig to chortled. All the above types may be further broken down in ways obvious and not-so-obvious: for example, affixation into prefixation and suffixation, or by function, as in negative (un-), superlative (-est), subtractive (de-) and so on. These more granular classifications, and finer ones again – negation in particular takes many forms – will be brought to bear from time to time where relevant.

The reader will have noticed that a few of the words cited above (torturer, casuistry, chortled) do not look like neologisms, but rather are words that are quite familiar in usage and meaning. Of course they are no longer neologisms to us because they have passed into common English, an occurrence associated mostly with a very small number of the most prominent poets – most famously Shakespeare, although the number of his contributions in this respect has been continually revised downwards in recent decades, as outlined in section 5 of this chapter and revisited in Chapter VIII. As we read poetry in the present day that contains such words, all the effects directly attributable to their being neologisms, which are to be discussed throughout this thesis, simply do not apply to us, now,

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8 Leech’s classification scheme is essentially the same as Nevalainen’s, terming conversion “functional conversion” and noting that it “might better be described as ‘zero affixation’”. Jeffries, in a variation that emphasizes linguistic function more than form, proposes “inflection”, “derivation” and “compounding”. The first is a subset of Nevalainen’s and Leech’s affixation class, and the second combines the remaining affixations with conversion, which she calls “zero derivation”.

as readers; but that fact does not reduce their relevance in discussions of poetic practice and contemporary readership. I pause here to make a note on nomenclature. A number of critics make a distinction between “nonce-words”, the existence of which is limited to the work in which they appear, and “neologisms”, which survive to become part of the language. Others make the same terminological distinction not according to the fact of the word’s survival or otherwise, but on the intent of the author as to whether the word was coined merely to fit a single purpose at the time of writing or whether it was intended to be a contribution to the language. Such a differentiation often involves a degree of conjecture on the part of the reader, and it tends to rest on a retrospective understanding of the writer’s stature in the canon. While this thesis at some points will note the significance of a word’s survival or otherwise, and at others will address the question of poet’s intent, I do not think it is helpful to make such terminological choices here, especially when there is no critical consensus to support them. The issue is discussed at length in an essay by David Crystal, who adheres to the “intentional” rather than the deterministic distinction.9

A final note on definition relates to some cases at the margin and the question of where that margin lies. One consequence of the relative scarcity of critical material in this area (which is explored in the following section) is an absence of a common vocabulary. Even the basic categories described above are not universally accepted – some critics do not classify conversions (category shifts) as neologisms. There is the nonce-word distinction described above.

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variations, once commonplace, have decreased over the centuries up to today’s relatively firm standard, and are of no concern here except in the case of deliberate misspellings. One outlier category exists in popular folk song, which has over time introduced words in refrains that sound – and often are – nonsensical, but sometimes have etymologies, and carry connotations, that run deeper than those of “fa-la-la”. These may fit the definition from a functional viewpoint, but in most cases it is impossible to trace a single point of coinage. For example, expressions featuring the enigmatic words Ranzo Ray, or just Ranzo, appear in the chorus of at least four different English and American folk songs and many variants of each of those. Three, ‘The Wild Goose Shanty’ ‘Reuben Ranzo’, and ‘Ranzo Ray’, are sea shanties, where the words fulfil the common sonic purpose of evoking and promoting collective physical effort (“Ranzo me boys, oh Ranzo Ray”); the fourth, ‘Huckleberry Hunting’, is a song about gathering huckleberries.¹⁰ There are competing theories about which song (if any) can be identified as the first to employ the expression, and about its derivation; the seemingly most likely is that it is a corruption of Lorenzo, a possibly fictitious mediocre sailor, but some contend that this is a back-formation. This typical obscurity of origin and limited semantic significance diminish the relevance of such words to this thesis. A more substantial field for neologism in language generally is that of cant, where word origins are again mostly obscure, but they are semantically rich; however, its slight presence and influence in English poetry

¹⁰ There are multiple versions of these songs and their variants available online: one example, a set of lyrics for the most well-known of them, is ‘The Wild Goose Shanty’, Traditional Music Library [website], http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/sea-songs-shanties/the-wild-goose-shanty.htm, accessed 4 July 2019. For a performance of the song by Kate Rusby that plays against male-chorus type, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6tVU--Cbes, accessed 4 July 2019.
place it outside the limits of this study. At various points I will also discuss poets’ usage of words that – at the time of composition – were archaic, rare, dialectal, technical, vernacular or foreign (“loan-words”), or while being standard English are used in a sense that radically departs from their accepted meaning. While I would not classify any of these formally as neologisms, they frequently share poetical qualities in common with them, and where appropriate will be considered in the same way, even though they do not require the degree of linguistic inventiveness that is one of the foci of this inquiry.

3. Extant literature

Neologism as a poetic device in English has been used by some poets a great deal, by others hardly at all. Some of those who have applied it did so consistently throughout their work, whereas others emphasized it in particular works or periods and ignored it in others. Word coinages in English poetry are regularly recognized by critics, but more often simply observed and recorded, like rare birds, than analysed in any depth for their significance in their poetic context. Where extended commentary does exist, it is almost always within a work on a particular poet, usually as part of a treatment of their lexis, and thus does not address that poet’s place in possible wider patterns of neologistic practice. Commentary tends to focus on the coined words themselves and their etymological and philological significance, particularly where – mostly in Renaissance writing – they have survived to become part of common English usage. Conversely, extended surveys of poetic diction – notably A. C. Partridge’s

11 The verse sections of Ben Jonson’s A Masque of the Gypsies Metamorphosed form a notable exception.
The Language of Renaissance Poetry,\(^{12}\) from which I have drawn some observations on poetic lexis in chapters II and III – tend to pay only passing attention to neologism. Partridge’s approach is determinedly traditional, self-styled as “a healthy revival of the old terms used in the classical schools of rhetoric”,\(^{13}\) at different points taking issue with New Critics and structuralists alike. It is of limited value with respect to neologism, which Partridge implies to be one of the “byways of diction” the study of which is a distraction from the “orthodox uses of words”.\(^{14}\) But the book has proved valuable as a survey showing the antecedents of Spenser in Chaucer, the progression of poetic diction across the century from 1575 to 1675, and the influences on Milton of his immediate predecessors.

For a few poets particularly given to neologism there exists a small body of criticism that covers the topic with a degree of thoroughness. There is any amount of material extant concerning Renaissance and particularly Shakespearean coinages; aside from that, three examples encountered in the present study are two treatments on Gerard Manley Hopkins and one on John Milton. Chapter 6 of James Milroy’s The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1977), ‘Wordscape’,\(^{15}\) analyses many of Hopkins’ coinages, but gives greater attention to his extensive use of archaisms and colloquialisms, many of them so obscure that they essentially function as neologisms. Chapter IV of W. H. Gardner’s Gerard

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\(^{13}\) AC Partridge, p. 9.

\(^{14}\) AC Partridge, p. 12.

Manley Hopkins (1944), ‘Diction and Syntax’,16 is less linguistically oriented, rather contextualizing Hopkins’ verbal art in other poetry of the nineteenth century. Chapter 3 of Thomas Corns’ Milton’s Language (1990), ‘Lexis’,17 is more measured and thorough than both of the others, gives plenty of attention to neologism, and is especially revealing of variations in Milton’s lexis between different periods and works. All the above are successfully descriptive of neologistic forms and sometimes of their poetic functions – that is, what effects they create in the poetry – and several such analyses relating to particular poets under consideration here will be cited in succeeding chapters. But even these extended treatments mostly do not grasp the opportunity to explain fully how the use of neologism causes those effects. Critical and linguistic theories that can contribute towards an understanding of those matters will be explored in Chapter I and brought to bear throughout this thesis.

A few authors have given some consideration to poetic coinages in a more general way, usually in only a few pages of a larger work on poetic diction. Leech’s A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry contains a section titled ‘Lexical Deviation’,18 which provides the best short technical summary (less than three pages) I have encountered on the poetic forms and function of neologism. This scarcity of general commentary on neologism in English poetry is not always matched in other languages. While I have been unable to locate any single treatment of the relative prominence of neologism in poetry across a wide range of languages, it is clear that French and Russian poetry in particular have had periods where

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18 Leech, pp. 42–44.
neologism, and commentary and criticism about it, flourished in ways perhaps matched in English only by the middle Renaissance. In France the Pléiade poets and Symbolists employed neologism extensively – it is no coincidence that they flourished respectively in two fertile periods for neologism in English – and the latter in particular were notably creative in doing so, constructing many words in ways other than through the three most common English formations described above. These included what we now in English (ironically enough) call “portmanteau words”, etymological play, and sonic allusion through onomatopoeia and assonance with other words. For example, Kristin Ross writes of the verb bombiner, which Arthur Rimbaud used in two poems and which appears to connote both the buzzing noise and the clumsy movement of large flies (“des mouches éclatantes / Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles”):

\[\text{Bumble}\] derives from the Middle English bomben, an onomatopoeic word signifying “boom” as well as “buzz”. A similar derivation seems to have motivated Rimbaud’s coining of bombiner: from the Latin bombitire, to resonate, to make noise.\(^\text{19}\)

It could never be said of English poetry, as Michael Riffaterre has of French, that “un des principaux procédés de l’expressivité stylistique est la création ou utilisation du néologisme [one of the most important methods of stylistic expressiveness is the creation or use of neologisms].”\(^\text{20}\) Nor is it likely that an English literary association would devote a conference day to neologism, as did

\(^{19}\) K Ross, \textit{The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune}, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1988, p. 104.

l’Association Internationale des Études Françaises in 1973.\textsuperscript{21} Russian poetry similarly has a rich tradition in neologism. The Futurists in particular saw it as a central part of their poetics:

And now, today, when the artist wishes to deal with living form and with the living, not the dead, word, and wishes to give the word features, he has broken it down and mangled it up. The “arbitrary” and “derived” words of the Futurists have been born. They either create the new word from an old root (Khlebnikov, Guro, Kamensky, Gnedov) or split it up by rhyme, like Mayakovsky, or give it incorrect stress by use of the rhythm of verse (Kruchenykh). New, living words are created.\textsuperscript{22}

It is a matter for conjecture beyond the scope of this thesis as to what extent this difference between languages in the prominence of neologism might be ascribed to structural linguistic features or to historico-cultural differences. But perhaps a telling indicator of the latter is the fact that in the 1880s, at the same time as Dickinson’s and Hopkins’ literary champions were temporizing over how to break their radical work gently to the public, the Symbolists, loved or loathed, were the talk of the French literary world.

4. History and scope

When major poets with a penchant for neologism are enumerated, it becomes clear that the prevalence of the practice has not been consistent over time. Two


remarkable periods quickly become apparent: middle to late Renaissance and Victorian. Shakespeare and Milton figure prominently in the first; Emily Dickinson (a kind of Victorian by distance ed.), Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Nonsense poets Lear and Carroll in the second. Each of these two moments was notable for its richness in innovation, not only in poetry and language, but in other matters cultural, philosophical and scientific, and for a surge in the purposeful, public nonconformance with various social norms. The poets in question will be shown to be complicit, in diverse ways, in such transgressions. English poetry moved on from each of these two periods, though, in very different directions. The fashion in poetry after Milton came to favour greater regularity in its language and prosody, and more social commentary and satires in its content. Clearly either the public’s appetite, or the poets’ inclination, for innovation was much reduced. New words were not entirely lost to poetry, but the thousands of instances from Shakespeare, Milton and their colleagues were not matched through the Augustan period. By contrast, in the Victorian era the surge of poetic neologism was a small part of the tide that became modernism, from which time through the twentieth century the old rules of poetry became largely obsolete, and multiple forms of innovation became commonplace at every level of the poetic hierarchy from typography upward.

Thus it is clear that the chronological extent of this study must encompass at least the Renaissance and the Victorians. The reason for its beginning where it does essentially lies with a machine: the printing press. The turbulent confluence of Old English and Norman French in the eleventh century set off a period of unusually rapid language change. Robert Burchfield describes how neologistic forms in the language at large were developing constantly as the two gradually
merging languages influenced each other in various ways at a furious rate. But poetry in what became Early Modern English was only available to the approximately five per cent of the population who could read it, and who only accumulated it at the rate of production of handwritten copies. Then in the 1470s, when Caxton introduced the printing press to England, the advent of mass production of all kinds of reading matter altered the way in which the language developed.

Before that event, written language, in the hands of an elite group of educated scribes and usually in Latin or Norman French, had been mostly irrelevant to how language evolved in society at large; but from then on the printed word was the vehicle for a steady increase in literacy rates. Burchfield writes, “Written English came to be set down everywhere in a standard form – in general terms that of people writing in London or within a reasonable distance of London.” While that standardization began to regularize such aspects of language as spelling and verb forms, lexis was not so constrained. Among many influential scholars a perception arose, which we will explore in more depth in Chapter II, that English as it existed before the Renaissance was not rich enough in vocabulary to serve the purposes of contemporary scholarship, nor elegant enough to suit the needs of poets and others who aspired to writing of the highest order. Nevalainen, in surveying the neologisms of William Shakespeare, observes that “Verbal experimentation was common … English was gaining new functions as a standard language in the public sphere, and was therefore in the process of acquiring a

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24 Burchfield, p. 21.
wealth of new vocabulary”. While change in spoken English continued vigorously for a while longer, it eventually began to abate somewhat as printed documents, widely read, supplied both a model and an authority for language use. Many of those documents – it is safe to say a far higher proportion than is the case today – were written by poets. At a time when the European Renaissance was becoming a significant influence in English culture generally, many poets saw in the new English the opportunity to overturn the convention of centuries that had anointed the classical Latin masters as paragons of poetic practice.

W. L. Renwick, who places Edmund Spenser at the forefront of that revolution in poetic language, writes:

> The new idea of the new poets was, that the modern age and the modern tongues were capable of poetry as great in kind as the ancient; it followed that treatment had to be in accord with conception, that the power of expression both of the language and of the poet had to be cultivated.26

The most noticeable way in which this new poetic language was advanced was in the creation of new words. Joseph Shipley gives a number of examples from writers of the period: “In the 16th and 17th centuries, in the fervor of the English Renaissance, writers took pride in the invention of words … [t]hey proudly put forth their own creations, and disdainfully put down those of their fellows”.27 Among other instances he lists from The Poetaster, by Ben Jonson, “retrograde,

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damp, strenuous, spurious, defunct, clumsy, prorump, obstupefact, ventositous; the last three died aborning, although obstupefact sounds worth a resurrection.”

At the same time, exemplifying the disdainful put-downs described by Shipley, Jonson famously opined of Spenser’s differently directed, frequently mock-archaic coinages that “in affecting the ancients, Spenser writ no language”. Burchfield notes that in the early days of printed publication, before an eighteenth-century series of serious attempts at dictionaries that culminated in 1755 with Samuel Johnson’s, “writers appended explanations to some of their works so that readers would understand the more difficult words …” Poetic neologism in the Renaissance, then, was engaged in as part of a massive project that was peculiar to its era, and – because of the intervention of the printing press – able to feed upon itself far more rapidly than would have been possible if constrained by the speed of copying by hand. Chaucer, who was certainly a major coiner of words, might have been an alternative starting-point, but his era is excluded here for two reasons. First, there is the difficulty of being certain about any single example given the paucity (pre-printing-press) of contemporary written material (that is, did Chaucer coin that word, or is it that we just haven’t seen it antedated yet?). Second, in historical context, Chaucer is something of an outlier. While his ultimate contribution to English literature is undoubted, his influence was restricted to relatively small numbers until his readership increased with distribution via print, and so that influence did not peak until the Renaissance.

The chronological endpoint of this study may seem to be more arbitrary, but it seems to me to be fitting. Just as Dickinson was an honorary Victorian, she and

28 Shipley, p. xxiv.
29 Burchfield, p. 77.
Hopkins were in a different sense honorary modernists. The reluctance of Thomas Higginson and Robert Bridges respectively to publish them without emendation, and their additions of explanatory and sometimes apologetic commentary, was essentially because the poems were written around half a century earlier than those of their spiritual cousins. Because neither poet was widely respected by the literary establishment at the time of modernism’s emergence – let’s say, the first decade of the twentieth century – it cannot be said that they were a major influence in the establishment of the movement; but we will see in Chapter VII evidence, notably reviews in *Poetry* magazine in 1914, of their early presence in the consciousness of some modernists who are of interest in this thesis. In fact, the modernists who favoured neologism – and they are fewer than might be imagined – are included here as a kind of Janus endpoint: looking back at the courage and creativity of their Victorian counterparts when the times were even less sympathetic to poetic innovation, and forward to the later twentieth century, where the innovation of a coined word was no longer a shock but as unremarkable as an off-rhyme, and to which they blazed the poetic trail.

5. Methodology

Two distinct aspects of methodology can be identified in this thesis. The first aspect, which might be termed “technical”, or empirical/quantitative, is concerned with the investigation and identification of instances of neologism, and at an aggregate level with how they are distributed, in number and in kind, within a poet’s work and across eras, genres and other taxonomies. The second, “poetical” or qualitative aspect concerns the hermeneutics of neologism in the poems in which it is significant. The present section is chiefly concerned with the former
matter, which presents a set of problems that, because they are not often encountered in poetry criticism in general, need to be outlined to the reader.

I first confronted many of the technical issues in a study of neologism in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, seeking to demonstrate that, contrary to at least two critics’ opinions, she neologized significantly more frequently than her peers. To that end I developed a method, summarized (and simplified) in what follows, to discover neologisms in her oeuvre. Two electronic resources were exploited to enumerate words in Dickinson’s poetry that did not appear in contemporary dictionaries. These were an OCR-generated text of the 1955 Thomas H. Johnson edition of Dickinson and an online database, developed under Cynthia Hallen’s direction at Brigham Young University, of Noah Webster’s 1841 edition of An American Dictionary of the English Language. This edition, as outlined in Chapter IV, was by scholarly consensus the Dickinson household dictionary (in its 1844 Amherst reprint) and a comprehensive reference to the language as it stood at the time. I scanned the poetry text using a US spell-checker as an initial sieve to isolate words that were potentially Dickinson coinages. The majority of those were immediately dismissible on inspection as proper nouns, variant spellings and other irrelevant cases; the remainder I then looked up in the Webster database. Words found there were removed from the candidate list. Adding hyphenated compounds and a sample-based approximation for conversions eventually led to an estimated total of 277 neologisms. A similar process applied

30 The 1955 Johnson edition was used, rather than the now-standard 1998 Franklin variorum edition, because I had access to an electronic version of it. The difference, though it might have made for a very small variation in the counts, is not material to the conclusions drawn.
32 This dictionary will be referred to in this thesis as Webster, and except where otherwise indicated the name denotes this specific edition.
to other New England verse of the time revealed that Dickinson was significantly more prolific in her coinages than her contemporaries.

Devising and carrying out the above method was valuable in my gaining an understanding of problematic aspects of identifying neologisms. Depending on the poetic context, each process will differ depending on place, period and available scholarship. In general, the older the text, the more difficult the job, an unsurprising finding that has three aspects. First, there was no contemporary, comprehensive dictionary suitable as a basic criterion until 1828 (the first edition of *Webster*) in the US and 1928 (*OED*) in the UK. Second, the older the language and (in particular) its spelling variations, the less discriminating is a twenty-first-century word-processing spellchecker as an initial sieve, and it becomes even less useful for writers – the Renaissance poets, in particular – whose coinages may have been taken up in the language. Even scholars nearly contemporary with the poet in question cannot be relied upon. In 1712, 38 years after Milton’s death, Joseph Addison wrote “… there are in Milton several words of his own coining, as *Cerberean, miscreated, hell-doom’d, embryon* atoms, and many others.” The *OED* shows that of those four Milton has only one first citation, for *hell-doom’d*. So, for those earlier eras, this thesis is largely reliant on a combination of existing scholarship, augmented by my own directed reading and research through the *OED* online and databases such as Google’s Ngram, as to what words were coined, when and by whom. Third, existing scholarship is changing all the time as

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34 Google Books, *Ngram Viewer* [website], Google, 2013, https://books.google.com/ngrams, accessed 4 July 2019. This tool has been valuable as an indicator of the rarity or otherwise of a word over time.
databases of early literature expand. Nathan A. Gans noted in 1979 that of 103 words cited by Frederick Padelford in 1941 as coinages by Edmund Spenser, at least five had since been antedated.35 That kind of incremental rate as it relates to Renaissance writers has accelerated wildly since, as the availability of digital forms of contemporary texts and computational tools has expanded. Ward E. Y. Elliott and Robert J. Vallenza estimate a drop of 60% from the late-twentieth-century consensus of around 1700 Shakespearean coinages. Nearly one quarter of their discards include “intended nonce-words”, which as mentioned in section 2 is a contentious differentiation to make, but the remaining set of previous attestations still constitutes a reduction of nearly half.36 I ask the reader to forgive me for not adding a caveat acknowledging this uncertainty to every historical attribution of a neologism to a poet in the course of this thesis.

Dickinson is the only poet for whom I have undertaken the detection of neologisms in a complete body of work from first principles. This was a viable task for a single scholar in the time available solely because of the existence of the *Webster* dictionary as a single reference point and the firm evidence of its place in the Dickinson household and in the poet’s affections. This factor, together with the uncertain nature of word dating, as instanced in the cited works

36 WEY Elliott & RJ Vallenza, ‘Shakespeare’s Vocabulary: Did It Dwarf All Others?’, in J Culpeper & M Ravassat (eds.), *Stylistics and Shakespeare’s Language: Transdisciplinary Approaches*, Continuum, London, 2011, p. 50. The authors add to this estimate the words “with an overall ongoing shrinkage of about 14 words a month”, a clearly fanciful proposition that supposes that shrinkage due to scholarship would continue at a constant number, whereas in fact the 60% reduction was due to a rush of research following the availability of new digital resources. If 14 words per month continued to be lost, Shakespeare would have zero neologisms left after about four years. Nevertheless, Part 2 of this article, pp. 47–50, contains a penetrating analysis of the hazards involved in identifying where a word might have been coined.
by Gans and Elliott and Vallenza, has also made the method as accurate as is possible for a large historical body of work.37

At a higher level, the variation and pattern within poets’ work and across time and other axes, I have again relied on existing scholarship and brought quantitative methods to bear as required. Occasionally a result will emerge out of simply examining and pondering data: patterns can jump off the page, such as my observation on Dickinson that she neologized at almost double the rate in the poems of her most prolific years of 1862–65 compared with those before and after.

The poetical aspect of methodology begins with close readings of poems, or – more commonly – sections of poems, in order to establish how neologism works as a poetic tool. I have not adhered to any single theoretical approach in this matter, but clearly I have been more than commonly concerned with the analysis of formal elements of the poem. These elements are not just of a linguistic kind, though those are obviously central; in many contexts the use of a neologism is bound up with other aspects such as syntax, metre or onomatopoeia. In respect of this emphasis on the formal, I have found that Terry Eagleton’s *How to Read a Poem* (2007), which reads partly as a call to rebalance criticism back in that direction, sits well with my approach: Chapter IV, ‘In Pursuit of Form’, contains a number of readings centred on elements of form. A reading there of T. S. Eliot’s ‘Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service’, foregrounding its lexical obscurities in a way similar to that required for neologisms, has served as a model.38 Further

37 Of course I do not claim that accuracy to be anywhere near 100% for my Dickinson count; as outlined earlier, and in Chapter IV, the method had its own problematic elements.
discussion of literary-theoretic matters as a framework for this study appears in Chapter I of this thesis.

6. Poetic effects of neologism

No two instances of poetic neologism being exactly alike, the poetic effects achieved vary widely. I have noted across the scope of this thesis that certain ones recur frequently, and so I have formed a list of nine principal effects, more than one of which may arise out of a given coinage. They will be noted as they are encountered in the treatments of individual poets, where most of the examples that follow here will be expanded on. Some will also be explored in more theoretical detail in Chapter I. This brief illustrative summary is presented here in order to inform the reader’s progress through the thesis.

This is also an opportune point to introduce two related issues, which are not necessarily statements of the obvious, around the effectiveness of neologism. The first is that each re-reading of a poem alters the effect of neologisms within it. Most obviously, if you read a poem today that you first read yesterday, you are seeing its new words for the second time, and each subsequent time they become more familiar and expected. Note that this does not automatically mean that their effect is reduced, because it may be that in subsequent readings one’s understanding of the text changes in a way that enhances the role of the words in question; but each of the effects that follow may vary according to the circumstances of the reading. The second issue is effectively the first one magnified: that many neologisms have passed into standard English, so that any poetic effects that they still carry in the twenty-first century are those of ordinary words, not of neologisms. These two matters will be discussed further in later
chapters; for the following list, discussion of poetic effects will assume that the poem is new to the reader.

*Defamiliarization.* An act of “strangeness” in a poetic text sharpens the senses and concentrates the attention by interrupting the ordinary perceptions and comfortable expectations of the reader. Though this statement might be thought to be conventional wisdom, historically it has been invoked as assertion without substantiation, a deficiency addressed here in section 2 of Chapter I.

Defamiliarization or *ostranenie* was central to concepts of art in Russian Formalist thinking, and critics such as Viktor Shklovsky argued strongly for neologism as a technique for defamiliarization in text. Thus a reader encountering Dickinson’s suffixation *recalless* may pause to ponder what is meant by it, or to wrinkle a brow in wonder at the uniqueness of a triple-letter spelling. In either case, this effect is the one most susceptible to fading with repeated reading, as described above.

*Ambiguity (or multivalence).* Clearly, many words in poems are intended to deliver to the reader meanings and connotations far beyond their standard ones, but normally the orthodox English definition is still inescapably present. With a neologism, because we have no previous “dictionary” definition in our mind when we encounter it, we must supply that ourselves, a task that may not have a single obvious answer. Nevalainen gives this Shakespearean example:

… She did lie
In her pavilion – cloth of gold, of tissue –
O’erpicturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature.
She writes: “O’erpicturing … Venus in the description of Cleopatra may be taken to mean either ‘surpassing the picture of Venus’ or ‘representing the picture of Venus in excess of reality’.”40 In this case, it is likely (though not knowable) that Shakespeare had one or the other meaning in mind, and the ambiguity was inadvertent. But Dickinson’s recallless is a different case, in which the poem is enriched by the ambiguity. Daneen Wardrop describes “recallless sea” as “an image of lost recurrence in which either the sea has no memory or we cannot recall the sea”.41 It is a measure of Dickinson’s multivalence that Wardrop omits a third option, that we cannot recall the dying from the sea.

**Indeterminacy.** This effect is to blur meaning, usually the reader’s perception of place, time, number, size or other quantifiable dimension. Examples are illocality, in Dickinson’s “Affliction cannot stay / In Acres – Its Location / Is Illocality”, or Carroll’s time and place (but can we even determine that is what they are? – see Chapter VI) brillig and wabe as the setting for ‘Jabberwocky’.

**Negation.** Affixations, both of both prefix (*un-, dis-, in-,* and so on) and of suffix (principally *-less*), frequently form negations of the root word. These are not always as straightforward as the construction might suggest – Dickinson’s recallless and illocality have already been noted. Dickinson follows Milton in a tendency to, in Thomas Corns’ words, “define what is by what is not”. In particular, Corns notes a remarkable number of words, both new and otherwise,

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39 Shakespeare text and citation amended for consistency with Norton edition used in Chapter II.
40 Nevalainen, ‘Shakespeare’s New Words’, p. 245.
beginning with un- in *Paradise Lost*. Rather than simply making some form of symmetric opposite to its root, a negative affixation can carry in context a richer and more specific signification. So, when a poet chooses to coin even a straightforward negation, the reader is likely to be influenced by that active word choice in a way that does not apply in the case of the root word. As Peter Groves observes, “How unhappy is she? presupposes that she is unhappy, while How happy is she? presupposes only that she is alive ...”.

*Catachresis.* This is a literary term that often causes difficulty because there are several identified types, with limited consensus among scholars – as happens occasionally in critical theory – as to exactly what they are. But Elzbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, in identifying one type essentially as a far-fetched, strained or strongly incongruous metaphor, observes that it “often relies on synaesthetic effects, nonce words, malapropisms …” and cites among others Shakespeare’s “elf all my hair in knots” and Dylan Thomas’s “heron priested shore”. Both involve conversions, likely to be the class of neologism most commonly put to catachrestic use.

*Onomatopoeia and other sonic effects.* The clearest examples are most readily found in nonsense poetry, particularly in names of creatures, such as Carroll’s awful *Boojum*, and places, such as Lear’s melancholy *Gromboolian Plain*. In other cases, the aural effect is more a contribution to the sound or mood of a

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42 Corns, pp. 84–86.
44 E Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, ‘Catachresis – a Metaphor or a Figure in Its Own Right?’, in M Fludernik (ed.), *Beyond Cognitive Metaphor Theory: Perspectives on Literary Metaphor*, Routledge, New York, NY, 2011, p. 41.
45 Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, p. 42.
46 Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, p. 43.
passage; an example is *churlsgrace* in Hopkins’ ‘Harry Ploughman’, as explained in Chapter V, section 3. A few poets, notably Wallace Stevens in examples such as *rou-cou-cou*, imitate bird or animal calls using their own distinct mimesis. More commonly a coinage may contribute to a wider sonic effect in a phrase or a line.

**Ellipsis.** Neologism can be a key technique for poets striving for brevity and close-packed meaning. Hopkins in the interpolative compound *wind-lilylocks-laced* encapsulates long fair hair tousled in the breeze, and packs an entire Bible verse of meaning into *beam-blind*.

**Pun.** Shakespeare, of course, did not need neologism to assist him in punning, but in *Antony and Cleopatra*, of the eunuch Mardian, his affixation/conversion *unseminar’d* (both uneducated and infertile) could hardly have been achieved without it. Dickinson’s conversion *bridalled* (both married and curbed) is of the same quality.

**Scansion.** At the risk of finishing this section on a bathetic note, occasionally a word appears to have been coined simply because the poet needed an extra syllable to fulfil a metre. This practice was common in Renaissance texts, with Spenser and Shakespeare both prominent culprits: Spenser’s *calmy* and *paly*, Shakespeare’s *vasty* and *climates* in their respective contexts appear to signify nothing other than “calm”, “pale”, “vast” and “climates”. Nevertheless, there may still be some sonic contribution made beyond the merely rhythmic.

Lastly, I foreshadow a question to be addressed in Chapter I: If the above are the effects, then what are the causes? That is, are the effects latent in characteristics of the words themselves, or do they arise out of the poetic context; and if the
latter, how does that play out? I intend in Chapter I to propose a set of qualities of the neologisms themselves that are associated with the effects they produce.

7. Structure of this thesis

Chapter I: the theoretical framework for this study. It begins with a discussion in section 1 of the nature of Anglophone poetic language – obviously a massive and well-worked field of study – narrowed to focus on the subject as it relates to neologism. An analysis and justification of the central concept of defamiliarization is presented in section 2. In sections 3 and 4 I synthesize and contextualize a theoretical framework, incorporating some elements of existing literary theory and some original concepts, appropriate to the thesis. This last includes a proposed set of four intrinsic attributes of neologisms, the varying presences of which are associated with the words’ poetic effects.

Chapters II–VII: specific studies of neologism as practised by period and/or poet. It is of course not possible to cover exhaustively every prominent poet for whom neologism is important; the intent of the selections made in these chapters is to achieve a range that is wide enough to be representative, while giving extended attention to a small number of poets for whom a more intensive analysis is presented.

II. Renaissance (up to Milton’s emergence)

III. John Milton

IV. Emily Dickinson

V. Gerard Manley Hopkins
VI. Victorian Nonsense

VII. Modernism

Chapter VIII. Section 1 presents short discussions on two themes, play and playfulness and the duration of neologistic effects, that arise across Chapters II–VII. Finally, I present a summary of conclusions and some directions for further studies in poetic neologism.
CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

On ne peut comprendre sa fonction que si l’on reconnaît que le néologisme est la résultante d’une dérivation à partir d’une donnée initiale, au même titre que tous les mots de la phrase littéraire. Sa singularité même n’est pas due à son isolement, mais au contraire à la rigueur des sequences sémantiques et morphologiques dont il est le point d’aboutissement ou d’interférence.

[We can only understand its function if we recognize that a neologism is the result of a derivation arising out of initial data, just like all the words of a literary phrase. Its very singularity is due not to its isolation, but on the contrary to the rigour of the semantic and morphological sequences of which it is an outcome or a point of disruption.]

Michael Riffaterre, ‘Poétique du Néologisme’

1. The nature of poetic language

The purpose of the present chapter is to set out strands of literary theory, together with some propositions of my own, that together will be relied upon throughout this thesis to facilitate the description of the poetic effects of neologism and how those effects are achieved. The lexes of the specific poets to be discussed in this thesis are clearly relevant to that purpose: to understand the effect of a new word it is necessary to understand the patterns in the old ones that surround it and are disrupted by it. But the generalized – and academically storied – question, “What is the nature of poetic language?” is also of interest, because most of the poets who appear in these pages expressed views on it in their writing that will inform
discussion of their possible motivations for the use of neologism, and because the response to that question bears upon the ways in which we are able to unpack the poetic power of neologism.

The view of English poetic language as an elite diction set apart from the language of ordinary spoken and written communication reached the peak of its acceptance as orthodoxy in the eighteenth century. In a letter to academic Richard West, Thomas Gray spoke for the general opinion (my emphasis):

As to the matter of style, I have this to say; the language of the age is never the language of poetry; except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself ...¹

This is an often-quoted excerpt for which a citation more of its time than the one in my footnote could have been found, but I have elected to use the 1825 volume because it retains the notes of original editor William Mason, a contemporary of Gray. On the above quotation, Mason comments:

Nothing can be more just than this observation; and nothing more likely to preserve our poetry from falling into insipidity, than pursuing the rules here laid down for supporting the diction of it ...²

Gray and Mason here are expressing an orthodoxy that held sway until around the turn of the nineteenth century, by which time some, though not all, of the poets of

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² T Gray, p. 114. In a further illustration of the prescriptive grip of orthodoxy at that time, Mason elsewhere in the book editorially suppresses a Latin elegy translation contained in a letter by a youthful Gray on the grounds, inter alia, that “it is not written in alternate but heroic rhyme; which I think is not the species of English measure adapted to elegiac poetry.” (p. 12.)
the Romantic reaction to Augustan classicism had begun to turn to a putatively more naturalistic diction. William Wordsworth in the ‘Preface’ to the 1800 and 1802 editions of his and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* was famously the flag-bearer for Romantic naturalism in general and natural language in particular. His argument is well known enough not to need repeating here. In adding in 1802 an appendix to the ‘Preface’, ‘Poetic Diction’, which adds some historical context and gives further examples, Wordsworth concludes succinctly: “in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or in verse, they require and exact one and the same language.”3 It is worth noting, though, that the ‘Preface’ was added only after the huge popular success of the first (1798) edition. There the poems were preceded only by a short ‘Advertisement’, which was in a very different tone. It makes its case for the naturalism of the language of the poems only briefly, and anticipates criticism from an audience accustomed to “gaudiness and inane phraseology” in a voice that is almost apprehensive. Very early on in the ‘Advertisement’ Wordsworth reveals how radical he feels the poetry to be:

> The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.4

One wonders whether it was only the popular, if still controversial, success of the book that prompted the degree of conviction with which he later expounded his

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theory in the ‘Preface’. In any case, it is worth noting that his experimentation in subject matter and register in *Lyrical Ballads* is not matched by a penchant for lexical invention. In this respect Wordsworth remained a purist. In a letter to the mathematician William Rowan Hamilton, a friend whose amateur poetry he occasionally appraised, Wordsworth wrote:

…*joying* for joy or joyance is not to my taste – indeed I object to such liberties upon principle. We should soon have no language at all if the unscrupulous coinage of the present day were allowed to pass, and become a precedent for the future. One of the first duties of a writer is to ask himself whether his thought, feeling or image cannot be expressed by existing words or phrases, before he goes about creating new terms, even when they are justified by analogies of the language.5

Though he adds some qualification, there is little doubt that “upon principle” Wordsworth is not a neologist by inclination, and he seems to have missed the irony of his own favourable use of *joyance*, which was, to quote the *OED*, “[a]pparently formed by Spenser ... reintroduced by Coleridge and Southey.” The letter was written when Wordsworth was nearly 60; perhaps his views on the subject had become less radical over time along with his political and social opinions, but his poetry at no period exhibits an inclination to neologism.

Returning to the quotation from Gray above: from the point where I paused it with ellipsis, he continues with an observation reminding us that at that time the Renaissance language upheaval was relatively recent history:

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... to which almost every one, that has written, has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivatives: nay sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakespear and Milton have been great creators this way ...

Considering that quotation side by side with Wordsworth’s, we see opinion leaders of their respective times presenting us with attitudes to neologism that are the reverse of what might be expected from their contrasting views on the nature of poetic language. So it can be concluded that radicalism in diction, both in proclaimed theory and in poetic practice, cannot be considered either necessary or sufficient as a marker for a poet to be inclined towards neologism. That does not rule out a degree of correlation, which will be observed later in these pages, but we should beware of putting it too highly.

On that note of caution, I turn now to establish a twenty-first-century view of poetic language upon which this thesis may proceed. The radical ways in which the language – indeed, the idea – of poetry changed and expanded over the twentieth century necessarily caused the meaning of this question to change. Nigel Fabb’s wide-ranging exploration of the current state of play first formalizes the question (in the broader case of all literary, not just poetic, language):

Most literary linguistics, for example in the generative framework, has assumed that there is a special relation between literary language and ordinary language. I formulate this as what I call the ‘Development Hypothesis’ ...

The Development Hypothesis: Literary language is governed only by rules and constraints which are available to ordinary language, and which

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refer only to representations which are present (at some stage in a derivation) in ordinary language.

The Development Hypothesis says that literary language is a development of ordinary language. The alternative is that literary language contains elements not found in ordinary language or is governed by rules or constraints which are not found in ordinary language.7

Fabb postulates two versions, strong and weak, of the hypothesis. The strong version states that “a literary language is a development of its source language.”8 The weak version “allows a literary language to be a development of the universal possibilities underlying all languages.”9 The conclusions of the article are guarded: that there are cases where the hypothesis holds, either in its strong or weak form, but there are others, particularly in verse, where it appears to be still debatable.10 Along the way Fabb lists “six types of difference which define the distinction between literary language and ordinary language”, of which the sixth is “insertion”, or “words which have been borrowed from another dialect or language, or from an older form of the language, or invented.”11 He goes on:

Neologism, the invention of new words, is the most radical type of insertion.... Texts may be extensively neologistic; examples include Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* or Drummond’s ‘Polemo-Middinia inter Vitarvam et Nebernam’ in a macaronic mixture of Latin and English (e.g., “scopulis lobster monyfootus in udis/Creepat” .... In some cases, these texts are governed by entirely artificial principles, and

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8 Fabb, p. 1220.
9 Fabb, p. 1220.
10 Fabb, pp. 1229–1230.
11 Fabb, p. 1224.
cannot be seen as developments of natural language. MacMahon (1995) shows this for *Finnegans Wake*, rejecting the psychoanalytic accounts which claim that the words in the book are like real ‘slips of the tongue’, and showing instead that no linguistic principles underlie the formation of the words.

On the one hand, insertion and particularly neologism work against the Development Hypothesis, and radical insertion/neologism (as in *Finnegans Wake*) takes a text over the boundary into a realm where we cannot expect the Development Hypothesis to work. But it is also true that ordinary language involves various kinds of insertion, including the use of foreign words and neologisms, with distinctive characteristics such as their phonology, even within the ordinary language. For example in the Central Sudanic language Ma’di, foreign words have a distinctive tonal pattern and their own plural morphology (Blackings and Fabb, 2003:68). In this sense, the insertions of literary language develop possibilities found in every ordinary language, and the Development Hypothesis is sustained.\(^\text{12}\)

To be clear on what Fabb is arguing here: it is that regardless of the status of some extreme texts, the practice of literary neologism in general is consistent with (at least) the weak form of the Development Hypothesis essentially because language itself, differently for different languages, includes forms and rules that legitimize and govern neologisms. Thus, rather than treating the use of poetic neologism as in some way outside the norms of ordinary language, we are entitled to approach it, and its practitioners, as exploring the boundaries rather than exceeding them.

\(^{12}\) Fabb, p. 1224.
2. Defamiliarization

Rather than seating itself in one or other school of literary theory, this thesis adopts certain ideas of several schools according to their usefulness in making sense of the practice and the effects of literary neologism. It postulates that for this purpose there is no utility in any theory that excludes or de-emphasizes the role of the reader in the literary experience, a premise that is most apparent when one considers the notion of defamiliarization. The centrality of defamiliarization to understanding poetic neologism is discussed later in this chapter. But first, for such a crucial concept, it is essential not only to make clear what it means, but to present a justification for what is often taken for granted.

Viktor Shklovsky, who coined the original Russian word *ostranenie*, begins from the premise that “as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic … [s]uch habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed”, and compares language deployed in this way with algebra. “By this ‘algebraic’ method of thought we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions; we do not see them in their entirety … ultimately even the essence … is forgotten.” He argues that this process of “‘algebrization’, the over-automatization of an object, permits the greatest economy of perceptive effort”, and in doing so depletes our consciousness.13 In the first sentence of the following passage Shklovsky quotes Tolstoy’s diary to describe the consequent reductive, stultifying effect on people’s cognition, then

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goes on to claim that it is in the nature of art – in fact inherent in its technique – to
defeat that effect:

“If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives
are as if they had never been.” And art exists that one may recover the sensation
of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of
art is to impart the sensations of things as they are perceived and not as they are
known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms
difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of
perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.14

The two statements relating to the purpose and the technique of art are both
sweeping assertions, rather than closely argued propositions, in Shklovsky’s
essay. But it is not necessary to accept them uncritically to see that the technique
he refers to, if not “the” technique of art, is at the least one that is widely deployed
to achieve the effects he describes. Shklovsky begins an earlier essay, ‘The
resurrection of the word’:

The most ancient poetic creation of man was the creation of words. Now words
are dead, and language is like a graveyard, but an image was once alive in the
newly-born word.15

He goes on to state in another way the problem of automatization: that we do not
see or sense the words that have become familiar, but merely recognize them.
Writing at a time when Russian Futurism was at its height, Shklovsky sees one
solution in the neologizing that was part of that movement’s program:

14 Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, p. 16.
And now, today, when the artist wishes to deal with living form and with the living, not the dead, word, and wishes to give the word features, he has broken it down and mangled it up. The “arbitrary” and “derived” words of the Futurists have been born. They either create the new word from an old root (Khlebnikov, Guro, Kamensky, Gnedov) or split it up by rhyme, like Mayakovskiy, or give it incorrect stress by use of the rhythm of verse (Kruchenykh). New, living words are created.16

Variations on Shklovsky’s formulation were put forward by critics from various schools over the twentieth century. Many of them were in furious disagreement with one another about a range of issues in literary stylistics, but when all those differences are set aside, it is possible to discern a consensus on the importance of defamiliarization (or alienation, or horizontal change, or unpredictability, or some other alternative related concept)17 to literary art. I will not list them all here, but will single out for illustration one such alternative from the French structuralist Michael Riffaterre, who took a specific research interest in neologism and to whom I will return in Chapter IX. He wrote, in a paper not specifically concerned with neologism, of the tendency of the reader to want to predict what is coming and the effect of a text in which those predictions are defied. In any sentence-based text, structural predictability is imposed locally by grammatical restrictions; but in poetry:

Predictability increases as the number of levels involved and the number of restrictions increase, which happens with any kind of recurrence, like parallelism in general and meter in particular – and where parallelism increases, so does the

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17 I am aware that there are distinctions between these concepts that are important to many, but I do not regard them as critical within the bounds of this thesis.
effect of an unpredicted element…\textsuperscript{18}

But as I wrote above of Shklovsky, such ideas in the end are assertions. Jonathan Culler, in a 1971 essay generally critical of Riffaterre’s theories, regards his views on unpredictability as untestable: “It is difficult to imagine experimental conditions under which one could objectively and efficiently collect ‘reactions’, and hard to see how one could distinguish between reactions to style and reactions to ‘information transmitted by the linguistic structure’ without considering the ‘subjective content’ of the reactions.”\textsuperscript{19} Nancy Easterlin has also recently pointed out in an essay on a cognitive approach to novelty in literature – a more general topic but one that encompasses neologism – that the theorists never proved their case:

However, the examples of Wordsworth, Jauss, and Shklovsky alone are not enough to suggest that the endorsement of novelty is not simply a cultural phenomenon that emerges with the accelerating processes of modernization.

Saying doesn’t make it so, and, after all, as theorist-poet, Wordsworth is motivated by self-interest: he is attempting to persuade readers to be open-minded about his unusual approach to the ballad ... By the same token, neither Shklovsky nor Jauss can explain precisely why defamiliarization and horizontal [sic]\textsuperscript{20} change are crucial aspects of literature. Since all three authors are undoubtedly influenced by their cultural milieus, perhaps their endorsements of novelty merely evince the conscious statement of internalized and unconscious cultural values – perhaps


\textsuperscript{20} This is an editing error in Easterlin’s article: “horizontal” is intended.
they are, in other words, the emanation of a superstructure expressed at the level of the individual.21

This argument is not trivial, and in responding to it Easterlin goes on to cite two results from psychological research, which the interested reader can find explained in more technical terminology in her paper. The first phenomenon, recognized since the mid-twentieth century, can be summarized thus: that tension between habituation and the new has been historically important in human development and remains central to what it is to be human.22 Habituation in this context refers to how humans have evolved, as have all organisms, to deal with their familiar environment and execute familiar tasks with a minimum of attention, a process that when applied to literary and other art is exactly the one referred to by Shklovsky as “algebrization”. This processing efficiency frees the brain to focus more on new and unfamiliar things, and in humans, for whom it has been a proportionate evolutionary advantage because of our bigger brains, it actually makes those new things attractive to us. The second result, arising out of experimental studies conducted by David Miall and Don Kuiken,23 and essentially carrying out the experiment that Culler found “difficult to imagine” two decades earlier, recorded slowed cognition and heightened engagement and affect in readers’ processing of unusual language in literary texts, regardless of the

subjects’ literary backgrounds. In combination the two provide evidentiary support for what might be called “literary defamiliarization theory”.

3. Specific poetic effects of neologism

In the succeeding chapters, which examine the use of neologism by selected Anglophone poets over several centuries, it will be seen that while poetic purposes vary between them, as well as within the work of a single poet, each single new word may bring about one or more identifiable poetic effects. While not exhaustive, the list of nine principal effects briefly outlined in the Introduction encompasses the great majority. I propose first to classify those into three subgroups, inherent, direct and indirect, according to common factors in how each is achieved by the words concerned. I use inherent to describe the unique quality of defamiliarization. The effects categorized as direct are identifiable, even if not fully worked out, in the form and content of the word in isolation. Those categorized as indirect are not identifiable by inspection of the word alone but arise only out of the word in its conjunction with the context. I have found that the direct subgroup is not always well defined, in that occasionally a neologistic effect in that category will rely at least partially on context, but overall the distinction is consistent enough to be worth making.

Inherent: Defamiliarization.

Defamiliarization, discussed in the preceding section, is the only effect that is universal to all neologisms, for it is axiomatic that a new word should be unfamiliar to its reader, though there is of course a variation in degree, as with all the listed effects. Defamiliarization will be mentioned regularly in succeeding
chapters, where it will be seen that it also has a kind of generative role for the other eight effects: whereas all of the nine are also obtainable using words that are not neologisms, in many cases defamiliarization either catalyses or augments the other eight.

*Direct*: ambiguity, negation, onomatopoeia (and other sonic effects).

*Indirect*: indeterminacy, ellipsis, pun, scansion, catachresis.

The rest of this section is devoted to treating ambiguity, negation, indeterminacy and ellipsis in a little more depth, and examples will illustrate their categorization as direct or indirect. To justify the placement of the remainder, I invite the reader to return to the examples given in the Introduction, and to other examples that appear later in this thesis. Ambiguity and indeterminacy will be taken first, together, because they bear a superficial resemblance to each other that can be most clearly explained in terms of the direct/indirect difference just described.

To illustrate ambiguity in neologism clearly, I will first return to the relatively straightforward example of *o’erpicturing* from the Introduction. Readers introduced to *o’erpicture* (or *overpicture*) out of context and invited to guess at its meaning\(^\text{24}\) might come up with options such as the following: place above (as in a picture over a fireplace); decorate (for example a wall) excessively with pictures; cover a picture with another picture; imagine in excessive detail; paint in exaggerated form; be prettier than (a picture). A plausible context could be constructed for any of the above six: say, “That’s my last Duchess, o’erpicturing the hearth” for the first, and so on. This multiplicity of potential meanings,

\(^{24}\) An interesting experiment to conduct with a few students.
polysemy,²⁵ contained within the word itself, is defined in the following section along with other inherent qualities associated with neologisms. But when the word is placed in its original context, as quoted in the previous chapter, only the last two of those six are available to the reader. Hence in the case of ambiguity, of all the senses directly available from the polysemous neologism, the context of the poem will in general restrict them to a subset. While that statement is true of any polysemous word, it is more telling in the case of poetic neologism because of the lack of a usage history of the word in the host language (see polysemy in section 4 of this chapter). The context also determines whether the two (or more) available senses are alternative, as in the case above, or whether they may be simultaneous. Where they are alternative, and the ways in which the passage may be read are mutually exclusive, it is possible that – as one suspects in the case of o’erpicturing – the ambiguity is unintended by the poet, and in such cases the main effect on any reader who spots both is likely to be puzzlement rather than any more uplifting response. For a second example with more complex poetic intent, consider from the same play the conversion of boy to a verb in Cleopatra’s lines envisaging her portrayal by a performer: “I’ll see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness”. The polysemy available in a context-free verb “to boy” is vast: it might signify to behave like a boy, make into a boy, beget a boy, change gender to male, utter “boy!” in surprise, and so on. The context gives the reader its transitive usage with the surprising object “my greatness”, leaving a brilliant, simultaneous ambiguity of perhaps three senses: to perform (a woman’s role) as a boy, speak in an unbroken voice (supporting “squeaking”), and portray

²⁵ I will use polysemy throughout when referring to that inherent attribute of a word, as distinct from the poetic effect of ambiguity.
reductively (contrasted to “greatness”). In the case of, say, Dickinson’s \textit{recalless}, cited in the Introduction, several meanings are also simultaneously available; however, I emphasize that Dickinson’s intent with this word is not knowable by the reader. But whether or not the effect is intended, and whether or not the multiple senses are alternative or simultaneous, each of those senses in the case of ambiguity is relatively clear in itself.

With indeterminacy, on the other hand, the neologism may have only one sense, but what it \textit{denotes} is indeterminate, obscured, perhaps even unknowable. Dickinson was as much given to indeterminacy as to ambiguity; both are discussed further in Chapter VII, where indeterminacy of place, a quality of “scenelessness”, is exemplified by \textit{illocality}, mentioned in the Introduction. A vivid example of the effect of context on a word is also referred to in that chapter. We all know, more or less, what the word \textit{plush} means, and in particular we know that it is not a count noun. So when Dickinson’s neologistic conversion makes it into one, as “One would as soon assault a Plush – / Or violate a Star –” (‘What soft cherubic creatures’, Fr675),\footnote{E Dickinson, \textit{The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Variorum Edition}, ed. RW Franklin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998. Consistent with scholarly convention, poem citations are in-text by first line and “Franklin number”: see ‘Notes on Texts’, p. vi of this thesis.} that simple transgression of syntax removes from the reader’s interpretation every specific, familiar characteristic of “plush”, leaving only a vague outline of – something, probably soft and a bit furry. Is it vulnerable? Is it alive? How big is it? The poem leaves us wondering. Such wondering arises not just because of the neologism but because of the conjunction of the word with its context. The reader is led to ask these questions – even if they are unanswerable – rather than simply taking in a generalized plushness, because
of the specific concrete brutality of “assault” and the reinforcing parallel of “violate a star”. For an exceptional case of indeterminacy, take Edward Lear’s *runcible*, an adjective invented and used multiple times but never defined by Lear, who applied it adjectivally to a variety of items including a hat, a spoon, a cat and a wall. Out of context, the word literally has no meaning. In context, it is barely any clearer, although at least in each case the reader is restricted to the set of descriptors that could sensibly (or nonsensically) be applied to the noun that it modifies.\(^{27}\)

Turning to the question of negation, a glance back at the Dickinson examples just quoted for ambiguity and indeterminacy shows that all but one were negations by prefix or suffix. She and Milton, in particular, were given to this form of neologism. It is necessary first to describe how affixations may function to create different kinds of negativity, such as simple opposite (*legal/illegal*), absence (*mercy/merciless*), removal (*veil/unveil*) and reversal (*zip/unzip*). One prefix can serve multiple purposes: for example, each of the above four functions is served by *dis-* respectively in *dishonest, disharmony, disrobe* and *dislodge*. Common prefixes such as *in-* (and its derivatives *im-, ir-, il-,* *a-*(and *an-*), *un-* and others, and the negative suffix *-less*, are governed by conventions around which specific negative meaning or meanings they may convey and to which word classes they may attach. It will be seen often in following chapters how such flexibility can enhance the power of the negative coinage: notably Dickinson’s use of *-less*, which conventionally attaches to a noun, as a suffix to verbs as in (among many others) *retrieveless, abashless, perceiveless*. Finally, it should be

\(^{27}\) I recognize that some Saussurean distinctions might be made here between signifier and signified, but I doubt that they would be helpful.
noted that while negation is almost always effected using affixation, it may rarely also be achieved in a compound, as related examples from Milton and Hopkins in Chapters III and V will show.

It has already been noted in the Introduction that a word that may simply appear to be some form of reversal of signification can achieve a richer function in its context. The literature on how poetic negation works in general is extensive, and I will limit this treatment to a comparison of two cognitive approaches that offer some insights applicable to this thesis. The first is an exhaustive analysis by Peter Stockwell of the function of the extensive negation (ten variations on not, never and no) in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116, ‘Let me not to the marriage of true minds’,28 a treatment chosen here for attention because several of the poems considered in later chapters deploy a similar pile-up of negatives. Stockwell makes particular note of the complication added by the four-way ambiguity (in the poem’s context) of the word “this” in the penultimate line, “If this be error and upon me proved”. He contends that one reason readers find the poem so persuasive despite (what Stockwell identifies as) its logical flaws is that “the logical argument is so convoluted by the deictic ambiguity of ‘this’ and by the negations that most readers simply read the poem as the affirmation they would like it to be – in other words, they allow the rhetoric to persuade them because accepting it is easier than resisting it by engaging with the logic.” (Stockwell does not appear to imply that this effect was necessarily Shakespeare’s intent, but only that it may account for the lasting success of the poem.) While this is clearly not intended to be a general statement about poetic negation, it is a plausible account

in this case that may be applicable in others where prolific negation and a degree of ambiguity are combined.

In assessing how negation operates in a poem such as Sonnet 116, an alternative treatment to Stockwell’s, and one that is applicable to isolated as well as multiple uses of negation, can be found in another cognitive approach presented in an article by Lisa Nahajec.²⁹ Nahajec states that “in order to understand a negated proposition we must be able to conceptualize the positive proposition that is being denied, and this concept, though understood as an unrealized state of affairs, adds to the ongoing discourse both as a concept and as an expectation.”³⁰ (Or, as Cristanne Miller succinctly says, “no creates space and therefore potential for new seeing and new meaning.”)³¹ Nahajec sees two different ways in which negation contributes meaning.

First, it can trigger mental representations of negated information. She gives the following example:

(1) I have a chair, it’s not a deck chair

In order to reject the notion of a deck chair, we must first be able to conceptualize what a deck chair is in order to know what the actual chair is not. Having created a mental representation of a deck chair, this adds to our overall ongoing mental representation of the discourse … [T]his negative mental representation can thus be seen as relevant to the understanding of the text.³²

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³⁰ Nahajec, p. 109.
³² Nahajec, p. 110.
Miller cites a classic Dickinson example\textsuperscript{33} where this process could be said to apply: ‘It was not death, for I stood up’ (Fr355), in which a series of negations beginning “It was not Death … It was not Night …” lead eventually to “It” being described in further negative terminology beginning “like Chaos – stopless …” (this last word being not a neologism by \textit{Webster}, but certainly a rarity).

Second, working on the assumption of cooperation between speaker and receiver, Nahajec proposes that the process of triggering the expectations on which negatives are predicated introduces implicit meaning to a reader’s understanding of a text.

For example:

(2) The dog did not bark when the post arrived.

In (2) we must conceptualize the dog barking, but also understand that although this describes an unrealized state of affairs … we can recover the meaning that the dog was expected to bark, normally barks or has been accused of barking.\textsuperscript{34}

Consider the series of propositions of St Paul (beginning “Love knows not jealousy, Love is never boastful, nor proud, nor unseemly …”), and of Shakespeare (“love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds, / Or bends with the remover to remove …”). On Nahajec’s model, the reader of these passages conceptualizes (perhaps arising out of personal experience, observation or reading) an emotion that is, for example, boastful or easily swayed: that emotion is, so to speak, the deck chair of Nahajec’s example 1. Further, the aspect of negation treated in example 2 enables the reader to recover the meaning that

\textsuperscript{33} Miller, pp. 100–101.
\textsuperscript{34} Nahajec, pp. 110–111.
sometimes one may boast, or alter, while in a state that only resembles love; and thus the meaning is extracted that one must beware of such manifestations, and that genuine love is an occasion for particular joy.

It is not necessary, from a hermeneutic viewpoint, to choose between Stockwell’s and Nahajec’s models. Indeed, they are not mutually exclusive even for the single example of the sonnet, as it is possible for one reader to process the language consistent with Nahajec’s model whilst another may, in the way Stockwell describes, decline to “engag[e] with the logic”. Both approaches, as will be shown in Chapter IV, can contribute to an understanding of poems such Dickinson’s ‘You love me – you are sure’ (Fr218), where negations pile up one on another.

Finally, I will make some brief observations on ellipsis. In ordinary conversation or prose, ellipsis is generally used to save time or space by avoiding the repetition of content that either was previously spoken or written, or is commonly understood between speaker and receiver. Here, for example, is a case of the former, where the sentence of B is grammatically nonstandard only because it omits “I am going”:

A: Where are you going?

B: To bed.

Samuel Pepys’ “And so to bed”, similarly nonstandard, is a case of the latter. In both instances the omitted content is entirely clear to the receiver. Occasionally in common usage ellipsis is used for more subtle purposes, such as to suggest a meaning that is untoward or humorous, or otherwise needs to be implied instead of spelled out. Such allusiveness, but for a much wider range of purposes, is a
primary motive for poetic ellipsis. I will adopt a definition from an article on the subject by Stanley Greenfield, who defines ellipsis as “omission of a form or forms in a clause or sentence, the presence of which is demanded or suggested by existing forms or context in order to make sense – and in poetry, to make the most or richest sense – of the message.”\textsuperscript{35} Ellipsis achieved through neologism, though, often adds a further layer of complexity that may either add to the richness of sense or, occasionally, blur it. Outside the poetic context, consider a word which was, at the time of its coinage, effectively an ellipsis: prioritize, which the Google Ngram viewer indicates gained currency in the 1970s as a useful way of reducing a phrase of around five words down to one. Around fifty years on, it continues to carry two related meanings – either “to set [a thing] at a high priority” or “to assign an order of priority to [a set of things]”. In most cases “prioritize” might be clear by context, but if I say, “I will prioritize my to-do list”, no one can be sure which of those two is meant; and we do not know whether in the long term one meaning will eventually die out or both will live on. In the same way, when a reader encounters a word for the first time in a poem and has no usage history at all to aid in glossing it, contextual knowledge may not be enough to restore the gap. Sometimes, as with Hopkins’ wind-lilylocks-laced (‘Harry Ploughman’, which will be studied in Chapter V) for the tousling of fair hair in the breeze, the content is semantically clear, the effect being more one of concentration of sense through compression of language. Hopkins frequently compresses in this kind of way, eliding small words such as prepositions and relative pronouns, most often resulting merely in an offence against standard syntax, but sometimes in

neologism. Dickinson has a similar habit: for example, the double-whammy suffixation in the opening couplet “The overtakelessness of those / Who have accomplished Death” (Fr894) enables a compressed yet clear sense in the first line that gives the reader more time to linger over the significance of the orthodox yet surprising accomplished in the second. But frequently, as with Shakespeare’s o’erpicture, mentioned in the Introduction, the information (over, picture) encoded in the neologism is incomplete, there is a range of possibilities for the elided words, and the context of the poem restricts its potential interpretations but does not fully define it. On other occasions the restoration of the elided words requires external knowledge. Hopkins’ beam-blind (‘The Candle Indoors’, in a passage examined in Chapter V), of one who criticizes another for a small fault while oblivious to its greater presence in themselves, would be unintelligible to any reader unfamiliar with its Biblical source. In other cases, familiarity with the poet’s work eases comprehension: Dickinson’s frequent adjectives formed from <verb>-less become less opaque when one realizes that they can usually (but not always!) be glossed as “unable to be <verb>ed”.

4. Attributes of neologisms in a poetic context

Having identified a set of poetic effects to which neologisms contribute, we must now ask: Why should a coined word be preferred to an existing one for a given purpose? What is it about neologisms that make them particularly valuable for those purposes? To answer these questions, we need to isolate characteristics significant in neologisms that in existing words of the language either are less important, or operate differently. My research has led me to postulate four such attributes, strangeness, charm, polysemy and breadth, to account for the poetic
power of neologisms in achieving the previously described effects.\textsuperscript{36} None of them is a virtue in itself, or even necessarily desirable in any given context; they describe the nature of the word rather than value it. In seeking to name the first two of them I was reminded of two of the six types of quark in particle physics, \textit{quark} serendipitously\textsuperscript{37} being itself a neologism coined by James Joyce and revived by theoretical physicist Murray Gell-Mann to name the then putative sub-elementary particles. It is stipulated that none of these four attributes is an entirely objective characteristic. \textit{Charm} in particular will be assessed variously by different readers; but, like other intangible qualities such as beauty or humour, that does not disqualify it as a subject for inquiry.

\textit{Strangeness} is the degree to which the neologism diverges from English lexical norms, and hence is central to its immediate defamiliarizing effect on the reader. That divergence may be relatively small. In the case of affixations, the normal effect of the prefix or suffix and the normal sense/s of the root will in general be well known, so that when the two are put together the result is sometimes so obvious as to be trivial. Dickinson’s \textit{audibler}, for example, is non-standard English but hardly abnormal in its construction and entirely clear in its surface meaning. In the case of the compound \textit{leap-frog} (Shakespeare, \textit{Henry V}) – leaving aside the question of whether Shakespeare coined the word for an existing game or was merely the first to record it – the construction is commonplace, the context makes it clear that a game is being referred to, and the reader knows how frogs jump, so again on first encounter it would not be particularly strange. By contrast,

\textsuperscript{36} All of these except polysemy carry in everyday English a wide set of commonplace denotations. When encountered within the pages of this thesis, they should always be construed with the narrow meanings assigned here.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Serendipitous} in turn is a surprisingly recent coinage dating to the 1950s.
on the strangeness scale, *betweenpie* (Hopkins) is downright bizarre. It is either an affixation or a compound (depending on how one regards *between* – I prefer to regard it as a prefixal preposition, and so *betweenpie* as an affixation), with -pie in turn being a back-formation from *pied*, which the *OED* regards as originally a conversion by the addition of *-ed* to the noun *pie* in its sense of a synonym for *magpie* (the bird). That is to say, there is no attestation in the *OED* for *pie* as a present tense verb root of *pied*. All of this means that when *betweenpie* is encountered in context in ‘My own heart let me have more pity on; let’ – “as skies / Betweenpie mountains”38 – it is not immediately clear what usage category Hopkins intends. Eventually a parsing of surrounding lines leads us to understand it as a verb, denoting the dappling effect on mountains of sun through clouds.

Neologisms in the “other” category tend also to be high in *strangeness*, simply because they generally do not have familiar components or structures for the reader to latch onto. Lewis Carroll’s *brillig* in ‘Jabberwocky’ out of its original context would be incomprehensible. Conversions are a special case because their newness is a function of their usage category in context: their very nature distinguishes them from affixations and compounds, because the latter two are (lexically speaking) new words, whereas conversions are not, and so their strangeness is manifested at a higher (sentence) level than for other categories of neologism, where the strangeness is that of the word in its own right. The reader’s eye, as it approaches a conversion, is not struck by difference in appearance. Conversions often work like a *trompe-l’oeil*: the visual sense on reading the word is lulled by its familiarity, and only when the reader’s deeper language-processing

function is engaged does the trick become apparent. Depending on context, the surprise of the word’s revolutionary role may not be sprung until a syntactic unit has been completely read. The technique of conversion is perhaps more effective when the results are read on the page rather than heard, because of the deceptive role played by the initial visual cue of the familiar word. To take an example from E. E. Cummings, on reading “he sang his”, one’s inbuilt decoder of English syntax leads to the expectation of a noun phrase such as “song”, so that when a commonplace auxiliary verb, didn’t, turns up instead, the reader is jolted by the transgression. This is a defamiliarizing event that does not occur with most other neologisms because their usage categories are apparent from their construction, except in a few cases such as brillig, which might be a noun or an adjective: “’Twas brillig” might signify, say, that it was evening, or that it was chilly. Then follows the consideration of what the word signifies in the poem, a task which is in general no easier for conversions than for other neologism types, because once the usage category has changed, much of what we thought we knew about the word may prove useless. Consequently, we may conclude that the strangeness of conversions, regardless of the familiarity of the word in isolation, generally exceeds that of other types of neologism. Finally, it should be noted that in rare cases, such as Dickinson’s recallless, strangeness may be seen even in typography.

Charm is the aesthetic attraction of the word in sound or appearance: how much the reader might find it charming or attractive when encountering its form on the page or repeating it mentally or aloud. In many cases the degree of charm may emerge in part or in whole out of the degree of stylization in the word’s construction, or out of strangeness; but a word may possess charm without either
of those two factors. There is inevitably some subjectivity involved here: the beauty of a word is a vexed concept, particularly when one is attempting (as I am here) to separate it from meaning. Max Beerbohm argued that to do so is impossible: that the notion that “beautiful” words such as *gondola* (he lists a series of such words) “seem to be fraught with a subtle onomatopoeia” is due entirely to their denotations, so that “[i]f gondola were a disease, and if a scrofula were a beautiful boat peculiar to a beautiful city, the effect of each word would be exactly the reverse of what it is.”\(^{39}\) While Beerbohm may be right with respect to the examples he gives, there is a body of evidence confirming that nonetheless an emotional or connotative significance exists in the vowel and consonantal sounds of language. Chapter 4 of Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh’s *The Sound Shape of Language*, ‘The Spell of Speech Sounds’, includes an extensive survey of this subject and its literature,\(^{40}\) and a recent major study has added empirical weight to the case against the arbitrariness of the (spoken) sign.\(^{41}\) In any case, the initial defamiliarizing effect of new words means that the reader encountering them will be less influenced by existing meaning. As to a word’s appearance in print on the page – while this will be a lesser influence – every so often, as in Lear’s angular location *Zemmery Fidd*, many readers will be a little charmed.

*Polysemy*, which was introduced and its relationship to ambiguity explained in the previous section, is the multiplicity of potential meanings contained within the word. It should be noted initially that this is not a simple count, in that one reader’s distinct shades of meaning will be another’s hair-splitting. There are

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relatively few English words that are not polysemous to some degree; many simple words run into the hundreds of definitions in the OED. In fact, the more complex the word, in general, the fewer meanings, so that whereas *set* has over 400 OED definitions, *unceremonious* has just two, and even those merely distinguish an unceremonious action from an unceremonious person. But consideration of polysemy as it applies to current words is only of partial relevance here: a key word in the definition above is “potential”. All the OED’s definitions arise out of the evidence of historical and current usage; they are the distillations of countless instances of each word in both a literal and a cultural context, where that context lent its flavour to meaning; as Emerson put it, “language is the archives of history”.42 On a smaller scale, that is also how we as readers assign meaning: by means of our accumulated familiarity with the word in question through the sum of the instances in which we encounter it. But when neologisms are coined, and when we first encounter them as readers, they have no such back-story, either at a dictionary or a personal level, and so we must attempt to decode them from their constituent parts (if possible – an entirely nonsense word such as Carroll’s *toves* might simply have none) into one or more possible meanings, before, or simultaneously with, absorbing the context. In the discussion of poetic effects in the previous section I distinguished ambiguity, the poetic effect, from polysemy, the inherent attribute of the word. We may say that the polysemy of a neologism provides an upper limit for the degree of ambiguity arising directly out it. Hence in the example given earlier of Shakespeare’s *o’erpicturing*, several possible meanings are available before restriction by context leaves us with a two-way ambiguity; but if the word in isolation has a

clear single denotation (that is, it is not polysemous), as with *pompless* (Dickinson) or *yestertempest* (Hopkins), it cannot be a source of ambiguity.

The final special attribute is *breadth*, a quality that applies mainly to compounds (the following account describes it in those terms) and occasionally to type “other” in the portmanteau category, but also more weakly to many affixations. It centres on the two (or more) separate parts of the compound as they are simultaneously apprehended by the reader. I have borrowed from cognitive poetics theory the model of “conceptual blending”, proposed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, to best describe it. Conceptual blending, or blending, theory is a relatively young branch of cognitive linguistics, too complex to give it more than the following condensed outline here; the interested reader is encouraged to browse the references in the footnote.43

In [blending theory] the basic unit of cognitive organization is ... the ‘mental space’ (Fauconnier 1994 [1985]), a partial and temporary representational structure [that is created] when thinking or talking about a perceived, imagined, past, present, or future situation. Mental spaces represent particular scenarios which are structured by given domains [in the cognitive metaphor theory sense]. The recruited structure is only a small subset of knowledge of that domain. In short, a mental space is a short-term construct informed by the more general and more stable knowledge structures associated with a particular domain.

...
[Blending theory] typically makes use of a four-space model. These spaces include two ‘input’ spaces plus a ‘generic’ space, representing conceptual structure that is shared by both inputs, and the ‘blend’ space, where material from the inputs combines and interacts.\(^\text{44}\)

In an article concerned with word formation in general rather than neologism, Friedrich Ungerer applies blending theory to model the conceptual effect of compounds:

Most word-formation processes involve semantic combination or fusion, and this qualifies them for an analysis in terms of conceptual blending as proposed by Fauconnier and Turner.\(^\text{45}\) In particular, conceptual blending seems well suited to elucidate processes like lexicalization.

Ungerer proceeds to a detailed technical description, on the model of Fauconnier and Turner, of the conceptual blending process that takes place in the mind of a reader encountering a compound, which I simplify considerably here. The two input spaces correspond to the conceptual understanding of the reader around each of the component words of the compound. The generic space corresponds to background knowledge of the reader regarding (i) matters common to both of the component words, and (ii) the reading context in which the compound is encountered. The resultant conceptual structure in the blended space yields the reader’s understanding of the word as read.


In the case of neologistic compounds, my concept of breadth is essentially a name for the sum of differences between the two or more component words. The conceptual blending model enables a clear identification of the nature of those differences, in two parts. The first is the degree to which the input spaces differ from one another, in the simple denotations and connotations of the source words, and in lexical qualities such as usage class and concreteness/abstraction. The second is manifested in a paucity of common material found in the generic space, which is an indication that regardless of whether the components in themselves share characteristics, they come, as it were, from different worlds. The greater these combined differences, the greater is the scope of the resultant blended space and hence the poetic potential of the compound.\textsuperscript{46} The real-world example treated by Ungerer is \textit{wheelchair}, a compound with little breadth because it relates a physical object with four legs to another physical object that can easily substitute for those legs. The result is a straightforward, prosaic denotation. Shakespeare’s \textit{leap-frog} is similarly lacking breadth because of the existing close association between the action and the animal. Whereas a coinage such as \textit{footglove} might only put us in mind of a sock, shoe, or similar object, because a glove is a covering for a hand, which has much in common with a foot, Hopkins’ much broader \textit{footfretted} exercises the mind more because \textit{foot} and \textit{fret} are two words that seem semantic strangers to each other. (The word also gains polysemy from the multiple meanings of \textit{fret}, and a little sonic charm from the assonance of its components.) Hopkins’ ‘The Candle Indoors’ gives us \textit{spendsavour}, its breadth encompassing two seemingly unrelated words in a mystifying result, were it not

\textsuperscript{46} A mathematical analogy to the attribute of breadth is the magnitude of a cross-product of vectors, which is dependent on the angle between them and is maximized when they are orthogonal.
for a second-degree association known only to those familiar with the Bible (this would exist in the generic space, in the above model), as will be explained in Chapter V. All of the above, as stipulated at the outset, applies chiefly to compounds. For affixations, one may postulate a simple input space associated with a prefix or suffix that is then blended with the space associated with the root word to which it is attached. The affix input space includes its normal semantic effect on a root word, and the type(s) of root to which it may be attached under standard usage. Thus, where the affix is syntactically or semantically ill-matched to the root, as well as a degree of strangeness in the resultant neologism there is arguably also breadth. An example is Dickinson’s occasional practice remarked on earlier, of applying the suffix -less, normally attached to a noun in standard English, to a verb, as in competeless.

5. Concluding remarks

Sections 2 and 3 discussed a set of notable poetic effects to which neologisms may contribute, and section 4 identified some key attributes of the words themselves. Clearly there will be different attributes that are especially important in the achievement of particular effects. To give just a few examples, I have already noted that the degree of polysemy in a word determines an upper limit to its potential for ambiguity; and while it is obvious that strangeness will produce defamiliarization, so too will charm and breadth. Other such associations will be remarked on as they emerge through the course of this thesis.

Finally, I will briefly signal without discussion – only in order that the reader is conscious of it over forthcoming chapters – an issue that will also arise throughout this study but for which I elect to defer presentation and discussion of
the theory to Chapter VIII. What happens to neologisms as they get older? When we read a new word for the first time, the second, the tenth, how does our response differ? (One can, of course, substitute “poem” in the above question and find a large volume of theory addressing it.) Further, over a longer period, there is the question of words that find their way into the language, and then the dictionary. For us in the twenty-first century, they are no longer neologisms, but we are still interested in how they affected contemporary readers.
1. Lexis expansion in Early Modern English

The extraordinary fertility of poetic neologism during the English Renaissance will be given context in this opening section by a study of how the language as a whole was undergoing a period of enormous change. A simple indication of the extent of that change is in the Table of Contents of *The Oxford History of English*: of its fourteen chapters, which span over two thousand years, three (6, 7 and 8) are entirely given over to the language in the Renaissance. In the Introduction to this thesis, contemporary perceptions of lexical deficiencies in the language and the massive stimulus of the printing press were mentioned as critical factors in this revolution, and this section will examine those in more detail. It will also be seen that the perhaps surprising degree to which educated society was observing, commenting on and attempting variously to influence the nature and speed of language change had its own reflexive effect. As Charles Barber writes, “The great expansion of the lexicon ... was a highly conscious affair, and people argued about it a good deal.” Paula Blank puts the role of writers and critics more strongly: “[I]t cannot be a coincidence that, for the first time in the history of the

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vernacular, so many individuals took it upon themselves to modify or to alter – sometimes dramatically – the way their countrymen spoke or wrote the language. [...] language reformers vied for the right to authorize a language that was, as yet, up for bids”.

In the centuries preceding the advent of print, most documents in England were not works of literature but papers relating to administration of the law through court, church and other institutions, written in Latin or Norman French by members of an elite class of scholars and clerks. The equivalent institutions pre-1066 were hardly primitive, but the Norman invasion brought with it a culture with a new level of attention to the written matters of governance, as Adam Fox documents:

Something like 2,000 charters and writs survive from Anglo-Saxon England as testimony to the fact that writing was already an important feature of administrative life. The great transition ‘from memory to written record’, however, took place in the centuries after the Norman Conquest. Tens of thousands of charters and writs are extant from the thirteenth century as evidence of the huge increase in bureaucracy at this time.

By the fifteenth century this volume of documentation had increased further and become entrenched in the lives of the people as they were governed by church and court; yet few of the population were able to read it. Historical accuracy in the matter of literacy rates is difficult to achieve, but the ability to sign one’s

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name is measurable from historical civil documents such as wills.\(^5\) The proportion of men and women capable of doing so in 1500, early in the Early Modern period, was around five per cent of men and one per cent of women. By late Renaissance, at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, those numbers had risen to thirty per cent and ten per cent respectively.\(^6\) In considering the above figures, the multiplier effect should not be forgotten – that many more people also had a family member or neighbour who could read to them and write for them. It is impossible to separate the interplay of several factors in this increase in literacy and how they might have fed into each other, but one thing is certain: the arrival of Caxton’s printing press in 1475 was central to it. The result of a rapidly growing capacity to mass-produce text was the production of text for the masses – and that meant text overwhelmingly in English. The new literacy, combined with the rise in provision for and valuing of schooling for children, in time produced a reading population drawn from a much wider social background, with far greater access to the written arts and, importantly, beginning to enter the academy in influential numbers. At the same time – again, correlation and causation are difficult to untangle – a revolution in knowledge was under way.

As writers and readers in what we now call Early Modern English rose to prominence in literature and in scholarly endeavour, the suitability of that language to those purposes became a matter for debate. R. F. Jones in *The Triumph of the English Language* (the title refers to English becoming the preeminent language over Latin in the academy, across the period between

\(^5\) Fox observes (p. 17) that this is a conservative measure for literacy, as there is much evidence to show that a written ‘signature’ of ‘X’ may co-exist with a halting ability to read. However, such ability is unlikely to have opened up a world of books to its possessor.

\(^6\) Fox, p. 18.
Caxton and the Restoration) catalogued the contemporary opposition to its usage in those spheres in chapters titled ‘The Uneloquent Language’ and ‘The Inadequate Language’. Jones chronicles the widely (though not universally) held views during most of the sixteenth century – not least by Caxton himself in an editorial capacity – of English as a “rude, gross, base, or in short uneloquent” language unworthy of use for higher literature, at the same time lacking in the conceptual and lexical complexity required for works of higher learning. In the former case, John Skelton voiced the frustrations of many poets as early as ca. 1505, in ‘Phyllyp Sparowe’:

Our language is so rusty,
So cankered, and so full
Of frowardes, and so dull,
That if I wolde apply
To wryte ornately
I wot not where to fynd
Termes to serve my mynde:

Jones shows by contemporary examples that the “aureate” or ornate style then in fashion was achieved through “the introduction of only slightly disguised classical words”, so that for “English compositions of the first half of the sixteenth century eloquence [as perceived by contemporary readers] was largely confined to neologisms”. On the “inadequate” side, Jones demonstrates the

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8 Jones, p. 55.


10 Jones, p. 6.
validity of the concerns of early Renaissance scholars about the capacity of the English word-stock as it then stood to serve the purposes of a variety of sciences, and the inevitability of their conclusion that neologism through loan-words and adaptations from other languages would be the solution. This section is again rich in contemporary quotation, which the interested reader is urged to seek out, in particular a succinct and acute statement of the problem by Ralph Lever in *The Arte of Reason* (1573), that there were “moe things, then there are words to expresse things by”.11 This stated problem of inexpressibility is followed by a long quotation of an explanation by sixteenth-century education theorist and teacher12 Richard Mulcaster of the need for neologism as the solution to the inadequacy.13 Mulcaster’s analysis is too long to quote here, but in its postulation of the mind’s activity as it expresses a thought, it would not be out of place in a twenty-first-century cognitive-linguistics text. It concludes, “[h]ence commeth it that we have our tung commonlie both stored and enlarged with our neighbours speches, and the old learned tungs.”

Thus as England entered the second half of the sixteenth century there were two separate impulses toward neologism: one among the scholarly, especially scientific, community, to meet a genuine requirement for words in English to signify concepts and things that were new, or perhaps had only ever been described before in scholarly Latin or French; and the other among poets and authors who felt the need to elevate the power of their seemingly uncultured tongue into something more akin to that of the classical greats. Those two

11 Jones, p. 69.
12 Notably, teacher of Edmund Spenser.
agendas between them were driving forces behind the explosion in new words, mostly borrowed or adapted from Latinate languages, recorded in English during the Renaissance.14 Scholars of the time were not lacking in self-awareness regarding the state of affairs: Mulcaster more than once identified the distinction between the two motives, writing at one point of “the latest terms which it [the English language] boroweth daielie from foren tungs, either of pure necessitie in new matters, or of mere braverie, to garnish it self withal.”15 Elsewhere he expressed the difference showing an understanding of the importance of the twentieth-century concept of defamiliarization, “strange deliveries”, to art: “as either more cunning made waie to more terms, or as strange devises did seke strange deliveries.”16

The rise of the new words, even those that appear to have been inevitable additions, was not uniformly welcomed, as Blank writes:

Although the need for new words in English, especially in fields previously dominated by Latin, was real enough, linguistic innovation in the Renaissance generated a polemic that is known to historians of the language as the “inkhorn” controversy. While many contemporary observers commend the utility of the new words, many others object to them on the grounds of obscurity, the fact that understanding them depended on a knowledge of the foreign languages from which they were derived.17

14 I forbear to quote here any specific number, as there are seemingly as many estimates as sources, for reasons that include definitional issues, attribution biases in the OED and continual antedating of first citations; but it is clearly measured in the tens of thousands. The one point that all are agreed on is that the explosion happened.
15 Mulcaster, p. 88.
16 Mulcaster, p. 173.
17 Blank, Broken English, p. 40.
The inkorn debate centred much more on the “artistic” use of neologism than the “utilitarian”. Criticism of the latter arose out of practical concerns of comprehensibility, as expressed in the above quotation, and the related issue of the potential for a class-based linguistic lockout by an educated class in professions such as medicine and the law, as expressed by Blank: “The new English ... for many ... erected barriers of communication among native speakers of the language and, moreover, accomplished this as a deliberate effort to achieve or confirm social preeminence.”18 Blank quotes examples of these contemporary criticisms, such as this by Thomas Wilson:

Emong al other lessons, this should first be learned, that we never affect any straunge inkehorne termes, but so speake as is commonly received. …Some seke so farre for outlandishe Englishe, that they forget altogether their mothers language. And I dare swere this, if some of their mothers were alive, they were not able to tell, what they say, and yet these fine Englishe clerkes, wil saye they speake in their mother tongue, if a man should charge them for counterfeiting the kinges English.... Do we not speake, because we would have other to understand us, or is not the tongue geven for this ende, that one might know what another meaneth? And what unlearned man can tell, what [this language] … signifieth?19

There were also appeals to simple linguistic patriotism, occasioning attempts at “re-Englishing” Latin-derived words such as muscles (fleshstrings)20 or centurion (hunderder).21 Many writers, to avoid the charge of deliberate obfuscation, gave a vernacular gloss of their coinages in the text where they were introduced.

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18 Blank, Broken English, p. 41.
20 Jones, p. 123.
Occasionally they would even launch into a preemptive defence against the anticipated criticism. Barber gives the example of Thomas Elyot, a prolific neologizer in prose, citing *animate, education, encyclopedia, frugality, metamorphosis, modesty, obfuscate* and *persist* as Elyot’s own inventions: a list that serves as a useful reminder that as we read Renaissance texts, we see words such as these as commonplace, but some of the contemporary language as strange; for readers of the time, the reverse was true. On coining *maturity*, Elyot spent two paragraphs glossing it and explaining exactly what semantic gap it fills that *ripeness* does not cover. It is worthwhile to quote Elyot’s entire case here, as it is a model for the defence of countless similar examples, including poetic ones examined in this chapter, that had to justify themselves in their very first context without the explanatory support of their progenitor.

… wherfore I am constrained to usurpe a latine worde callyng it Maturitie: whiche worde though it be strange and darke / yet by declaring the vertue in a fewe mo wordes / the name ones brought in custome / shall be as facile to understande as other wordes late commen out of Italy and Fraunce / and made denizins amonge us.

Maturitie is a meane betwene two extremeties / wherin nothing lacketh or excedeth: and is in suche astate / that it may neither encrease nor minisshe without losinge the denomination of Maturitie … Maturum in latine maye be enterpreted ripe or redy: as frute / whan it is ripe / it is at the very poynte to be gathered and eaten: and every other thinge / whan it is redy / it is at the instante after to be occupied. Therfore that worde maturitie / is translated to the actis of man / that whan they be done with suche moderation / that nothing in the doinge may be sene superfluous or indigent / we may saye / that they be maturely done: reserving the wordes / ripe and redy / to frute and other thinges seperate from
affaires / as we have nowe in usage. And this do I nowe remembre for the necessary augmentation of our langage.22

As to the “artistic” neologism agenda, there is a perhaps surprising degree of self-awareness detectable in some more considered contemporary defences of the practice. Some critics identified certain qualities such as euphony and philological purity that distinguished a desirable from an undesirable coinage.23 For the most part, though, the pejorative “inkhorn” was flung more or less indiscriminately at the users of loan-words and neologisms in their pursuit of more elegant expression in poetry and prose. The lists of flingers and targets, perhaps unsurprisingly, in many cases include the same names on both sides. Blank, for example, cites Thomas Nashe’s “fondness for conspicuously prolix diction” as at odds with his excoriation of the “inkehornisme” of his literary rival Gabriel Harvey, and Harvey’s equally pot-kettle-black response. She concludes:

Both authors, of course, were guilty of some of the most outrageous neologizing of the age. Renaissance “inkhornism” is a game in which each player makes up his own rules24 and then legitimates those rules – most often, by proscribing those of others. For those authors, including William Shakespeare, who exploited the new trade in words, profits depended, crucially, on regulating the linguistic ventures of others.25

Perhaps the most famous disparagement is that of Edmund Spenser by Ben Jonson quoted in the Introduction. Jonson, another critic who walked both sides

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23 Jones, pp. 204–213 *passim*.
24 For neologism considered as a form of play, see Chapter VIII.
25 Blank, *Broken English*, p. 44.
of Neologism Street,26 opined of Spenser that he “in affecting the Ancients, writ no Language”, a put-down referring to archaisms as well as mock-archaic neologisms. Posterity disagrees, with most scholars crediting Spenser as a major influence on the diction of English poetry across roughly – as it happens – the period covered in this thesis.27 Sometimes the poets themselves have testified to his inspiration, as in this from Milton: “our sage and serious poet Spencer, (whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas)”.28 Milton might be classified as late Renaissance, but he flourished at a time when the language wars described above had moved into a different phase, and his particular influence on his own and future eras justifies a separate treatment in Chapter III. Indeed, any number of poets of the period might be the subject of study here, including some Metaphysicals such as John Donne (see, for example, ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’ for the compounds tear-floods and sigh-tempests, and the affixation inter-assured). But though others may have coined more freely than they, Spenser and Shakespeare, standing clearly as the two most historically influential of the English neologizers of the Renaissance, are the chief subjects for individual study in this chapter.

26 Jonson liberally laced The Poetaster in particular with neologisms, and Blank observes that his extensive use of thieves’ cant in A Masque of the Gypsies Metamorphosed “turns a deaf ear to Jonson’s own call for a language characterized by ‘perspicuitie, and nothing so vitious in it as to need an Interpreter.’” (p. 62).
2. Spenser: archaism, dialect and neologism

“Throughout his career Spenser coined words, and borrowed from Chaucer, Lydgate and Skelton”, writes A. C. Partridge. The Shepheardes Calender was the first major work in which Spenser deployed his strange words both old and new, and the one that contains them more densely than any other, due to its population of bucolic characters speaking in a style made deliberately unfamiliar to the poet’s audience. Though Spenser’s augmentation of the common lexis ran as much to archaism and borrowings from dialect as to neologism, those techniques share some effects in common. Indeed, as Nathan A. Gans points out:

In the Elizabethan period ... neologism could itself be a form of archaism. One way of imitating the old poets – Chaucer, Lydgate, Occleve, and Hawes – was to neologize, since the sixteenth-century reputation of these writers depended, in part, on their enriching the language with new words.

In particular, the qualities of strangeness and charm identified in Chapter I as significant to the effects of neologism in poetry also apply to a great extent to archaisms and dialect. This proposition is directly supported by E. K., writer of the preface to The Shepheardes Calender, whose identity is still a matter for

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29 This is an appropriate point for a general note regarding sources and attribution for the words cited in this chapter and in the following one on Milton. Many thousands of words that first appeared in print around the Renaissance became a part of standard English; and conversely, many words that were standard, or at least accepted, at the time have died out of usage and so appear new to a twenty-first-century reader. A further complication in a treatment of this period is the previously mentioned perennial difficulty of distinguishing an original neologism from a quotation of someone else’s recent coinage. In my own reading from the period, in particular of Shakespeare, I have noted some apparent cases of compounds and conversions, which I have then verified as far as possible; but apart from those occasional sightings, a nonspecialist in the period such as this writer is reliant on the work of others for most examples. In respect of those, I have not added a formal footnote for a secondary source for every individual word cited, but have endeavoured to make the source volume or article clear in context.

30 AC Partridge, p. 61.

31 Gans, p. 379.
debate. E. K. addresses the matter of Spenser’s new words, presumably in the (correct) expectation that a defence would be required against future critics:

[O]f many thinges which in him be straunge, I know [his words] will seeme the straungest, and words them selves being so auncient, the knitting of them so short and intricate, and the whole Periode and compasse of speach so delightsome for the roundnesse, and so grave for the straungenesse.32

It is difficult from the viewpoint of the general reader centuries away to understand how Spenser’s (and others’) examples of archaism might have been read by his audience, not least because for us those poets are archaic all around; as Bruce McElderry puts it, “[u]ndoubted as is the presence of deliberate archaism in Spenser, it is probable that for a modern reader most of the archaic effect derives from words perfectly current and unexceptionable in his own day.”33

Further, the use of archaic and dialect language in modern poetry is not a common occurrence, so it is not easy to replicate the experience of the Renaissance reader in this respect. One art form in which they thrive, though, is in folk music, and so I offer the following as an example of the power of dialect/archaic language through its strangeness to inform a story with a mood. The song ‘Twa Corbies’/‘Two Ravens’/‘Three Ravens’ (title variants shared among countless versions), dating back at least 400 years, in a very few lines comments in a vein either optimistic and accepting or dark and cynical, depending on the version, on matters of human mortality. The reader is invited to compare two recorded

renditions of the darker kind, one in archaic Scots dialect\textsuperscript{34} (“As I was walkin’ all alane / I heard twa corbies makkin’ a mane”) and the other in contemporary English\textsuperscript{35} (“As I was walking all alone / I heard two ravens call and moan”), which use essentially the same melody in minimal productions. Despite the greater vocal and instrumental stylization and the funereal pace of the latter version, the defamiliarizing effect on the modern listener of the strange words in the former, simpler arrangement in amplifying its sinister mood is unmistakeable. “So grave for the straungenesse”, indeed: a comparable effect must have been felt by readers of \textit{The Shepheardes Calender}. E. K. goes on to justify it:

And firste of the wordes to speake, I graunt they be something hard, and of most men unused, yet both English, and also used of most excellent Authors, and most famous Poetes. [… H]aving the sound of those auncient poetes still ringing in his eares, he mought needes, in singing, hit out some of theyr tunes. But whether he useth them by such casualtye and custome, or of set purpose and choyse, as thinking them fittest for such rusticall rudenesse of shepheards, eyther for that theyr rough sounde would make his rymes more ragged and rustical; or els because such olde and obsolete wordes are most used of country folke, sure I think, and think I think not amisse, that they bring great grace, and, as one would say, auctoritie to the verse.\textsuperscript{36}

E. K., not burdened by concerns about the intentional fallacy, in very few lines here offers two pairs of alternatives. First, about the origin of Spenser’s idea for archaisms in his lexis: has his reading led him naturally that way, or is he making a deliberate artistic decision to use them? Second, if the latter, is the purpose

\textsuperscript{34} \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXYbakmwJhQ}, accessed 4 July 2019.
\textsuperscript{35} \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwWegFE3eHY}, accessed 4 July 2019.
simply to add veracity to his speakers’ vernacular, or to change the flavour of the verse itself to “more ragged and rustical”? The answer to the first question surely lies in the variation in Spenser’s diction from one work to the next around the period that *The Shepheardes Calender* was in preparation. Blank explains:

> We can be certain, at least, that Spenser was conscious of the varieties of diction that he was employing in the *Calender*: Although he occasionally used northern pronunciations for the purposes of rhyme in *The Faerie Queene* (1590/6), the presence of dialect words in works outside *The Shepheardes Calender*, including his late pastoral *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* (1595), is negligible. The concentration of northern English in the *Calender* underscores the choice that the poet made in his inaugural work.37

She later makes a suggestion as to where Spenser may have obtained inspiration, or at least validation, for his project. The Pléiade poets’ circle in the middle of the sixteenth century was advocating for expansion of literary diction through, among other avenues, the use of regional vernacular. Blank points out that Spenser had translated the work of Joachim Du Bellay, one of the key figures in La Pléiade, who championed the cause of poetic neologism and archaism, and that Spenser’s theoretical writings bore some kinship to Du Bellay’s.38 As to the second question, even if the answer were simply one of idiomatic veracity, Spenser’s archaisms would still be of interest to the present study, particularly as he also engaged in neologism. But this thesis does concern itself, *pace* scholars from text-centric schools, with poets’ intentions in their lexical choices. Spenser makes

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occasional observations on his own style, in letters and in the following lines from
the lexically more orthodox Mother Hubberds Tale:

Ile write in termes, as she the same did say,
So well as I her words remember may.
No Muses aide me needs heretoo to call;
Base is the style, and matter meane withall.39

Those comments, together with the just-mentioned variety in diction across his
body of work, show a consciousness of the centrality of his lexis to his own poetic
success, but there is little indication that Spenser was an active warrior for the
cause of literary English language reform in the wider world. As Groom puts it:

… the style of The Faerie Queene was allowed to make its way into the world
alone. Spenser adopted a defensive attitude. He had no wish to impose words on
the language, but merely claimed a freedom necessary to his special purposes.40

But perhaps Spenser, whose body of prose was relatively small, and ran mostly to
politics rather than to literary criticism, simply rested his confidence in the
longevity and significance of his work, that it might stand for itself on poetic
language without the need to, so to speak, spell it out.

The Introduction to this thesis mentioned the problem of uncertainty in
identification of neologisms, which in general is more difficult the older the text
in question. Before presenting a survey of Spenserian dialect, archaism and
neologism from his two major works, I will reiterate in a little more detail that
issue as it relates to Spenser, the problem being put in a seminal 1932 article,

40 Groom, p. 5.
‘Archaism and Innovation in Spenser’s Poetic Diction’ – just four years after the publication of the complete OED – by Bruce McElderry:

The discussion of Spenser’s archaisms and innovations first necessitates classification. What words used by Spenser would by his own contemporary readers have been considered “old” or “new”, decidedly outside the ordinary literary usage? It is obviously impossible to answer this question with anything like absolute certainty, especially since the sixteenth century was a time of great language change; but unless some reasoned approximation to an answer can be arrived at, the terms archaism and innovation can have no real significance as applied to Spenser’s diction.41

For much of the twentieth century the OED was the prime source of supporting evidence in such work. The McElderry article proposes rules of thumb, largely relying on the presence or absence of OED citations and of explanatory glosses by E. K., for determining the likelihood or otherwise that a word is a revived archaism, neologism or neither. McElderry acknowledges the uncertainty inherent in the method, which essentially only rules out the unlikely candidate words, and thus claims only to have posted “a safe maximum of Spenser’s deliberate archaism”.42 A trail of scholarship from that time to the present has ruled out a number of McElderry’s archaism candidates, such as compacture and disentrail, yet also proposed to rule in a smaller number that he ruled out, such as affray and paramour (all of these four examples cited in Gans, 1970).43 Although scholarship continues slowly to clarify first-citation issues and the previously mentioned issue of overlapping classification, Willy Maley was still able to write

41 McElderry, p. 144.
42 McElderry, p. 147.
relatively recently that “[i]t may come as a crumb of comfort to new readers
trying to get tongue and teeth round Spenser’s language sandwich to learn that
critics are as confused as they are ...”.  

With that note of caution in mind, I will proceed first to describe the forms of neologism adopted by Spenser, with examples taken from *The Shepheardes Calender* (*TSC*) and *The Faerie Queene* (*TFQ*).

The citations in the following treatment of the forms of neologism in Spenser are largely drawn from an essay by Alan Ward in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*.  

He identifies the following groups: formations from the three common classes (affixation, compound and conversion) defined in Chapter I; a handful of what he identifies as portmanteau words, though he gives only two examples and acknowledges that the classification is contestable; and a large number borrowed, usually with a little anglicization, from other languages, mostly Latinate, and most of those French. Under Ward’s headings I will discuss examples that are mainly either given by him or noted by one or more of Groom, Blank or Partridge in their books cited above. The exception to using Ward as the prime source is the case of compounds, which are more easily distinguished by the modern reader, for which the examples are mostly from my own study.

Ward draws attention to the most common Spenserian affixations, beginning with prefixes including *a*-, and variants (*accourting*), *dis*-* (dispred)*, *em-/en-/im-/in- (embrave)* and *re-* (*redisbourse*). The examples on this list, when traced to their

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45 A Ward, ‘Neologism’, in AC Hamilton (ed.), *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1992, pp. 508–509. Ward also reiterates here the point made above that “it is often difficult to know whether we are dealing with new formations or archaic survivals”.
source contexts, can be seen to fall into two classes: where the prefix is meaningful and where it is redundant. Thus in “And with sad Cypresse seemely it embrace”, 46 a new verb meaning “adorn” has been formed from the existing adjective brave in its then existing sense of “finely-dressed” or “splendid”. In contrast, if one removes the prefix ac- from “Accourting each her friend with lavish fest” 47 the meaning is unaltered. A search reveals that courting is used in similar contexts three times in TFQ. Hence, we can safely conclude that the additional syllable is present simply to preserve a properly iambic line. Ward goes on to cite suffixations -age (pupillage), -a(u)nce (joyaunce), 48 -ant (thrillant), -ful(l) (gronefull), -he(a)d (an older form of -hood – bountihed) and -ment (jolliment). The modern reader might be tempted to add to the latter list the frequently encountered -er and -est endings for comparative and superlative adjectives respectively (shamefuller, beautifullest), where the form of the root word is sufficiently complex that the modifiers more and most (which were well established at the time) would be expected in standard English in the present day. Such formations are frequently encountered in Spenser and certainly add to the archaic strangeness of the text to the modern reader; but McElderry points out that they were common in Spenser’s time.49 I will note in Chapter IV that Emily Dickinson was partial to such constructions (terribler, redoubtablest), but Jack Capps in his book on her reading finds nothing from Spenser, so that in this case Spenser appears innocent of influence on posterity. The other characteristic suffix unmentioned by Ward is -y, an addition to nouns to make new adjectives that was

47 Spenser, The Faerie Queene, II.2.16.
common at the time. Groom devotes a little time to it, and adds that “Spenser not infrequently adds the suffix -y to words which are already adjectives, as in calmy, paly, moisty”\textsuperscript{50} – a practice enthusiastically embraced by Shakespeare. Again, the metrical imperative would appear to be the sole reason, but perhaps this practice slowly died of embarrassment, as Groom goes on to note that “this type of epithet tends to drop out of later seventeenth-century verse.” In the same passage, Groom cites some other cases of variations in forms of words for the purposes of rhyme and metre, concluding that overall they are indicative “both of the fluidity of Elizabethan English and of Spenser’s individual freedoms.”\textsuperscript{51} I will mention just one of the more orthodox kind of -y suffixations here, shady, for which the OED cites Spenser under two different definitions, once as the earliest citation for that definition, the other ten years later within a year of the earliest, so there is every likelihood he created the two independently. In TSC we see “You naked trees, whose shady leaves are lost”,\textsuperscript{52} for which the OED defines shady as “affording shade”. Then in TFQ is “Her angels face / ... made a sunshine in the shadie place”,\textsuperscript{53} making the clearly different meaning of “shaded, protected by shade” (OED). There is no telling whether Spenser was unconscious of having coined a pair of homonyms\textsuperscript{54} a decade apart, or whether he knew but did not care. Either way, this example is instructive in demonstrating how even the most elementary coinage may fail to carry a clear meaning without its context to assist the reader.

\textsuperscript{50} Groom, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{51} Groom, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{52} Spenser, ‘January’, The Shepheardes Calender, in Shorter Poems, line 31.
\textsuperscript{53} Spenser, The Faerie Queene, I.3.4. It is noteworthy that Spenser here uses sunshine as a count noun in the sense of “a burst or spell of sunshine”, a usage that antedates the OED’s earliest for this rarity, 1611: W. Mure, “Lyk to a fair sunschyne befoir a schoure”. In Chapter VII we see that Emily Dickinson occasionally used the same construction (“a hay”, “a plush”).
\textsuperscript{54} Disregarding the variant spellings.
Ward also lists under the heading of affixations examples of what might be called “de-prefixation” and “de-suffixation”: the elision of a syllable from the beginning or end of a word, as in bove (for above) and daint (for dainty). These appear to be almost always cases of the technical imperatives of prosody. Here is the stanza of *TFQ* in which daint is apparently coined:

> By that, which lately hapned, Una saw,
> That this her knight was feeble, and too faint;
> And all his sinews woxen weake and raw,
> Through long enprisonment, and hard constraint,
> Which he endured in his late restraint,
> That yet he was unfit for bloudie fight:
> Therefore to cherish him with diets daint,
> She cast to bring him, where he chearen might,
> Till he recovered had his late decayed plight.55

Of the other strange-looking words, most are simply alternative spellings of the words that come to mind when they are read, bearing in mind that orthography at the time was far from the relatively fixed standard of today. *Enprisonment* is more than a spelling variant, but an *OED* search reveals that *im-*, *in-*, *em-*, and *en-* were all current alternative prefixes for the root *prison* at the time. However, even discounting these, we can still find two almost certain neologisms in these nine lines. I can find no match for chearen in any reference source, and there seems little doubt that it is another case, this time in a suffix, of preservation of metre. Similarly, there is no prior known record of daint, and a reading of the above lines would suggest that, rather than its having been retrieved from some obscure

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source, the twin tyrannies of scansion and rhyme have combined to shape this
new word in Spenser’s mind. This kind of elision of a syllable, most commonly
the final one, was even common in his proper names where metre required it:
among others, Spenser changed Clarabella to Clarabell, Diana to Diane and
Archimago to Archimage in this way in TFQ. Elisions for the sake of metre or
rhyme such as these were common to many poets at the time, though far from
universally approved, and indeed even disapproved and approved by the same
man in different cases. George Puttenham’s influential The Arte of English
Poesie, for example, seems to find the practice unacceptable “unlesse usualle
speech and custome allow it”; thus accepting morne for morning and bet for
better, 56 but elsewhere lambasting the practice as exemplified by John Gower’s
back-formation of roy as a noun formed by de-suffixation of royal:

... by all likelyhood, having no word at hand to rime to this word joy he made his
other verse ende in Roy saying very impudently thus,

O mightie Lord of love, dame Venus onely joy
Who art the highest God of any heavenly Roy.

Which word was never yet received in our language for an English word. Such
extreme licentiousnesse is utterly to be banished from our schoole ... 57

In the case of that deathless couplet we might agree with Puttenham’s irritation,
without necessarily subscribing to his overall condemnation. Certainly, many of
his contemporaries continued to support the practice, as Robert Nares observes,

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London, 1869, digitized by Google Books, 2008,
quoting Puttenham and adding his own (in a spectacularly titled tract as footnoted below):

This kind of license, and more particularly that of changing the final syllables for the sake of a rhyme, was not given up for some time. Spenser frequently took such liberties.58

That both *The Shepheardes Calender* and *The Faerie Queene* are rich in compounds is the inevitable result of the nature of Spenser’s deliberate choice of archaic flavour in his poetic language. A property of Old English, owing to its Germanic character, was that compounds were a standard method of word-formation, unlike the case with Romance languages. Further, as Sylvia Adamson points out,59 compounds are formed similarly in Greek, of which Spenser was a scholar. Thus Spenser’s tilting of his lexis to favour Old English over Latinate forms, his classical background and his striving for an antique diction were bound to entail a significant number of compound formations, in which Ward notes that he tended to favour use of the hyphen, citing *forckhead* (*TFQ*) as an exception.

Most combinations take forms that have been more or less common through to the present day, particularly noun-adjective (*sun-bright*, which appears in both *TSC* and *TFQ*, *love-lavish* – *TFQ*), adjective-participle (*double-eyed*, *fiery-footed* – both *TSC*), and the double adjective (*filthy-feculent* – *TFQ*). The alliteration notable in three of the above five, a tendency that will be encountered again in Chapter V on Gerard Manley Hopkins, is frequently present. One form that seems


especially Spenserian, even though others before and after him employed it, is the compound used for a proper name, as in _Praise-desire_, a woman desperate for the approval of others, and _Kirkrapine_, a robber of churches (both _TFQ_). For portmanteau words, Ward cites from _TFQ scruzed_ (“squeezed” + “screwed”, which seems probable and a 400-year anticipation of Lewis Carroll) and _treachetour_ (Ward allocates an element of “tregetour”, or juggler, which appears to complicate unnecessarily what arguably is simply a mock-archaic form of “traitor”). There are other candidates for this category, such as one quoted by Blank,\(^60\) _wrizzled_ (in 1596 text, _wrizled_; “wrinkled” + “frizzled”, or perhaps “grizzled”).

Of conversions Ward gives two examples: _equipaged_ (_TFQ_), which in its context appears likely to be another case of replacing “equipped” in pragmatic fulfilment of a metrical requirement, and _throb_ (_TFQ_) as a noun. Spenser was less prolific in this practice than some of his successors; Groom mentions in this respect Shakespeare and Giles Fletcher,\(^61\) “a true disciple of his master”, giving examples from the latter in the verbs _sads_ (“As when a vapour ... / ... sads the smiling orient of the springing day”,\(^62\) _lanke, bowre, jolly_ (which has survived to the present) and _hermit._

_Throb_ appears in the _OED_ with an earlier date as a noun, but with a different meaning from Spenser’s, which suggests it belongs more properly in Ward’s next group, that of existing words (either in contemporary use or archaisms) where the

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\(^{61}\) Groom, p. 20.

sense rather than the usage class is changed. In Chapter VI, in the context of
nonsense poetry, I give the term “radical semantic conversion” to Edward Lear’s
slightly more extreme version of this practice, where the meaning changes to
something entirely removed from the original. Spenser’s shifts may be less
radical, but neither are they mere shades of difference: Ward cites contemporary
words *revoke (TFQ)* as “restrain”\(^{63}\) and *insolence* as “exultation”; and archaisms
*chevisaunce (TFQ)*, which previously had mercantile meanings associated with
fulfilment of a contract, as “high chivalric enterprise or achievement” and *dearnly
(TFQ)*, previously “secretly”, as “dismally, mournfully”. Critical opinions vary,
often case by case, on whether such Spensarian usages (especially in the case of
archaisms) are simple solecisms or conscious poetic acts, with the weight of
opinion favouring the latter. For the last two words cited above Ward persuasively
argues deliberate etymological and aural associations with “chivalry” and
“yearn”. Such links are very similar to those in play when one glosses some of the
words in ‘Jabberwocky’, and indeed *chevisaunce* and *dearnly* would not have
been out of place in that poem.

Ward’s final category is loan-words from Romance languages, which were
identified in the Introduction as generally not for consideration as neologisms in
this context, and so I restrict myself here to a handful of examples, noting how
Spenser usually anglicized them in line with already existing conventions. Hence
*disloigned (TFQ)*, “removed to a distance” is formed from the French word with
the same meaning, *desloigné*. The Latin *crumena* (“purse”) is changed to an
English-looking *crumenall (TSC)*, and the Italian phrase *bel guardo* (“loving

\(^{63}\) This example appears to have been antedated in the *OED.*
look”) is anglicized to belgard[s] (*TFQ*). An exception to this rule is canto, used by Spenser to denote a chapter in *The Faerie Queene*, although Ward points out that other poets were using the word in a similar way. Indignant has similarly been attributed to Spenser but is also contemporaneously recorded for others. A more artificed borrowing from French, a genuine neologism quoted by Blank as an “invented archaism” denoting a “fair maid”, is *bellibone* (*TSC*), which might also be classifiable as a compound or a portmanteau, appearing to be an anglicization of “belle et bonne”.

I close this section by listing four examples of particular interest that are almost certainly original with Spenser. While a few of Spenser’s creations were picked up by his contemporaries or immediate successors before dying away, each of these words has enjoyed a substantial afterlife in print for centuries, the most famous being the one used in relation to the monster that represents calumny, the Blatant Beast (*TFQ*). The function of the adjective *Blatant* (in text sometimes *Blattant*) is more nominal than descriptive, as the monster is otherwise nameless, and the word carried little or no etymological or aural marking, as if plucked out of the air purely for its alliteration and perhaps onomatopoeic allusion to a trumpeting cry. The *OED* reports suggestions that it may have been intended to carry echoes of Scots *blaitand* (bleating) or Latin *blatire*, to babble, but unless used ironically these seem at odds with the fearsome nature of the beast itself. The word has flourished, and its senses have shifted somewhat over the centuries from “bellowing or noisy” to “glaring or egregious”. Also well known is *derring-do* (*TFQ*), a delightful and unorthodox compound of some sonic charm that

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previously existed but only as a verb phrase ("daring to do"), which the *OED* theorizes has come into *TFQ* text as a noun through Spenser’s misunderstanding of its antecedent context. I prefer to think of it as a combined compound-conversion. Then there is *under-songs*, in this couplet from *TSC*:

And Willie is not greatly overgone,  
So weren his under-songs well addrest.\(^6^5\)

The modern reader might stop first at *overgone*, which was in fact current in Spenser’s time, with several meanings including apparently, in this case, “surpassed”. Spenser’s coinage of *under-songs*, musical accompaniments or harmony lines, is not only nicely juxtaposed with *overgone* but also a creation of such charm (and utility) that it has survived in both poetry and prose to the present day, as the *OED* records and the Ngram website confirms.

Lastly, following the pattern of examples given earlier of body parts with descriptors (*double-eyed*, *fiery-footed*) comes the stanza-opening line from *TFQ*, “Now when the *rosy-fingred* Morning faire,“\(^6^6\) starting the English career of a common Greek epithet that (most frequently for “dawn”) gave way to unstoppable cliché in English poetry. The *OED* records two or three examples of “rosy-fingered Dawn”, doubtless selected from many more, from each of the next four centuries and by poets of some repute. Bernard Groom, in commenting on Spenser’s word formations and spelling variations, observed: “Something of his commanding influence on poetic style is also indicated by the instances in which

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\(^{6^5}\) Spenser, ‘August’, *The Shepheardes Calender*, in *Shorter Poems*, line 128.  
\(^{6^6}\) Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.2.7. Sylvia Adamson notes that this famous epithet is a direct translation from a Greek original: Adamson, p. 581.
his example was followed.”67 It may be a quirky measure of just how sustained was Spenser’s effect on poetic language that seemingly only in the twentieth century did “rosy-fingered dawn” finally become untouchable in serious verse.

3. Shakespeare: household words and others

There is general critical consensus that, in agreement with J. B. Lethbridge, “we can say with some assurance that Shakespeare read Spenser carefully and remembered what he read”.68 Edmund Spenser published The Shepheardes Calender in his mid-twenties, in 1579, around ten years before William Shakespeare began his career as a dramatist at a similar age. No further work appeared from Spenser for ten years, during which it is likely he was composing the early books of The Faerie Queene. When Books I–III were published in 1590, Shakespeare was already working on his earliest plays, and by the time the remainder of TFQ appeared in 1596, he had completed around one third of his prodigious body of work. While at least one critic of Lethbridge argues that Shakespeare may well have influenced Spenser too, citing “thirteen plays, not counting the lost Love’s Labour’s Won, and two narrative poems certainly or likely written and performed before 1596, which could well have influenced Spenser when writing Books 4–6 of The Faerie Queene, first published in 1596”,69 there seems to be little critical appetite for exploration of that direction of influence, and this thesis will assume the more commonly studied one, of the older man upon the younger.

67 Groom, p. 10.
The first task of this section is to assess the current state of play in the ever-changing game of “how many words did Shakespeare really invent?” No purpose will be served by offering a count, or even an estimate more exact than “probably a few hundred excluding compounds, which are a few hundred more depending on how you count them”; and not all of those are “poetic” in any case, because they appear in prose dialogue. History suggests that to attempt more precision is an easy way of embarrassing oneself. Estimates of 9450 in 1906,\(^{70}\) 1500 in 1998\(^ {71}\) and “nearly six thousand” as late as 2007\(^ {72}\) are now generally recognized to be greatly overstated, for a variety of reasons arising out of methodologies both in the original composition of the *OED* and in calculations arising out of its citations. Over recent years suspicions about possible antedating of putative Shakespearean coinages have been validated by scholars exploiting a recent upsurge in digitized Early Modern texts. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into further detail; Giles Goodland provides an excellent specialist summary of the recent situation.\(^ {73}\) It is significant that, as calculated by Bryan Garner, the period of twenty-four years covering Shakespeare’s writing career accounts for around thirty per cent of all neologisms appearing in the 160 years of the Renaissance as dated from 1500 to 1659;\(^ {74}\) that is, the fertility of Shakespeare’s span was around double that of the period as a whole, and that calculation remains essentially true even if his own words are taken out. There are many words still in


a kind of “not proven” category that for the present purposes will be regarded as Shakespearean, but when posterity inevitably invalidates some of them, I do not expect the number will be so great as to overturn any conclusions of this thesis.

As with the previous section, most examples discussed here have been cited previously by others; I am particularly indebted to Vivian Salmon,75 Bryan Garner76 and (especially for a list of conversions) David Crystal.77

Shakespeare stands out among the authors examined in this thesis in that his profusion of neologism extends across all the three major classifications, affixation, compounding and conversion, and in a variety of ways within those. I will first look briefly at each of these forms with some examples of special interest. Affixation in Early Modern language development is the most common, and in some ways the least interesting form. Whereas by the nineteenth century the standard, “correct” forms had been decided and codified for all of the functions such as negation and reflexivity that are fulfilled by affixes, in the Renaissance they were in many cases being invented on the run. Thus Shakespeare, seeking on two different occasions a word meaning “unable to be made out or recognized”, might have been indifferent, as would his audience, to whether he wrote *indistinguishable* (*Troilus and Cressida*) or *undistinguishable* (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), for both of which he has the first citation in the *OED*, and each of which he may well have constructed himself, even if not for the first time. In contrast, when Emily Dickinson wrote *unpuzzled* she did it with a

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76 Garner, pp. 149–170.
poetic purpose and fully conscious that she was transgressing an established lexical code that scarcely existed in Shakespeare’s era. The most interesting of Shakespeare’s affixations are those, a minority, for which a poetic intent akin to Dickinson’s is distinguishable, and which in many cases are nonce-words that have not survived in English, nor probably were intended to.\textsuperscript{78} An illustration of just how dense Shakespearean drama can be with coined affixations is found early in \textit{Hamlet}. In the space of thirty lines,\textsuperscript{79} Horatio, a character whose manner of speech is noble but hardly overblown, utters the words \textit{unimproved, palmy, tenantless} and \textit{climature}, all of them probable Shakespearean neologisms.

Turning to conversions, in the same passage we also see \textit{shark’d}, which is new in the transitive sense used there. Shakespeare’s free use of conversions tends strongly towards those forming a verb, most commonly from a noun, as will be seen in further examples below. Modern readers, familiar with the large number of his coined words and figures of speech that have gone into the language, might be more surprised by two present-day idioms that may well have arisen out of Shakespeare’s creative use of the conversion form. In Richard II we find “Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle”, and in Romeo and Juliet “Thank me no thanks, nor proud me no prouds”. I have been able to find no earlier use of this

\textsuperscript{78} One entertaining category of these is that of malapropisms, where the purpose is comic rather than poetic, but unfortunately nearly all of them are disqualified here on technical grounds, in that they appear in prose rather than verse dialogue of characters such as Sir Toby Belch in \textit{Twelfth Night} (“they are scoundrels and subtractors”) or Dogberry in \textit{As You Like It} (“Is our whole dissembly appeared?”) There are marginal cases of malapropism appearing in verse in several plays where characters attempt a grandiloquent register in speech, creating words such as (in the case of Hector in \textit{Troilus and Cressida} \textit{multipotent} and \textit{impressure} that, if not quite malapropism, are at least incongruous substitutes for more familiar words.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Hamlet}, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 94–106.18. As noted in ‘Notes on texts’, p. vi of this thesis, this and all subsequent Shakespeare citations are from S Greenblatt et al (eds.), \textit{The Norton Shakespeare}, 2nd edn, WW Norton, New York, NY, 2008. The closing line number, 106.18, in the present citation is formatted thus in the Norton edition because part of the passage is omitted in the Folio version.
form in English than Shakespeare’s in 1595, the likely year of authorship of both
of these plays. And residents of the Australian state of Victoria under Premier Jeff
Kennett who became familiar with the verb “to Jeff”, used in the passive voice, as
in “small primary schools have been Jeffed”,\(^80\) may be unaware of this coinage
for which it is worth quoting the couplet:

\[
\text{BIANCA. That, being mad herself, she’s madly mated.}
\]

\[
\text{GREMIO. I warrant him, Petruchio is Kated.}^{81}
\]

Likewise Rosalind, “She Phebes me” in \textit{As You Like It}, and Hamlet (albeit in
prose) “it out-herods Herod”. More broadly, the conversion or affixation of
proper names to form words of other usage classes has been an occasional sub-
class of poetic neologism over time: in this thesis see, for example, Emily
Dickinson’s \textit{New Englandly} (Chapter IV) and Francis Thompson’s \textit{Judasry}
(Chapter VII).

As to compounds, a counterpoint to the above use of proper name as verb is the
use of compound epithets as names, in a manner echoing that of Spenser noted in
the previous section. This practice was well established by Shakespeare’s time,
but his use of it was particularly evocative in names such as Sir Andrew
\textit{Aguecheek (Twelfth Night)} and Doll \textit{Tearsheet (Henry IV Part 2)}. Of compounds
in general, Vivian Salmon writes:

\[
\ldots \text{for Shakespeare, much of the virtue of the compound epithet lay in its}
\]
\[
\text{conciseness or its metrical value; the occurrence of the “simultaneity of}
\]

\(^80\) The Premier in question notoriously closed, privatized or merged many supposedly uneconomic
public facilities, especially small schools.

\(^81\) \textit{The Taming of the Shrew}, 3.3.116.
apprehension” for which the juxtaposition of two elements in a compound has been praised, is comparatively rare.82

The “simultaneity of apprehension” referred to is a notion akin to that of conceptual blending as laid out in Chapter I: that the richness of the compound for the reader is partially dependent on its breadth, a kind of “difference” between two simultaneously received impressions. Salmon’s observation is that most of Shakespeare’s compounds are valuable for their contribution to prosody, and the effects of “conciseness” and “metrical value” she mentions have been previously noted in the Introduction, under the labels “ellipsis” and “scansion” respectively, as two of the poetic effects or functions of neologism. While those two effects are well served by Shakespeare’s compounds, they can also be achieved by other neologistic forms; and conversely, compounds are important in the rest of the effects nominated in the Introduction. In fact, owing to the sheer number of his coinages, Shakespeare is notable among poets treated in this thesis for the presence of neologisms producing every one of those functions, as will now be demonstrated across a range of neologism types, with the nine effects highlighted by boldface type.

Defamiliarization, as pointed out in Chapter I, is present to some extent in every neologism. The Renaissance, though, is something of a special case, in that new words were appearing so regularly that readers and audiences may well have become inured to at least those, such as transparent affixations of un- or -less, that followed a familiar model. But Shakespeare’s more ambitious creations must surely have caused a mental double-take for (say) the audiences for King Lear

82 Salmon, p. 21.
encountering the compound to-and-fro-conflicting and the twin conversions in “Dowered with our curse and strangered with our oath”. Ellipsis, as pointed out in the Salmon quotation above, is a common function of compounds, many of them packing a meaning otherwise requiring a phrase for its expression. Salmon cites a number of them and reconstructs their full form, including fen-sucked fogs (“the fogs are sucked from the fens”, King Lear) and star-crossed lovers (“the lovers are crossed by the stars”, Romeo and Juliet). There are countless compound modifiers of similar noun-participle form, including dog-hearted daughters (Lear’s daughters’ hearts are as pitiless as those of dogs, King Lear) and air-drawn dagger (referring back to Macbeth’s imagining of a dagger before him, Macbeth). These last four collectively illustrate that elliptical compounds identical in their syntactic form can be expanded in very different ways, requiring the reader or audience to make their own meaning from the context. Ellipsis is also achieved using both conversions and affixations. This remarkable lament from Mark Antony contains three elliptical conversions in the space of four lines:

All come to this? The hearts
That spaniel’d me at heels, to whom I gave
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets
On blossoming Caesar; and this pine is barked
That overtopped them all.

Spaniel’d here is a marvellously scornful conversion of a simile, “followed with dog-like loyalty”; discandy is a combined affixation/conversion, a striking metaphorical image suggesting a dissolving of affection; and bark’d conveys a

83 Salmon, p. 21.
84 Antony and Cleopatra, 4.13.20–24.
stripping of authority and dignity, possibly with a **pun** on a sense of the word as “embarked” that was then current. From the same play comes the elliptical affixation *o’erpicturing*, already analysed in the Introduction, where its **ambiguity** – possibly unintentional – was noted.

Forms of **negation** are many: Garner records over one hundred negative coinages in Latinate forms, including over eighty prefixations in the *un-* form from *unaccommodated* (*King Lear*) to *unwedgable* (*Measure for Measure*).\(^85\) One -less suffixation is conspicuous for its centrality to Gloucester’s passionate, suicidal address to the gods in *King Lear*:

> O you mighty gods!
> This world I do renounce, and, in your sights,
> Shake patiently my great affliction off:
> If I could bear it longer, and not fall
> To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
> My snuff and loathed part of nature should
> Burn itself out.\(^{86}\)

**Opposeless** carries the sense that opposition is either impossible or futile, and its middle syllable houses the longest vowel in the line to maximize its poetic and performative impact. Nor did there exist a more prosaic alternative: *unopposable* is not recorded until 1667. Shakespeare similarly coins “**confineless harms**” (*Macbeth*), which also carries some **ambiguity**: in the context of Malcolm’s “when they [my vices] shall be opened” it may convey either or both of

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\(^85\) Garner, pp. 158–166 *passim*.

\(^86\) *King Lear*, 4.6.34–40 (Conflated Text). Historical textual issues resulted in three versions of the play being included in the Norton Shakespeare cited here. The third, titled “Conflated Text”, is the nearest to most widespread editions.
“unlimited” and “released”. Further examples are sumless (Henry V) and exceptless (Timon of Athens); this efficient elliptical form, the addition of the -less suffix to a verb rather than to a noun as is standard, was noted in Chapter I as being used many times by Shakespeare devotee Emily Dickinson, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV. Another instance of ellipsis is found in King Lear, “He childed as I fathered”, in which Edgar combines the neologistic childed with a radically different meaning for fathered, condensing into five words his association of Lear’s elder children turning against him with Gloucester’s rejection of Edgar.

Shakespeare often uses neologisms to achieve antithetic effects. Among other examples, Salmon87 quotes daughter-beamed in punning opposition to sun-beamed (Love’s Labour’s Lost), and unpacks the negation in a line from Troilus and Cressida, “Speaking in deeds, and deedless in his tongue”88 thus: “‘words’ are opposed to ‘deeds’ while ‘positive’ (speaking) is opposed to ‘negative’ (deedless).” This is conceptual symmetry, as it were; Salmon might have also pointed out the lexical symmetry of the line, with the opposed deeds and deedless juxtaposed and the line bracketed by the metonymic pair speaking and tongue.

Onomatopoeia is relatively infrequent among the coinages. Many words that fit the description and look as if they might be coinages (pash, swash, twangle) turn out upon investigation to be in contemporary usage. Two examples that appear to be created are clangor (Henry VI, Part 3), a word that also appears in the compound trumpet-clangor in Henry IV, Part 2 and has thrived from then to now;

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87 Salmon, p. 19.
88 Troilus and Cressida, 4.6.101.
and *potch* (*Coriolanus*), meaning something like an unexpected physical attack (possibly from German *putsch*).

Examples of coinages that patently exist only to achieve *scansion* are legion, and several have already been quoted. Two more are *enactures* (*Hamlet*), in a line, “Their own enactures with themselves destroy”, where “acts” or “actions” would serve equally well except for being one or two syllables short; and *enguard* (*King Lear*), similarly providing an extra beat to “guard”.

The two remaining poetic effects are the most difficult: one because examples of it are hard to find, the other because its definition, as mentioned in the Introduction, is itself elusive. **Indeterminacy** in poetry is often sought-after, but in Shakespearean drama it is rarely so. After Cordelia’s rejection by her father in *King Lear*, the King of France champions her in a short speech flooded with words of her family’s rejection (poor, forsaken, despised, cast away, neglect, augmented by the negative coinages *dowerless* and, in the sense used here, *unprized*), and concludes “Thou losest here, a better where to find.”

Although on a simple level France may be referring to his kingdom where she shall be Queen – as opposed to the present one in which she is unwelcome, marked by the here/where lexical juxtaposition – the coined noun carries a sense of the unknown and ill-defined future. In Sonnet 55, the mysterious phrase “*all-oblivious enmity*” is initially ambiguous through two alternative senses, in that it may denote opposing forces that are oblivious to the lives (and that word “live” echoes throughout the poem, including in “oblivious”) that they destroy, but also those

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89 *King Lear*, 1.1.238–249 (Conflated Text).
90 The Norton edition does not hyphenate *all-oblivious*, but most texts do.
forces wreaking oblivion upon the world. The result, for this reader at least, is an indeterminate, deliberately vague sense of doom.

Last, to the always difficult case of **catachresis**. Vivian Salmon at the end of her previously cited article refers to “numerous instances where nouns function as verbs in highly individual ways, which often defy the ingenuity of editors to explicate”, which appears to fit the brief. Salmon cites, as did Elzbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska as quoted in the Introduction, “elf all my hair in knots” (*King Lear*),\(^91\) which I read as something like “tie in a fey, random and playful way”. Cleopatra’s “*boy* my greatness”, discussed in Chapter I, also fits this category, as does the verb form *Kated* quoted above. I would also propose the conversion *lethargied* in the following passage where Lear questions his own sanity, finishing with:

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Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied—Ha! Waking? ’Tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?\(^92\)
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Lear’s language, as it often does, reflects his state of mind, in this case with the use of an unorthodox word so startling that it seems to catch his own attention for a moment, and he reacts by lapsing into monosyllabic simplicity as if to avoid a further linguistic solecism.

As with other authors studied in this thesis, the frequency of Shakespeare’s neologizing varied across time and according to the nature of his work. The sonnets offered an opportunity for reading in their entirety and researching for

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\(^{91}\) Salmon, p. 26. Also quoted by Salmon is *flap-dragoned* (*The Winter’s Tale*), but that is from a prose speech.\(^{92}\) *King Lear*, 1.4.203–205 (Conflated Text).
myself their likely neologisms, by enumerating (i) hyphenated compounds on an assessment of whether they are creative or just an orthodox syntactic variation (which entails a problem of subjectivity that I have discussed elsewhere); (ii) Latinate affixations, relying on Garner’s list of them;93 (iii) other affixations, closed compounds, conversions, and other constructions that appear to me unorthodox by twentieth-century standards and checking their OED citations. This last process may produce a few false positives, but I expect that they would be roughly counterbalanced by the occasional word coined by the poet that has passed into modern usage and was therefore missed by me. This exercise produced twenty-five affixations, eighteen compounds and four conversions, a total of 47 neologisms, or around one every 46 lines. It is difficult to measure this against the frequency of poetic neologism in the plays, for the reasons set out early in this section, but a very approximate calculation suggests, perhaps surprisingly, that they are roughly comparable. As to frequency over time and genre of the plays, an analysis of Garner’s list shows significantly more of that type of neologism in the latter half of Shakespeare’s career (about half of the plays were written before 1600), and one might reasonably extrapolate that imbalance to neologisms as a whole. Three reasons suggest themselves: that the linguistic zeitgeist was becoming more liberal in its acceptance of neologism; that the poet himself gained the courage to be more experimental as he matured, a proposition that is reflected in the complexion of his later work; and that by their nature the tragedies, which were mostly written in the second half of his career, lend themselves particularly to the practice. In fact, if one classifies Troilus and

Cressida as a tragedy, of the nine plays with more than twenty Latinate neologisms in Garner’s list, six were tragedies written in the 1600s.

One of those, King Lear, has been a rich source of examples here, unsurprisingly for a play where words, and the ways of saying them, continually affect the action and partially define the characters. Cordelia refuses to use honeyed words to her father and loses her share of the kingdom; Lear’s variations in register through the play mirror the changes in his condition; Kent and Edgar assume others’ voices for self-preservation through disguise. The coinages in the play are shared among many characters, but perhaps the most remarkable are those of Lear at the height of his passions, and it is fitting to close this section with a passage where Shakespeare deploys them to dynamic effect:

Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks.
You sulph’rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head. And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ th’ world.
Crack nature’s molds, all germens spill at once
That makes ingrateful man.94

There are only (only!) four genuine neologisms in this passage, and three of those are compounds, yet its language is so striking to the modern reader that it seems full of originality. A first response is to guess that hurricanoes might be a highly

94 King Lear, 3.2.1–9 (Conflated Text).
effective coinage to fulfil the metrical needs of the second line, but it was in fact, having been imported recently from Spanish, still a common alternative at the time to *hurricanes*. Arguably the better word was lost to posterity. Similarly, though they look strange to us today, *vaunt-couriers* (advance troops) and *ingrateful* were in use. On the other hand, *germens* (spelled variously in different texts) appears to be Shakespeare’s invention, either inspired by Latin or a de-suffixation from “germination”, and seemingly signifying seeds, sources of life, spilling to their destruction. But look at the three successive violent participial compounds, *thought-executing*, *oak-cleaving* and *all-shaking*, how in their density of meaning they build the power of Lear’s kinship – for that is what he feels in that moment – with the storm. The voice that roars those words is his thunder, their jagged intensity his lightning.
CHAPTER III: MILTON

… to raise
Quite out their Native Language, and instead
To sow a jangling noise of words unknown:

Paradise Lost

1. The late Renaissance and Milton’s predecessors

The state of development of English in the first half of the seventeenth century is aptly described by Thomas Elyot’s Elizabethan new word *maturity*. Elyot described it in these terms, already quoted in Chapter II: “the actis of man / that whan they be done with suche moderation / that nothing in the doinge may be sene superfluous or indigent / we may saye / that they be maturely done.”¹ That description is apt, for the turbulent winds of vocabulary change through the Elizabethan period, peaking around the turn of the century, and the gales of disputation that arose, had rather abated by the time of Milton’s early work. The inkhorn controversy was effectively settled in that there was general agreement that neologizing was neither a good thing nor a bad thing in itself, but only in how and why it was done. The challenge of English to the Latin and French lobbies in the scientific academy was effectively won, and so the continuing English-language needs of the scientific revolution required a steady stream of new words. In the field of literature, the popular success of Spenser and Shakespeare, and

¹ Barber, p. 55.
especially of the First and Second Folios in 1623 and 1632, consolidated the acceptance by the reading public of lexical innovation. Archaism in the style of Spenser, though, had declined in popularity as a vehicle for high poetic style. Adamson notes that in that respect Milton’s aspirations to a grand style replete with Latinisms did not cause him to disdain the archaic, and so he provided an example to his contemporaries and successors that the two could work together; though only rarely, unlike (for example) Robert Herrick, did he combine them in a single word:

Despite the prestige of *The Faerie Queene* and the dominance of Spenserian styles in England’s *Helicon*, the collection which celebrated the state of English poetry in 1600, by that date the archaisers were generally on the retreat in the battle for the grand style, though … Spenser’s influence and a significant segment of his archaic vocabulary had passed on to Milton, who combined it with the latinity it had originally opposed.²

Critics continued to debate poetic neologism, but less fervently than before, and in more nuanced tones, focusing on the merits of its deployment in particular works rather than arguing in principle for or against the practice. R. F. Jones detects a changing poetic mood among those adding to the vocabulary:

The Elizabethans borrowed from necessity, vanity or sheer exuberance. One senses a different spirit, something akin to the metaphysical, a seeking for the strange and out of the way, perhaps a striving for certain imaginative or sound effects, in the borrowing of men like Burton, Donne, Taylor and Browne.³

² Adamson, p. 579.
³ Jones, p. 272n.
The “seeking” and “striving” in the early seventeenth century described by Jones anticipate the poetic purposes of neologizing poets of future centuries, to be studied in succeeding chapters. But Milton’s unusually long flourishing period of more than four decades meant that by his later years the poetic fashion was beginning to move on again towards the Augustan era, an evolution reflected in the style of his late work, as will be discussed in section 3.

The four writers listed by Jones engaged particularly in the use of loan-words, and more in their prose than in poetry, but there are other notable neologizing contemporaries of Milton. None of them, though, was as prolific with poetic coinages as he, nor were they especially inventive. George Herbert’s poetry, notably experimental in visual and other unorthodox line arrangements, was less so, even plain, in its lexis, although Herbert did leave us with *abusiveness* and the occasional striking hyphenated compound such as *cross-bias* (‘Affliction’), *clay-hearts* (‘Misery’) and *sigh-blown* (‘The Collar’). There is a notable pair in ‘Prayer (I)’: “Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear, / The six-days world transposing in an hour”. Herbert’s purpose in the sonnet is clearly to inundate the reader with its rapid stream of epithets for prayer, so that he cannot afford to spend many words making explicit a Biblical allusion; the ellipsis in the compounds, which encode stories that are immediately recognizable to his audience, aids him in that brevity, as it does Gerard Manley Hopkins in his similar religious purpose two hundred years later in ‘The Candle Indoors’ (see Chapter V).

Of Milton’s contemporaries, perhaps the most interesting, though still not prolific, neologizer is Herrick, Milton’s opposite in so many ways. Whereas Milton only
occasionally broke poetry’s “fourth wall” by anticipating the putatively postmodern practice of commenting in verse on his own work, Herrick continually did so, beginning his collection, *Hesperides*, with an unusually long and detailed overture, ‘The Argument of His Book’, that catalogues what was to come. “I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds and bowers ...” begins a list that is in a different league from Milton’s announcement of his grand purpose in *Paradise Lost*, to “justify the ways of God to men”. Herrick’s prologue contains the slightly enigmatic “I sing of times trans-shifting”, presenting the reader with the first of many hybrid (Latinate/Anglo-Saxon) coinages. It is not clear whether Herrick intends it to signify “a-changing”, a more conventionally poetic alternative that would have fitted the metre and given Bob Dylan scholars another morsel, or if he is simply indicating that the settings of the poems were not restricted to the present day. But *trans-shifting* may or may not be the first neologism in the book, according as how editors have treated a certain hyphen. The following couplet appears several lines earlier:

I write of youth, of love, and have access
By these to sing of cleanly wantonness;⁴

In editions with contemporary spelling, the second line ends with the hyphenated *cleanly-wantonnesse*, a compound seeming to give a subtle unity to the idea that Herrick has in mind that goes missing with the regrettable loss of the hyphen. The reader is invited to compare it with Milton’s complementary notion of the prelapsarian “Love *unlibidinous*”. Perhaps both poets felt the need to neologize here in implicit recognition that their respective readerships might find the

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concepts disconcerting; in any case, it is characteristic, as we shall see in section 3, that of the two it was Herrick who celebrated both halves of his compound, and Milton who needed to invoke negation.

Herrick employed a wide variety of rhyme-schemes and lineation, and even had one try at visual poetry in the crucifix-shaped ‘This Cross-Tree Here’, but he could hardly be said to be a stylistic innovator. Though he wrote many religious poems, and clearly took that side of his work seriously,\(^5\) Herrick’s concerns are generally far more secular and less weighty than Milton’s, and the simpler, more Anglo-Saxon lexis exhibited in his short lyrics provides a backdrop against which his occasional choice of a startlingly strange or repurposed word, even when it is not a neologism, has extra defamiliarizing impact. Sometimes it is Latinate, recruited from a specialist context into poetic service, as *liquefaction* in ‘Upon Julia’s Clothes’:

> Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
> Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
> The liquefaction of her clothes.\(^6\)

Every word except one in that first three lines is Anglo-Saxon and of one or two syllables, giving the (al)chemist’s polysyllabic term a star quality to do justice to that of the poem’s subject. In the second and concluding triplet Herrick repeats the trick, this time borrowing *vibration*, a recent coinage from natural philosophy, to interrupt lines of simple monosyllables:

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Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free;
O how that glittering taketh me!?

Less successful, perhaps, is the borrowing from natural history of a word meaning “to bud or sprout again” (OED) in ‘His Age’:

But vanish’d man,
Like to a lily lost, ne’er can,
Ne’er can repululate, or bring
His days to see a second spring.8

Just to complete a sampler of Herrick’s borrowings from the sciences, from anatomy Herrick takes a term to describe his experience of poetic inspiration: “... when the spirit fills / The fantastic pannicles / Full of fire”.9 No doubt there is something of the show-off in this kind of technique, perhaps of a piece with Herrick’s lyrics that parade multiple female subjects for whose existence there is little evidence; but then showing off, even if only for a poet’s own satisfaction, is something that we see a lot of in these pages.

Herrick’s neologisms are not frequent by the standards of most of the poets who appear in this thesis. Groom writes:

Like his master Jonson, he is a collector rather than a maker of words, and in word-formation he does not venture much beyond hybrid [that is, Latinate/Anglo-Saxon] compounds (in fashion at the time) like intertalk,

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circumbind, circumwalk, circumflankt, circumspangle, circumcrost.\textsuperscript{10}

(In the terminology adopted in this thesis those “compound” words are affixations.) Groom rather underestates the originality of some of Herrick’s coinages. Certainly, as evidenced by the above list, there is a surprisingly consistent affection for the prefix \textit{circum-}, which appears also in the non-hybrid combinations \textit{circumvolve/circumvolving} (‘Upon Master Fletcher’s Incomparable Plays’, ‘Upon a Black Twist Rounding the Arm of the Countess of Carlisle’), \textit{circumfused} (‘On Julia’s Breath’), \textit{circumgyration} (‘To His Learned Friend, M. Jo. Harmar, Physician to the College of Westminster’) and \textit{circumspacious} (‘Ultimous Heroum’); only the last of these appears to be Herrick’s coinage. One other of his own is \textit{circummortal}, which serves as a useful example of the ambiguity, advertent or otherwise, that may accompany neologisms, especially where the elements of the construction tend towards the abstract. Here are Herrick’s two uses of the word in context: first, in the slight four-line verse ‘Upon Julia’s Breasts’:

\begin{quote}
Display thy breasts, my Julia – there let me
Behold that \textit{circummortal} purity,
Between whose glories there my lips I’ll lay,
Ravish’d in that fair \textit{via lactea}.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Second, in the first quatrains of ‘To His Peculiar Friend, Mr. Thomas Shapcott, Lawyer’:

\begin{quote}
I’ve paid thee what I promis’d; that’s not all;
\end{quote}


Besides I give thee here a verse that shall
(When hence thy circummortal part is gone),
Arch-like, hold up thy name’s inscription.12

Pollard editorially defines *circummortal* as “more than mortal”,13 which seems at once ingenious and inadequate. It is a phrase that is applicable in two radically different contexts because it is itself ambiguous, yet it fails to capture the poetic effect of the word in each. The first thing to note is that *circum-* as a prefix means “around” rather than “more than”, and Herrick’s other unusual usages of it are consistent with that orthodox sense, so that if “more than mortal” had been Herrick’s primary intent he would more likely have coined “extramortal” or “supermortal”.14 Instead, I would argue that in each usage the neologism carries additional import. In the Julia case, while the surface meaning might well be something like Pollard’s, the two parts of the chosen word have additional connotations respectively of roundness and the flesh. In the address to Mr Shapcott, the sense is of the man’s im-mortal soul, and given that the addressee is a friend, one suspects that rather than use more conventional words for the concept of his fated demise, Herrick simply wanted to lighten the tone. A comment by John Lennard on ‘Upon Julia’s Breasts’ does not attempt to gloss *circummortal*, but plausibly accounts for its creation:

This could easily be paraphrased as offensive wolf-whistle (‘tits out for the lad’), but coinage of the slightly absurd “circummortal” and a horrible pun on “Via

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14 Which, perhaps surprisingly, no poet ever apparently did, nor does the searchable record show anyone doing so until a writer under the pseudonym “Titan” in describing the importance of fairy-folk in the lives of rural dwellers: “the simpler their lives, the more frequent were the visitations of their supermortal neighbors” (*The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, Volume 42, 1859, p. 274). Oddly enough, *circummortal* might have been a more appropriate word in that context.
Lactea” (Milky Way) make for loving jest rather than leering insult. Eliot did something similar beginning the solemn-sounding ‘Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service’ with “Polyphiloprogenitive”, which he invented to mean ‘liking to have lots of children’: it’s a learned joke, but it is a joke, for poets are not quite supposed to fill entire tetrameters with single words, especially ones that don’t exist.15

(Eliot’s neologisms, including the one mentioned above, are discussed in Chapter VII, but it seemed appropriate to extend the above quotation here to make an early link between the two poets.) Leaving aside the question of whether Lennard’s defence of the poem fails by present-day mores – a question not necessarily simplified by Julia’s probable non-existence – his characterization of circummortal as “slightly absurd” seems exactly right. The playful tone imparted by the word is one we will encounter again in the nineteenth century among the coinages of Dickinson, Hopkins and, above all, the nonsense poets, all of whom in turn prefigure the frolicsome experiments in lexis of many modernists. A brief discussion of play and playfulness in poetic neologism can be found in Chapter VIII.

That Groom underestimates Herrick’s coinages is shown up by many striking hyphenated compounds, such as lily-wristed, silver-shedding, moon-parched, life-begetting, primrose-tide, night-beweared, maiden-monument, grief-drowned and weeping-ripe. As with circummortal, Herrick liked weeping-ripe, meaning something like “with eyes full of tears”, enough to use it twice, in similar playlets, ‘A Pastoral Sung to the King’ and ‘A Bucolic betwixt Two’. The only other

neologism I could find recycled is niplet, in ‘How Lilies Came White’ and (inevitably) ‘Upon the Nipples of Julia’s Breast’. The -let diminutive is used similarly in zonulet, thronelet and quarrelets, and it may not be coincidental that those three are also found in poems to or about Julia, ‘Upon Julia’s Riband’, ‘The Transfiguration’ and ‘The Rock of Rubies, and the Quarry of Pearls’. Indeed, as many as nine coinages are to be found in Julia-related poems: in addition to the four cited diminutives and circummortal are circum-walk, circumfused, enclaret and life-begetting. This barely significant cluster represents the only pattern discernible in the distribution of Herrick’s neologisms, which otherwise appear to be spread randomly across time, style and genre. That even distribution, in contrast to the peaks and troughs evident in most of the other poets treated in this thesis, suggests that Herrick’s neologizing, limited as it was, was not exercised with the same conscious stylistic purpose detectable in the work of the others.

By contrast, in the case of Herrick’s near-contemporary, Milton, there is considerable variation among his works in the frequency of his coinages, and in the kinds of neologism he employed. Of those scholars whose work I have drawn on in this chapter, I am especially indebted to Thomas Corns, whose Milton’s Language, cited first in the Introduction and many times below, discusses the varied nature of the new and repurposed words in each of the major works. Its introductory chapter surveys Milton studies over time as they apply to the poet’s language, and offers a telling side note that indirectly explains why a disproportionate share of the critical literature cited in this study is so many years old. Corns observes that the decline in language-related study of Milton was indicated in the Third International Milton Symposium (1988), where in over
ninety papers “only a handful dealt even secondarily with questions about Milton’s language”. He contends that contemporary attacks on structuralism have given linguistic stylistics generally a bad name, and I would add that presently in Dickinson studies language-related research is similarly somewhat unfashionable. More than half of Corns’s book concerns itself with lexis, with separate sections covering *Comus*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and the minor poems. Neologism is covered in each section, and subsections on “New Senses” include both semantic and usage-category shifts (conversions). It is a more systematic approach than Milroy’s similar survey of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ verbal innovation, and of great value to this study, although its specifically reader-response focus somewhat limits it to being a superb feat of observation without great theoretic heft. Subsections on “ludic lexis” in *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Comus* and the minor poems, and on “wit” in *Paradise Lost*, survey the light-hearted or amusing aspects of language in those works. That content is a reminder, especially to modern readers who may be challenged by his style, that even Milton had a playful side.

2. Linguistic extravagance: early poems and *Comus*

It is relevant first to place Milton within the line of development of English poetry as a clear and avowed successor to Spenser and Shakespeare. His acknowledgement of the former was quoted in Chapter I, and the young unpublished Milton was allowed an epitaph to “the Admirable Dramatic Poet” Shakespeare in the front matter of the Second Folio in 1632, presumably as a

16 Corns, p. 5.
mark of gratitude to his father, who was a sponsor of Shakespeare’s troupe, The King’s Men. Hilda M. Hulme summarizes critical opinion thus:

By general agreement the first influence to be considered is that of Spenser, for however much Milton admired the naturalness and ease, the force and compression of Shakespeare’s language, it was with the poet Spenser, “sage and serious”, the great teacher, “famous” and “admired”, that he had the most natural affinity. “Milton has acknowledged to me”, says Dryden (1700), “that Spenser was his original,” and it was Spenser’s mastery of language and of verse-music that Milton was first to make his own.17

There have been so many examples identified of conscious Spenserian echoes in Milton that it is relatively easy to find one that involves neologism. Hulme quotes18 the instance of Spenser’s probable neologism *attune* (“He ceased, and then ’gan all the quire of birds / Their diverse notes t’attune unto his lay”: The Faerie Queen, II, xxii, 75–76) being picked up by Milton in Paradise Lost:

The birds their quire apply; airs, vernal airs,
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
The trembling leaves ...19

Note the presence of the quire of birds in each case, and that Milton subtly changes Spenser’s original meaning of *attune*: it has become a transitive verb with a new sense, for which the poet is cited first by the *OED*, evoking a harmony

18 HM Hulme, pp. 74–75.
of nature of a hauntingly literal kind. One is reminded of—and one wonders
whether Milton had in mind—the Spenserian coinage *under-songs* cited in
Chapter II. Similarly, scholars have noted that many Shakespearean neologisms
can be found sampled in Milton. Corns gives the example of a compound epithet,
civil-suited, in ‘Il Pensoroso’ (‘Thus Night oft see me in thy pale career / Till
civil-suited Morn appear’)) that has been noted by editors to echo Shakespeare’s
similar personification in Juliet’s “civil night, / Thou sober-suited matron, all in
black” (*Romeo and Juliet*, [3.2.11–12]);20 Archie Burnett suggests that the
compounds rush-candle and knot-grass (*Comus*, 337 & 541), which add to the
masque’s bucolic air, were suggested by Shakespeare’s use of them in similar
contexts (*The Taming of the Shrew*, [4.6.14]; *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,
[3.2.330]);21 and Groom remarks that “printless feet” in *Comus* is “evidently
suggested by “printless foot” in The Tempest ([5.1.34]), the earliest known use of
the epithet.22

Having seen, so to speak, where Milton has come from, we have a starting point
from which to trace where he goes from there. The second word of this section’s
title—in Milton’s original sense, “going out of the usual path” (*OED*)—is one of
many coinages to be found in his prose works, where they occur in surprising
numbers approaching those in the poems. That practice of straying from the norm,
though, occurs in differing styles and frequencies across the poetic works. As a
general rule, neologisms, especially compounds, are more common in the earlier
works than in the later, and this trend in Milton’s work follows the evolution in

20 Corns, p. 76. For this and the following three Shakespeare excerpts I have amended the authors’
citations to those of the Norton edition for consistency with Chapter II.
22 Groom, p. 76.
his poetic language generally from strongly Elizabethan-influenced to the so-called “grand style”, which in turn runs parallel to (but differs from) the one in English poetic language at large across almost half a century, as described in the passage below from E. M. W. Tillyard’s *The Miltonic Setting*. Tillyard’s analysis here is coloured by a seeming animus to F. R. Leavis, which I have attempted to edit out of the following abridged version, but which leaves an oddly sardonic note in what remains.

Finally, let me point out with what extraordinary difficulties Milton was beset in the matter of poetic style through living just when he did. [...] The change of style from Milton’s early to his late verse ought to be considered along with the changes that were then taking place in the language of poetry.

... In the early part of the seventeenth century men used as many words as possible in as many ways as possible; and the connotative rather than the denotative side of language was developed. Words were pushed beyond their normal meanings, until “the metaphysical writers by continually extending the common meaning of words gradually cut the ground away from under themselves”. A reaction was bound to follow, ... a denotative austerity superseded a love of connotative profusion. “The Augustan achievement was by shearing words of their secondary and irrelevant associations to release the full energy of their primary meanings.” Now Milton suffered the extraordinary embarrassment of being thoroughly involved in both of the two conflicting currents, and he is the only seventeenth-century poet who attempted to combine both methods.23

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One may agree with Tillyard in seeing the later Milton as deliberately attempting a kind of stylistic fusion, a similar concept to that of Adamson quoted early in this chapter; or with Leavis that this view reduces Milton to merely a follower of linguistic fashion, is at odds with traditional notions of Milton’s “aloof and majestic self-sufficiency”, and thus “rob[s] the English tradition ... of that unique heroic figure”. I am not sure that there is necessarily a contradiction between those two views, but I will leave the dispute to the Milton scholars.

This treatment will spend most time on Comus, as an example of the more neologism-rich early period, and Paradise Lost as a paradigm of the later. The plainer language of the last major works, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, while not coinage-free, is passed over for the purposes of this chapter. But we will look first at Milton’s first notable poem, the rather Spenserian ‘On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough’ (date disputed, probably 1628), which is rich in neologism, as exemplified in the first three stanzas, which follow. They relate an imagined supernatural rape scene that sits oddly with the poem’s elegiac purpose.

I

O fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken primrose fading timelessly,
Summer’s chief honor, if thou hadst outlasted
Bleak Winter’s force that made thy blossom dry;
For he, being amorous on that lovely dye

25 The poem was omitted from the 1645 Poems, not appearing until the 1673 collection. Scholars surmise that this was in consideration of the sensitivity of the subject matter for the family of the deceased child, who was Milton’s niece.
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss
But killed, alas, and then bewailed his fatal bliss.

II

For since grim Aquilo his charioteer
By boist’rous rape th’Athenian damsel got,
He thought it touched his deity full near
If likewise he some fair one wedded not,
Thereby to wipe away th’infamous blot
Of long-uncoupled bed and childless eld,
Which ’mongst the wanton gods a foul reproach was held.

III

So mounting up in icy-pearlèd car,
Through middle empire of the freezing air
He wandered long, till thee he spied from far;
There ended was his quest, there ceased his care.
Down he descended from his snow-soft chair,
But all unwares with his cold-kind embrace
Unhoused thy virgin soul from her fair biding-place.26

The first stanza contains two marginal cases. The sense here of “timeless” equates not to our present understanding of “outside time” or “eternal” but rather to our word “untimely”. That sense was already in use at the time of writing of the poem, though seemingly rare, and the OED, which records all adverbs in -ly, gives Milton the first citation for timelessly in any sense. The verb envermeil, to

tinge with red, is a borrowing from Old French that was already extant but rare, and seemingly functions as a conscious archaism here, given that the scansion would easily have admitted a plainer phrase (and one that omitted the metre-fixing auxiliary *did*) such as “That ting’d thy cheek with scarlet”. That simple past tense construction in *did*, incidentally, is another Spenserian marker in the early Milton. As George T. Wright observes of that word and its variants, and the analogous *do* for the present tense,

... many [sixteenth-century] poets used them in poems principally for metrical reasons. Spenser, for example, in Sonnet 81 from *Amoretti*, uses such pleonastic forms in five different lines ... Such words serve little purpose other than to fill up the metre.27

In the present poem, Milton employs the same form using *did* or *didst* nine times, emphasizing his youthful debt to Spenser. We should therefore not be surprised to find that the neologistic forms he favours here and in other early works, particularly *Comus*, are frequent also in Spenser.

The kind most prominent in ‘Death of a Fair Infant’ is the modified participle functioning as an adjective, a formation common then and ever since; Milton used it consistently, particularly in his early poems. Often it can be no more than a syntactic shorthand, but its very first use in this first poem, in the second stanza, is striking: “to wipe away the infamous blot / Of long-uncoupled bed, and childlesseld”. The word *uncouple* was already in use, in the senses around “detach” or “separate” still current today. It is difficult to devise a phrase to match the young

Milton’s arresting physical evocation of lovelessness in this single word, which is more than a standard compound because of its semantic reinvention of the root. Often this kind of construction carries a double meaning (compare Shakespeare’s *unseminar’d*, discussed in Chapter II), but here only Milton’s new sense of *uncoupled* seems appropriate. Another instance of the modified-participle form opens the following stanza, which is the richest in the poem for neologism. In *icy-pearlèd* to describe the chariot of the personified Winter\(^{28}\) (again, such prosopopoeia is typically Spenserian) Milton conveys at once the physical representation of opaque frozen droplets and, in the reference to pearl, the regal nature of the chariot thus encrusted, and by extension its rider.

The compound *snow-soft* is of a different kind, coined along the then already existing template \(y-x\) for “as \(x\) as \(y\)”, where \(x\) is a common adjective and \(y\) is a common object or substance that possesses that characteristic: *milk-white* and *blood-red*, for example, still familiar today, are attested from Old English, and Milton himself used *star-bright* (*Paradise Lost* X.450).\(^{29}\) Because *snow-white* already existed, by means of the familiarity of the template the contemporary reader was provided with a mental association of not only softness but whiteness, to augment the already encountered *bleak* and *pearled*, making the use of the word *white* itself unnecessary. Further, the sibilant alliteration and the double meaning of *soft* in *snow-soft* aid in conveying both the silence of winter’s

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\(^{28}\) The original published text also had initial capitals for *Primrose* in this stanza and *Snow-soft* in the third (regrettably omitted in the Bush edition), which are similarly significant in a poem where the poet does not throw upper case around willy-nilly as did some of his contemporaries.

\(^{29}\) Perhaps because of their ubiquity in popular and folk song, the most common of this type have lapsed into cliché, so that in *Under Milk Wood* Dylan Thomas was happily obliged to compound other exemplars with -black than coal- (in Wales!), such as *sloe- and bible-*. On the same template, Gerard Manley Hopkins created nonce-words such as *brass-bold* (*Brothers*) from less likely-sounding sources.
approach and the deadly embrace. Lastly, there is *cold-kind*, at first glance a double adjective along the lines later favoured by Gerard Manley Hopkins.\(^{30}\) Remarkably, this appears to be the only double-adjective neologism of its hyphenated form in all of Milton’s poetry, unless one counts *aery-light* (*Paradise Lost*), but this in describing Adam’s sleep is better construed as “as light as air” rather than as a merging of two descriptors. And it serves as confirmation that negation as a poetic effect of neologism is not restricted to affixations: each half of this semi-oxymoron to a degree negates its partner. But there is more to *cold-kind* than a simple pair of contradictory adjectives. Each of its two halves is also a common noun as well as an adjective, *kind* in particular carrying different significations that give additional weight to the combination. Here is a selection paraphrased from some of the *OED*’s many noun sub-senses of *kind* that were extant at the time: disposition or character; Nature in the abstract; kin or ancestry; the genitals. The reader is invited to consider the number of further senses of *cold-kind* that they, together with shades of meaning of *cold*, make available. It is not necessary, and probably not possible, to itemize here all the meanings that may be present simultaneously when *cold-kind* is considered both as a double adjective and as a noun phrase acting as a modifier; it suffices to laud it as an ingenious and evocative piece of multiple ambiguity by Milton, which contributes to the success of the supernatural fancy that introduces his elegy.

Spenserian elements, particularly in its bucolic setting and mythic and supernatural themes, are still present a few years later in *Comus*, as is Milton’s penchant for neologism and especially the modified-participle form of epithet

\(^{30}\) Indeed, Hopkins will later reverse the epithet in coining *kindcold* in ‘Epithalamion’.
found often in ‘On the Death of a Fair Infant’ and other early poems. Corns gives about twenty examples of this form selected from the early works, including “icy-pearlèd car” (mentioned above), “meek-eyed Peace” (‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’), “low-browed rocks” (‘L’Allegro’), “dewy-feathered Sleep” (‘Il Penseroso’), “silver-buskined nymphs” (Arcades), “Sphere-borne harmonious sisters” (‘At a Solemn Music’) and “leaden-stepping hours” (‘On Time’). He goes on to note that such coinages “are not a feature of his later minor poetry” and that “[a]s in Comus, some are more complex than perhaps they seem”. In his lexical treatment, Corns reports that “Comus is less than 8,000 words long, yet I have noted almost sixty newly coined words, and probably I have missed some.” Indeed, of all Milton’s works Comus appears to be the most densely populated with neologism; it is likely that, in addition to his Elizabethan inclinations mentioned above, the performative nature of the masque and the aristocratic Ludlow Castle audience emboldened the young poet to show off a little, in the hope of leaving a memorable impression on any possible future patron (and showing off, of course, was one very Elizabethan motive for neologism.) Corns opens his analysis with haemony (line 638), a “singularly opaque term” that “has offered a challenge to Miltonists as irresistible as the two-handed engine of ‘Lycidas’.” Rather than rehearse Corns’ discussion of that admittedly fascinating word here, I will just highlight his point that it appears to be the only word in Comus coined from a foreign source “rather than from the native resources of English.” That observation should be borne in mind as an indication of how much Milton’s approach changes by the time of Paradise Lost.

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31 Corns, p. 75.  
32 Corns, p. 50.  
33 Corns, p. 51.
and other later works where Latinate borrowings comprise a large proportion of 
his (by then less frequent) coinages. Corns’ extensive treatment, which the 
interested reader is urged to consult, goes on to examine many examples selected 
from throughout the masque; rather than replicate his approach, I will first 
expand on one significant pattern in compounds noted by Corns that is so 
consistent as to suggest a conscious technique, and then concentrate on how 
Milton’s coinages contribute to the verbal and philosophical energy in two 
exchanges between Comus, a licentious son of Bacchus and Circe, and the Lady. 

The majority of coinages in *Comus* are compounds, and a surprising number of 
those describe a character or characters using a participial form of a feature of 
physique or clothing preceded by an adjective. For example, the first, “blue-
haired deities” (29), refers to Neptune’s children, the Tritons, and is noted by 
editors to originate with Ovid. On the same model we find “dark-veiled Cotytto” 
born Helena” (676) and “rosy-bosomed Hours” (986). All these characters are 
invoked by speakers, rather than in the speaker’s narrated action of the masque. 
Bearing in mind the performative nature of the piece, one imagines that the 
epithets served partly to aid an audience in swiftly visualizing the characters in 
the moment, when they do not have a reader’s leisure to recall their nature. In 
some cases, there is some allusive poetic weight in the descriptors, such as the 
connotations of fading colours and the covering dark in “grey-hooded Even”. 
Corns explains the further complexity present in “rosy-bosomed Hours”, that the 

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34 Corns, pp. 50–56.
group of goddesses so named in classical myth were (among many other functions) responsible for awakening the day, and so they appear “appropriately suffused with the colour of dawn.”

In their initial encounter, the Lady is surprised by Comus, who appears to her as a benign shepherd when she is resting alone after becoming lost on a journey with her brothers, who have left to forage for food. They quickly fall into a stichomythic interrogation of fourteen single pentameter lines, beginning:

\begin{quote}
Comus. What chance, good lady, hath bereft you thus?
Lady. Dim darkness and this leavy labyrinth.
Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?
Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf.
\end{quote}

In his survey of \textit{Comus} Corns notes that many of its compounds “reflect perhaps an impulse towards poetic brevity or ellipsis.” This excerpt shows a particularly pressing case of metrical restriction for the poet, who needs to maintain the rapid-fire to-and-fro lines, bordering on bullying despite the god’s early geniality, of Comus’ interrogation. To pack the import of the question in the third line into a single pentameter is something of an achievement, and \textit{near-ushering} is crucial to it. Further on in the same passage, the Lady describes the youthfulness of her brothers: “As smooth as Hebe’s their \textit{unrazored} lips” (290). The \textit{OED} finds no earlier citation of \textit{unrazored} than this, and it is one of several putative coinages in \textit{un-} in \textit{Comus}. ‘On the Death of a Fair Infant’ had only one, in \textit{(long-)}uncoupled, and that was a new sense of an existing word; the frequency of neologistic

\begin{flushright}
35 Corns, p. 54.
37 Corns, p. 52.
38 Metre is also presumably the motive for the redundant “grassy” in the next line.
\end{flushright}
negations in *Comus* is something of a halfway house on the road to their plentiful presence in *Paradise Lost*.

The second passage for attention is the central scene in which Comus, whose true nature has by now become apparent to the Lady, attempts his seduction of her.\(^{39}\) He supports his efforts by appeal to the archetypal *carpe diem* argument with which Milton will have been familiar from both classical sources and recent ones such as his heroes Spenser (“Gather therefore the Rose, whilst yet is prime, / For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre”)\(^{40}\) and Shakespeare (‘O Mistress Mine’).\(^{41}\) Probable neologisms occur in this passage at a rate of around one every nine lines; the majority are hyphenated compounds varying from unexceptional to striking, together with some negations in *un*- and a handful of other affixations. I will focus on the speech by Comus (706–755) in which he makes his *carpe diem* pitch. He opens by decrying “those budge doctors of the Stoic fur” (706) who praise abstinence; the odd-sounding adjective *budge* is first cited in the *OED* (“Solemn in demeanour, important-looking, pompous, stiff, formal”) for this occurrence. The word has an earlier meaning, a noun meaning a furry hide, specifically the woolly side of lambskin, and the *OED* seems to imply that the adjectival definition possibly arose as a back-formation from the phrase *budge doctor*, where *budge* may have initially been simply an attributive noun referring to doctors who wear fur trims on their gowns. That is plausible, although the phrase may not have been Milton’s own idea, as a second use of *budge* as unequivocally an adjective is cited from just three years later than Milton’s: whether *Comus* would have had so prompt an influence is open to question. In

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\(^{40}\) Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, II.12.75.

\(^{41}\) *Twelfth Night*, 2.3.35–48.
extolling the bounty of Nature, which he urges the Lady to partake of in its widest sense, Comus uses a coined negation in un-, of a form that is seen much more frequently in Paradise Lost: the negative that imparts a positive, by negating a word with negative connotations: “Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth / With such a full and unwithdrawing hand?” (710–11). Two lines on, the negation innumerable, not a neologism, is also positive in its connotation of plenitude. This form occurs more often in the late works, and its presence in Paradise Lost is discussed in the next section. The rest of Comus’s speech includes several participial compounds, smooth-haired silk (the subject of a detailed commentary by F. R. Leavis, quoted by John Leonard),

42 all-worshipped ore and vermeil-tinctured lip (recalling the archaism envermeil in “Death of a Fair Infant”), and the prefixation undarting eyes, which in context is also somewhat of a negated-negative-as-positive. Among those, Comus paints a picture of the excess that would afflict Nature if humankind failed to exploit her plenty. He mirrors that surfeit in his speech, using an overabundance of seven similar verbs in under five lines, that Nature

... would be quite surcharged with her own weight,

And stranged with her waste fertility;

Th’earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with plumes,

The herds would over-multiplicity their lords,

The sea o’erfraught would swell ...

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Of these, darked is an archaism, and over-multiplicity is itself an excessive coinage, an affixation attached to a conversion. It seems likely, incidentally, that Milton is

also listing the elements in this evocation of Nature: the above quotation encompasses earth, air and water, and with a coinage (in the sense Milton uses it) in the following lines, that the surplus diamonds would “emblaze the forehead of the deep”, he completes the classical set of four.

3. Intervolved, yet regular: *Paradise Lost*

Covering neologism in a work the size of *Paradise Lost* is necessarily an exercise in sampling, as instances are less dense than in Milton’s early poetry. Corns writes:

New words are, however, markedly less frequently coined in *Paradise Lost* than in *Comus*. I have noticed fewer than twice as many as in his masque, though it is ten times the length. Milton’s rate of coining appears closer to that of *Samson Agonistes* or *Paradise Regained*. We may only guess, but I suspect that the reasons, in so far as they are open to surmise, lie not in an atrophy of Miltonic creativity but rather a shift both in the rate at which words were entering the language and a change in the prevailing poetic aesthetic away from an Elizabethan exuberance to a neoclassical austerity.⁴⁴

Though the coinages are less frequent, the standing of *Paradise Lost* in the canon has ensured that a higher proportion of them survived into present-day usage – the most famous, perhaps, being *Pandemonium* (I, 756; X, 424). As to their distribution, it does appear – as was noted for *King Lear* in the previous chapter –

⁴⁴ Corns, p. 84. Of course, to match in *Paradise Lost* the rate of coinage in *Comus* would have required around 600 neologisms, so the reduced rate might owe something to the size of that challenge.
that neologisms tend to cluster in key passages of the narrative, of which three are examined in what follows.

A critical moment in Book II occurs when Beelzebub, at Satan’s behest, delivers a tub-thumping address to the renegade angels, seeking a volunteer agent for a vengeful mission to disrupt God’s earthly paradise. Presumably Satan chooses Beelzebub, his subordinate, for the quality of his oratory, and the choice is justified in his speech, of a kind identifiable with demagogues throughout earthly history. Beelzebub builds up to a climax that is a series of (very) rhetorical questions, with lashings of adjectives and a characteristic mixing of Latinate and Anglo-Saxon forms:

But, first, whom shall we send
In search of this new world, whom shall we find
Sufficient? Who shall tempt with wand’ring feet
The dark unbottomed infinite abyss,
And through the palpable obscure find out
His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight
Upborne with indefatigable wings
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive
The happy isle; what strength, what art, can then
Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe
Through the strict senteries and stations thick
Of angels watching round?45

The call begins with two short, blunt questions using the Shakespearean device of a sequence of simple, mostly Anglo-Saxon monosyllables brought to a contrasting

Latinate halt, emphasized by its presence at the start of a line, with “Sufficient?”
Then in the same way as the short words are jolted by the long one, the two short questions are followed up with two syntactically complex ones across nine lines. The pace is built with the aid of repeated enjambment that races the longer questions towards their anticipated ends, and the meaning is laced with the devilry of Milton’s word choices.

The *OED* cites Milton for the first usage of *tempt* with a poetical sense of “to adventure oneself in or upon; to risk the perils of”, and it may well be that this quotation initiated that form, but it seems likely to me that Milton’s coinage here was no more than an instance of the Renaissance practice, noted in the previous chapter, of de-affixation (of *at-* from “attempt” in this case) to fit a metre. In “The dark unbottomed infinite abyss” are three descriptors with much redundancy between them: abysses are dark by nature, and “unbottomed” and “infinite” in this context mean much the same thing. The line is a very Grand-Style piece of grandiloquence. Although it does not originate with Milton, *unbotted* sounds Miltonic, is seemingly a recent invention, and if Milton did not independently discover it but found it in the wild, he would no doubt have adopted it lovingly. In the next line the conversion of *obscure* to a noun is a first citation in the *OED*. One cannot be certain that the noun usage originates with Milton, but it seems probable, and its semi-oxymoronic pairing with “palpable” is remarkable enough to warrant mention here. The *OED* postulates for the noun *obscure* “obscurity” or “darkness”, and the latter is the image that stays with the reader of these lines. It is an evocatively Miltonic example of that class of sayings that we use to emphasize an abstract quality by making it sensory or concrete: “you could cut the tension with a knife”, “it’s so close I can smell it”, “cum on feel the noize”.

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Corns says of it: “as Satan evokes for his infernal audience the prospective horror of traversing chaos, readers too are left groping for some familiar substantive to fix upon: we find instead the shaky premiss [sic] of a new noun, either the ‘obscure’, which is palpable, or, if the usual order is inverted, as well it may be, the ‘palpable’, which is obscure!” In “as well it may be”, Corns is alluding to frequency in Milton of the practice of inverting the normal modifier-noun sequence. To translate Corns’ observation into the language of Chapter I of this thesis: when the reader finds that “shaky premiss” where the “familiar substantive” is expected, that is defamiliarization in action; and the resultant murkiness of the phrase palpable obscure is a prime example of indeterminacy as another poetic effect of neologism.

Only three lines on we also find “the vast abrupt”, which is similarly striking; the OED finds an earlier noun usage of abrupt by Edmund Bolton, but again one wonders whether Milton may have arrived at it independently. Groom cites some other conversions in Paradise Lost, such as convex, vast, globose and Empyrean, not all original in Milton, that form a pattern of this technique being used to suggest “[v]ast and shadowy conceptions”. These and similar examples from other authors of his period suggest that this form of conversion, of adjectives with relatively abstract meaning into nouns, was then regularly practised, and we shall see in later chapters its reappearance in Dickinson and Hopkins. Further on, upborne is an example of a common Miltonic form of affixation by inversion, up-<verb>, where “<verb> up” would be the orthodox usage. Two other instances of many are “the universal host upset / A shout that tore Hell’s concave” (I, 541–

46 Corns, p. 88.
47 Groom, p. 89.
“All these, upwhirled aloft, / Fly o’er the backside of the world” (III, 493–494). The effect is a curious one: the prefix and the root verb in almost every case I have noted exchange places in a foot, so that the up- syllable, which in the orthodox form would be accented, becomes unaccented (compare “Borne up with indefatigable wings”); yet the inversion, especially in the present case where the word begins the line, in telling the reader the direction of the action before the nature of it, gives an added force to the sense of loft. A reason for this may be found in the way the style of Paradise Lost relies so heavily throughout on unusual choices and sequencing of words, while the metre is not strongly iambic, so that the reader is more sensible to the effects of the former than the latter.

The second passage for attention is from the “gardening scene” where the loving prelapsarian couple are observed by a jealous Satan, to whom Milton attaches a wry coinage, undelighted, in “the Fiend / Saw undelighted, all delight, all kind / Of living creatures, new to sight” (IV, 286). Adam and Eve enjoy their personal Paradise surrounded by the plants and animals of Eden, and then at last:

... to their supper fruits they fell,
Nectarine fruits which the compliant boughs
Yielded them, sidelong as they sat recline
On the soft downy bank damasked with flow’rs.
The savoury pulp they chew, and in the rind
Still as they thirsted scoop the brimming stream;
Nor gentle purpose, nor endearing smiles
Wanted, nor youthful dalliance, as beseems
Fair couple linked in happy nuptial league,
Like Beelzebub’s speech, this passage is rich in adjectives; two or three of them on OED evidence apparently make their debut in these few lines. The doubt in “two or three” arises out of the curious status of the conversion *recline* in this context. There is little doubt that it is a coinage, as the word up to this time shows no sign of being anything but a simple verb; the OED classes this usage as an adjective, but it might just as well be an adverb: a word in that place might be modifying “they”, as in “they sat sunburnt”, or “sat”, as in “they sat comfortably”. A third possibility is that Milton is simply dropping the last syllable from “reclining” for metrical convenience. In addition to that form of *recline*, the OED cites the two participial adjectives *brimming* and *endearing* first in this passage, making three first citations in five lines, which might sound like a record – but see the next extract. In *brimming*, a word that has since flourished, Milton ingeniously creates a conversion/suffixation that extends three then-current senses of the noun – for that was at the time its only function – “brim”: first, a body of water; second, the edge, coast or bank of such a body; and the edge of a cup or bowl, an association that harks back to the use of the rind of the fruit as a drinking vessel. While *endear* existed as a verb, Milton is credited – this happens often – with the first use of the participle in an adjectival function. The whole passage resonates with a sense of togetherness with nature, and to that harmonic end Milton engages in an unusual amount of assonance and parallelism, in which the neologisms play their part. The long-vowel assonances in *compliant/side/recline/rind/smiles* (and depending on pronunciation, possibly *nectarine*), *boughs/downy/flowers* and

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stream/endearing/beseems/league, and the anaphora in nor, combine to help evoke the Edenic harmony in the scene.

Like the preceding extract, this final one is in the speaker’s own voice. God has declared his punishment of mortality on humanity; the archangel Michael has shown Adam a vision of death, and now presents him with an even worse apprehension, a horrible catalogue of the wretched diseases that might precede it, “that thou may’st know / What misery th’ inabstinence of Eve / Shall bring on men.”49 Inabstinence is a classic Miltonic Latinate affixation, but the passage that follows is exceptional for just one kind of coinage: its extraordinary compounds.

... all maladies
Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms
Of heart-sick agony, all feverous kinds,
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,
Intestine stone and ulcer, colic-pangs,
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy
And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence,
Dropsies and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums.
Dire was the tossing, deep the groans; Despair
Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch;
And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook, but delayed to strike, though oft invoked
With vows, as their chief good, and final hope.
Sight so deform what heart of rock could long

Dry-eyed behold? Adam could not, but wept ...50

Of the six hyphenated compounds above, heart-sick was already in common usage and colic-pangs is unremarkable, but the remainder together contribute to an arresting set of images that bring to mind the compound-laced imprecations of Lear to the storm, discussed in the previous chapter, or similar scenes in another medium by Pieter Bruegel and Hieronymous Bosch.51 A kind of sonic peak is reached in the middle with the alliterations and the syntactic parallelism of “moping melancholy”, “moon-struck madness”, “wide-wasting pestilence” and “joint-racking rheums”, followed by more of the same in “Dire was the tossing, deep the groans”. Incidentally, the three participial adjectives moon-struck, wide-wasting and joint-racking were all judged to warrant their own subentries in the OED, which is as dense a cluster as I have found in this study. Lastly, we note dry-eyed, which is ascribed to Milton and like moon-struck has survived as an epithet to the present. Eyes are referenced more than fifty times in Paradise Lost, often as indicators of character (“his baleful eyes”, I, 56) or of deep feeling (“eyes of conjugal attraction”, IV, 490–491); that frequency suggests, along with dry-eyed, “meek-eyed Peace” and “pure-eyed Faith”, (both cited in this chapter from earlier poems), that the poet’s progressive blindness, by now complete, was always on his mind.52

Before leaving the epic, I will briefly make note of Milton’s affinity for negation, which has been widely commented on and is at its height in Paradise Lost. A clear majority of these words are formed with the Anglo-Saxon un- prefix, even

50 Milton, Paradise Lost, XI, 480–95, p. 435.
51 I can find no evidence that Milton was familiar with their work.
52 It is hard to see a causal connection with neologism, but failing eyesight also afflicted Dickinson, Hopkins and Lear.
though perhaps more than half of them have a Latinate root; these hybrids seemed not to attract as much critical denigration as some other hybrid forms (it is notable that Herrick’s commonly used Latinate *circum*– and *trans*– prefixes were frequently attached to Anglo-Saxon roots, producing hybrids of a converse form.) Corns notes that Milton would frequently cluster them in groups of two, three and even four,\(^{53}\) citing as an example of the last:

... unmoved,

Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,

His loyalty he [Abdiel] kept ...\(^{54}\)

All of these four have citations prior to Milton’s usage, but the specific cases are unimportant. Most instances are not original with Milton, but a substantial minority, such as the already mentioned *unlibidinous*, are, and he would simply form them when he needed them. Corns poses the question, “why should he, more than most, define what is by what is not?”\(^{55}\) A more specific form of that question might relate to the connotation of a positive quality by prefixing a negative word with a negative prefix, as in the lines quoted above, or *unwithdrawing* in *Comus*, discussed earlier. The later works, though their coinages are less frequent overall, contain many of these forms, such as *unbenighted* (*PL* X, 682), *unculled* (*PL* XI, 436) and *unconniving* (*Paradise Regained*, I, 363). Annabel Patterson explores that phenomenon and other questions across an entire chapter relating to Milton’s negation, a fascinating study which, because it is concerned only in passing with

\(^{53}\) Corns, pp. 84–85.


\(^{55}\) Corns, pp. 85–86.
neologism, I regretfully will not spend more time on here.\textsuperscript{56} Patterson notes that 
\textit{Comus} is rich in newly created negations, and argues that from that early work, in 
which the examples are mostly relatively simple in their signification, Milton’s 
eventual more complex use of negation would be informed by his rhetorical 
deployment of it over his subsequent period of social engagement in his prose 
works: “years of experience in verbal combat would not only have increased 
Milton’s lexical inventiveness, but also brought him a deeper understanding of 
what negativity might be and mean.”\textsuperscript{57}

4. Words of such a compass: reception and influence of Milton’s 
neologisms

There is a wealth of scholarly material on the matter of Milton’s later style, which 
has generated so much debate over four and a half centuries. The Introduction to 
this thesis contained a quotation from a 1712 Joseph Addison essay, the first 
paragraph of which observes that “the learned world is very much divided upon 
Milton as to [the language of \textit{Paradise Lost}]”.\textsuperscript{58} So, 37 years on from Milton’s 
death, the subject was still very much a live one. The question of Milton’s 
influence on his successors has been less vexed, with differences around the 
extent and nature of it, but no disagreement that it was substantial. This brief 
section presents a sample of contemporary and later reactions to Milton’s “grand 
style”,\textsuperscript{59} mostly as epitomized in \textit{Paradise Lost}, insofar as they focus on his

\textsuperscript{56} A Patterson, \textit{Milton’s Words}, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp. 165–195. For a more 
complex view of the coinage mentioned earlier, “the Fiend / Saw undelighted, all delight”, which I 
refer to above as simply “wry”, see p. 189 of Patterson’s book.
\textsuperscript{57} Patterson, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{58} Addison, ‘Six \textit{Spectator} Papers’, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{59} I am conscious that the “grand style”, or “Grand Style”, has been understood to mean different 
things over the years, but to labour over those distinctions is not within the remit of this thesis.
coinages and archaisms, which were not the least controversial of its characteristics.

Andrew Marvell, who was a contemporary and a fierce supporter of Milton, contributed a verse preface ‘On Paradise Lost’ to the second edition of the epic. Marvell’s praise was unstinting, and he may have had Milton’s neologisms in mind at one point in the poem. John Leonard comments as follows on the well-known couplet, “Where couldst thou words of such a compass find? / Whence furnish such a vast expence of mind?”:

As Nigel Smith notes, “‘expense’ carries echoes of ‘expanse’” ... Marvell is expressing awe at Milton’s seemingly inexhaustible verbal resourcefulness. In part, Marvell might be thinking of neologisms – the ‘words’ Milton ‘found’ by coining them from other languages. Intriguingly, the OED identifies ‘expanse’ as one such coinage, first used as a noun in Paradise Lost. This might help to explain why “‘expence’ carries echoes of ‘expanse’”: Milton furnishes his ‘expence’ by expanding English.60

It is noteworthy that few of Milton’s early supporters were entirely uncritical of his style, and conversely his detractors were prepared to offer praise in some respects. Sometimes the language in these assessments is indirect and its import vague, as if the critics were loath to commit themselves too firmly to praise or blame. John Dryden proclaims him to combine the qualities of Homer and Virgil;61 yet five years later he seems ambivalent about Milton’s archaisms and neologisms. He writes of the former that Milton “imitated Spenser, as Spenser did

60 Leonard, pp. 7–8.
Chaucer”, and that “the love of their masters may have transported both too far”, yet then he subtly moves into a mode of general observation to add that “obsolete words may ... be laudably revived”, as may newly formed words; then concludes that “in both cases a moderation is to be observed in the use of them: for unnecessary coinage, as well as unnecessary revival, runs into affectation”. The reader cries out inwardly, “Just tell us what you really think!” Addison, having declared himself unabashedly for the pro-Milton crowd at the start of the abovementioned essay on the poet’s language, notes four words – at least three of them incorrectly – as being “of [Milton’s] own coining”. He goes on to write:

If the reader is offended at this liberty in our English poet, I would recommend him to a discourse in Plutarch, which shows us how frequently Homer has made use of the same liberty.

Milton, by the above-mentioned helps, and by the choice of the noblest words and phrases which our tongue would afford him, has carried our language to a greater height than any of the English poets have ever done before or after him, and made the sublimity of his style equal to that of his sentiments.

The “helps” cited by Addison encompass, besides direct coinages, various other aspects of Milton’s diction, including some that are relevant here, such as archaisms, borrowings from other languages and a particular form of conversion, that of adjective to noun, exemplified by obscure above. Yet in a subsequent essay he writes of Milton’s language that “it is often too much laboured, and

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64 Addison, ‘Six Spectator Papers’, p. 42.
sometimes obscured by old words, transpositions and foreign idioms”.

Then again, “it would have been impossible for him to have represented [his sublime sentiments and ideas] in their full strength and beauty, without having recourse to these foreign assistances.” As if this vacillation is not enough, Addison goes on to write, famously, “Our language sunk under him”; in view of Addison’s earlier ambiguity it is ironic that this famous pronouncement, seemingly not intended as a slight on Milton, has been used by both defenders and detractors ever since.

By later in the eighteenth century, anti-Milton attitudes with respect to the borrowings in his vocabulary appear to be firmer. Leonard quotes Leonard Welsted on how to introduce “foreign Treasures” into English, that they should

... in a manner, naturalize Themselves; that is, they ought to fall into the Idiom, and suit with the Genius of the Tongue, they are brought into, so luckily, as almost to seem, originally, of its own Growth; otherwise, the Attempt will end in nothing but an uncouth unnatural Jargon, like the Phrase and Stile of Milton, which is a second Babel, or Confusion of all Languages; a Fault, that can never be enough regretted in that immortal Poet, and which if he had wanted, he had perhaps wanted a Superior. (ix)

Leonard quotes Samuel Johnson as writing “in similar terms”. Perhaps Johnson, Welsted and critics in similar vein simply made their call too early. Leonard, writing in this century, gives an account of Milton’s deployment of the phrase “all ear”, which is a translation from a Latin idiom and has survived through to now in its present form, “all ears”. While it is occasioned by a Latinate phrase rather than

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67 This propensity of Addison for equivocation was later famously noted by Pope in ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’ as a tendency to “damn with faint praise”, and to be “Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike, / Just hint the fault and hesitate dislike”.

68 Leonard, p. 21.
by a neologism, Leonard’s argument could be applied to all forms of lexical novelty, and is worth quoting at length, because it explains admirably how the most influential writers of the Renaissance changed their own language:

The phrase [‘all ear’] indeed imitates a Latin idiom, and Bentley will not be the last critic to conjecture that Milton’s use of it is innovative.... The fact that it is now common parlance should give us pause. Miltonists and anti-Miltonists alike often assume that Milton uses Latinisms solely for nostalgic purposes – to reach back to an earlier purity. Some of Milton’s Latinisms are like that, but we should not forget that early modern European writers coined words and idioms from Latin in the hope of invigorating their vernaculars. Their aim was not to go back to the Romans, but to go forward with them. Some neologisms caught on, with the result that we do not now hear them as ‘Latinisms’. It is the ones that did not catch on that stand out. This has implications for Leavis’s claim that Milton exhibits a ‘callousness to the intrinsic nature of English’. If English does have an ‘intrinsic nature’, it is not fixed for all time, but allows room for what Eliot called ‘that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations, meanings perpetually eingeschachtelt into meanings’. Eliot denied this virtue to Milton, but Bentley finds in ‘Turnd him all eare’ a splendid example of just such a ‘new and sudden combination’. It startles by its novelty even though it is ‘borrow’d from the Latin’.69

Two final observations arise out of the above. In “startles by its novelty” we have yet another in the long list of phrases used in commentary on lexical creativity, already encountered in this thesis or yet to come, signifying defamiliarization. And that “perpetual slight alteration of language” to which poetic neologism

69 Leonard, p. 25.
contributes, while not so “slight” in the linguistic upheaval of the Renaissance and its Miltonic coda, is a kind of macro-effect that we will be able to see clearly by the time we reach the concluding chapter.
CHAPTER IV: EMILY DICKINSON

There came unsummoned in –

That portion of the Vision

The Word applied to fill

Emily Dickinson, ‘Shall I take thee, the poet said’ (Fr1243)

1. The story so far

It may seem a surprising leap, across an ocean and nearly two centuries, from the last chapter to this. While it should not be supposed that poets ceased to coin words after Milton, the post-Renaissance trend in poetry towards a more formal and rule-bound mode, frequently in declared or undeclared imitation of the classics, produced an environment where lexical inventiveness was no longer valued as before. As well as this evolution in form, the content of poetry was increasingly taken up with satire and social commentary, for which the perceived ideal in lexical register was one that fostered clarity of thought and expression. From Milton’s time, through the Restoration and Augustan periods, the poetic landscape was increasingly dominated by learned men such as Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and John Gay, who were not only prominent poets or poetry critics but also opinion leaders in matters of both literature and society at large. We saw in Chapter III that Addison, perhaps the most influential of them all, was at best ambivalent about poetic neologism in Milton. He made his views on poetic language clear from time to time in the
Spectator, in which he published his Milton essays; his position is well illustrated by these two further quotations, the first of them satiric, from that journal. Their contexts relate respectively to foreign and technical borrowings, but their thrust is plain.

I have often wished, that as in our Constitution there are several Persons whose Business it is to watch over our Laws, our Liberties and Commerce, certain Men might be set apart as Superintendents of our Language, to hinder any Words of a Foreign Coin from passing among us ...¹

It is one of the great Beauties of Poetry, to make hard things intelligible, and to deliver what is abstruse of it self in such easy Language as may be understood by ordinary Readers ...²

Sylvia Adamson cites the latter quotation in her description of the movement towards “perspicuity” in language, part of which was “the restriction of the literary lexicon to a standard general vocabulary”:

... by this line of reasoning [Addison] and other critics condemned all the ‘hard words’ that renaissance writers had used as a means of amplifying. Shakespeare’s neologisms, Spenser’s archaisms, Sidney’s compounding and Milton’s latinisms all at various times came under attack.³

So it was that poetic neologism went into a kind of recess, where coinages became a much less prominent feature of published verse, without disappearing altogether – Pope in particular indulged in them at times, especially in his

³ Adamson, p. 614.
classical translations. A surprisingly high proportion of Pope’s inventions, such as
*arduous, casuistry, obstetric* and, surprisingly, *gnome* in its little-person sense
have survived in the language – a measure perhaps of the popularity of his work
among the opinion-forming classes – and he even used one to name ‘The
*Dunciad’. But the role of poets in shaping the language was waning, lesser
Augustan names than Pope were in general not given to neologism, and no one
else then or since has produced in poetry so many words that survive in general
usage today.

It was not until the inevitable reaction in the later eighteenth century to the
strictures of the Augustans that the incidence of neologism began to rise once
more, as a more contemplative poetry concerned with the interior monologue and
with the expression of feeling and emotion, together with the exploration of new
prosodic forms, came into its own. The Romantic project produced Coleridge and
Southey, who coined words occasionally in prose; but for them and others,
notably Keats, neologism was only an occasional poetic practice. Only with the
Victorian era did several more prolific practitioners emerge, as will be seen in this
and the next two chapters. The reasons for the Victorian resurgence in neologism
will be described there, but we should rule out now any suggestion of a stylistic
sameness in its practice, as the selection of these candidates for study illustrates.
While the next chapter notes some common circumstances in the lives and
personalities of Emily Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and they shared
some thematic interests in their poetry, their styles, as is made explicit there, were
unalike; and the work of the nonsense poets of Chapter VI very different again.
Dickinson is less recognizably American than prominent contemporaries who
coined words infrequently such as, say, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow or Walt
Whitman. The latter, it may be noted in passing, serves as an example of the point made elsewhere in this thesis that poetic and personal unorthodoxy do not necessarily correlate with a tendency to neologyism. I give Dickinson an honorary status as a regional Victorian rebel, based on the similarity of that era’s English middle- and upper-class conformity to the religious, convention-bound Amherst milieu that shaped her: it was not called New England for nothing. She agrees neologically:

Because I see – New Englandly –
The Queen, discerns like me –
Provincially –

‘The robin’s my criterion for tune’ (Fr256)

The poetry of Emily Dickinson is noted for being seldom straightforward in its lexis or syntax, consistent with her own dictum to “tell it slant” (‘Tell all the truth but tell it slant’, Fr1263). The language of Dickinson’s poetry, writes Cristanne Miller in *Emily Dickinson: A Poet’s Grammar*, is “elliptically compressed, disjunctive, at times ungrammatical; its reference is unclear; its metaphors are so densely compacted that literal components of meaning fade”. It could fairly be said that Dickinson invented her own language style; little wonder, then, that she should also have invented new words when required, to serve her poetic purposes. The role of neologisms in Dickinson’s poetry has historically not provoked a great deal of comment, but Miller, and Brita Lindberg-Seyersted in *The Voice of

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4 An earlier version of the material in this chapter from this point onward is contained in my 2011 submission, ‘Without the Lexicon: Poetic Neologism and Emily Dickinson’, for ALX715/6, Research Project A and Research Project B, subjects in my M.A. (Writing and Literature) by coursework at Deakin University. Parts of its introductory material have also been adapted for use here in the Introduction and Chapter I.

5 Miller, p. 1.
The Poet, are two critics who have paid it some attention. As Lindberg-Seyersted observes, “It is evident that she does not in any way feel tied down to a use of the items recorded in her Lexicon, however much she protests her great dependence on it.” Her freedom in this respect matches that with which she often disregarded the rules and conventions of English syntax.

It is worthwhile first to note the links between Dickinson and two poets we have already surveyed, William Shakespeare and John Milton. Dickinson was passionate about Shakespeare, who was a source for many allusions in her letters, though surprisingly few in her poems. Milton’s poetry, especially Paradise Lost, was also well known and beloved by her, but again quotation and allusion were extensive only in her letters. In fact, as Richard Sewall writes:

She was never the avowed disciple, as far as we know, of anyone. When she disclaimed the conscious use of “a paint, mixed by another person”, she distinguished herself from the tradition of learned poets who used whatever they wanted from their predecessors, often verbatim and for well-calculated effects...  

Sewall’s statement may be true in the matter of content, as it appears that the King James Bible was for Dickinson the only book – with the possible exception, as noted below, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Aurora Leigh – that was a significant source of poetic material. But it is likely that Shakespeare’s and

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7 Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 111.
9 Capps, pp. 71–72. Having mentioned Shakespeare and Milton, I should reiterate that Spenser does not appear in Capps’ index, and he writes that “Shakespeare was the earliest literature in which Emily Dickinson showed any considerable interest”.
Milton’s freedom in poetic coinages influenced Dickinson’s lexical inventiveness in the search for “well-calculated effects”, and echoes of each with respect to certain forms will be noted later in this chapter. In particular, it is likely that Dickinson was familiar with the coinage-rich *Comus*: Martha Nell Smith has noted a quotation from it jotted down by Susan Dickinson, Emily’s sister-in-law, in the margin of her copy of a Dickinson poem.11

Another poet beloved of Dickinson was her near-contemporary Barrett Browning, on whose death she wrote three memorial poems.12 Though it could not be said that Barrett Browning coined words freely, she had something of a penchant for compounding, and the early part of her *Aurora Leigh* does yield the Dickinsonesque suffixation *missionariness*. While *Aurora Leigh* was, as John Evangelist Walsh persuasively argues, the source for many images in Dickinson’s work,13 that grand narrative is a less likely source of inspiration for Dickinson’s poetic technique than Barrett Browning’s sonnets. One of those, ‘Grief’, opens with a declarative line, “I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless”, of a kind that Dickinson deploys frequently, in such poems as ‘Pain has an element of blank’ (Fr760) and ‘Fame is a fickle food’ (Fr1702). In ‘Grief’ the constant negation (*hopeless, passionless, moveless*) is resonant with Dickinson’s frequent use of the -less suffix – often in neologisms – which I will examine in section 3. In the middle of the sonnet, this sentence appears:

Full desertness

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12 Capps, pp. 86–87.
In souls as countries lieth silent-bare
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute Heavens.14

The rare (but not original with Barrett Browning) *desertness*; the coined extra-rhymed compounds *silent-bare* and *eye-glare* (as Amy Christine Billone has noticed, the former echoes Wordsworth’s cityscape in ‘Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802’: “silent, bare, / Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie”);15 and the overwhelming abstraction of “the absolute heavens” would all be at home in a Dickinson poem. If I rewrite these lines a little to enable a different metre and punctuation, even if the parody is wanting, the lexical kinship is clear:

Full desertness – in Souls, as Countries –
Lieth silent-bare –
Noon’s eye-glare – blanching – vertical –
Blazes absolute here –

2. Identification

The previous two chapters, concerned with neologisms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, demonstrated the difficulties of proving originality from the circumstantial evidence of *OED* citations. In many cases, evidence of identification is essentially the absence of a counterexample. For Dickinson in nineteenth-century America it is possible for the first time to make much more

well-informed judgments on these questions, because of the contemporaneous existence of Noah Webster’s *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. Scholarly consensus has it\(^{16}\) that the 1844 reprint of the 1841 revision of that dictionary\(^{17}\) was the one that Dickinson referred to when she wrote to Thomas W. Higginson that “for several years, my Lexicon – was my only companion” (Letter 261).\(^{18}\) At a substantial 82,971 entries,\(^{19}\) that dictionary was the universal choice in the United States for a comprehensive dictionary in the sense that we understand it today. The completeness of *Webster* makes it a strict arbiter: examples from a long list of Dickinsonian words that might be thought to have been neologisms, but surprise the reader by their disqualifying presence in *Webster*, include *fashionless, hueless, marrowless, un plausible, untumbled* and *totalness*. It therefore constitutes a logical qualifying device for determining neologism in Dickinson’s work: excluding obvious anomalies such as proper nouns and inflected forms, we may reasonably say that if it’s not in her “Lexicon”, then it is very likely that she coined it. In fact, this is the only poet-study chapter in this thesis that has the benefit of such a single arbiter (because the *OED*, the first genuinely complete English dictionary, was not published until late in the modernist period), and so I have taken the opportunity offered by that fact to present a little quantitative research on the prevalence of neologisms in Dickinson. It will probably count as neologisms a very small number of words

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that the poet knew from another source but for some reason escaped Noah Webster; but I did not attempt to make judgments that may involve some guesswork, preferring to maintain consistency so as to be able to compare Dickinson’s counts with those of other poets. Indeed, the reverse is also possible – there may exist words in Webster that should have been counted because Dickinson coined them independently without knowledge of their dictionary entries. This section is sometimes unapologetically quantitative, but whereas weight of numbers is not in itself proof of poetic significance, we may still make a prima facie case by demonstrating that neologism occurs more often in Dickinson’s poetry than in that of comparable poets.

Miller spends about four pages on neologism, 20 but states that “coined words amount to only slightly more than 2 per cent of Dickinson’s total [poetic] vocabulary (a percentage comparable to that in poetry by Keats, Lanier and Emerson)” 21 (emphasis mine). She cites a 1957 article by William Howard, ‘Emily Dickinson’s Poetic Vocabulary’, 22 for her statement, but recourse to Howard’s article shows that Miller’s parenthetical comment is actually not supported there: Howard does arrive at the 2 per cent figure, and also terms it “only”, but – in an article where he makes a variety of quantitative comparisons with other poets’ work – he does not offer comparative figures on neologism. Howard counts 159 words “that are not recognized by the dictionaries of Emily Dickinson’s time”, 23 by which he means the 1846 and 1849 editions of Webster. He does not present a list, but gives a number of examples from various

20 Miller, pp. 59–63.
21 Miller, p. 59.
23 Howard, p. 229.
categories. It must first be stipulated that it is impossible to avoid occasional subjective decisions on what words qualify as Dickinson coinages. The short list of examples of “compound words” (from his stated count of 43, which on my definition is greatly inflated) given by Howard is instructive in this respect: “by-thyme, co-eternity, egg-life, goer by, To Come, wizard fingers” (230). I would classify these as follows. By-thyme is a compound, though one could make a case for affixation; co-eternity is an affixation; egg-life is a compound; goer by seems just a quaint variant of “passer-by”, and a questionable inclusion given that it is not hyphenated and its two component words are both in Webster. To Come is an especially interesting case that illustrates the power, and sometimes ambiguity, of conversion in the hands of a poet such as Dickinson:

The Future – never spoke –
Nor will He – like the Dumb –
Reveal by sign – a syllable
Of His Profound To Come –

‘The future never spoke’ (Fr638)

It has been read by Howard as a noun phrase and therefore arguably a kind of two-word conversion. But, conversions and Dickinson’s elastic syntax being what they are, could it not also be that Profound is a noun conversion signifying of a kind of mysterious depth possessed by the Future, which is, of course, yet “To Come”? We saw in Chapter II a similar doubt raised by Corns with respect to Milton’s “palpable obscure”, an ambiguity likewise made available by the syntactic flexibility (of different kinds) shared by these two poets. Lastly, wizard fingers seems an unexceptional, if poetic, combination of attributive-noun–noun; although the phrase might never have been written previously, without a hyphen it
is no more a neologism than “bedroom window”. I do not include such pairs of separate words in neologism counts, for if they are included, then what about three words? How then can we distinguish neologisms from unorthodox syntactic units? I maintain here the simple approach stated in the Introduction, that a neologism must be a single (possibly hyphenated) word.

Notwithstanding the inevitable grey areas exemplified above, Howard’s criterion of concordance words unrecognized by an appropriate dictionary is a reasonable approach, but it suffers from incompleteness: the great majority of conversions are excluded. One can infer from Howard’s list of examples that he has counted a small number of conversions: the ones, such as addings and heres, that betray their character by the accident of being nonstandard plurals or other unconventionally inflected forms. That is to say, if a poem had referred in the singular to “an adding” the word might have passed unremarked by Howard. In fact, he does not in his brief treatment recognize conversions as a class. As will be demonstrated shortly, that omission is a significant one.

The computer-assisted method of detecting Dickinson’s neologisms described in section 5 of the Introduction yielded 198 words that on the above criteria are neologisms. This process was not able to detect hyphenated compounds, nor most conversions. On my own judgment, I included just six of the former, which were added to the list of the previously obtained 198. Together, they and just three closed words (barehead, palmleaf, winterworn) found in this first pass yield an extraordinarily low total of just nine compound neologisms in Emily Dickinson’s entire poetical output, none of them other than gem-tactics (‘We play at paste’, Fr282, which is touched on in Ch. VIII) of any great breadth or originality. The
only conversions detected in that pass were those appearing in nonstandard
inflected forms, of the kind that were also the only examples cited by Howard.
Thus, in addition to his noted addings and heres, other conversions so explicit as
to be detectable by this process included: an adjective functioning as a verb in the
past tense as well as a superb catachrestic pun, bridalled, in the line “Born –
Bridalled – Shrouded” (‘Title divine is mine!’, Fr194); an adverb constructed
from a proper noun (the previously mentioned New Englandly); and a plural
formed from a non-count noun (chaoses). This last appears to be a variation on
the favourite Dickinson trick, mentioned below, of applying an indefinite article
to a non-count noun, but it has a more distinguished lineage that we can be
confident influenced Dickinson. R.D. Emma observes that:

The present view that abstract nouns such as wrath, revenge, importance, and
innocence should not take plural forms was not held by Shakespeare and his
contemporaries, who consequently sometimes gave such words a peculiarly
concrete quality. Milton retains the option of occasionally using these forms ...24

Emma goes on to cite examples from Milton’s prose such as insolencies and
vehemencies. Examples can be found in the poetry too: decencies, in Adam’s
paean to Eve, “... those graceful acts, / Those thousand decencies that daily flow /
From all her words and actions”;25 and idolatries (“And all the Idolatries of
Heathen round”).26 The nonstandard nature of these plurals strikes the reader on
the page, but generally conversions are less easy to spot than other neologisms: to
identify a word functioning in a nonstandard category, one must first parse its
context. Much poetry in general is frequently difficult to parse, and Emily

26 Milton, Paradise Regained, III, 418, p. 496.
Dickinson’s is notoriously harder than most. Not only does her syntax sometimes defy diagramming, her lexical ambiguity is a further complication. For example, in ‘To tell the beauty would decrease’ (Fr1689), the last word in the final line, “Of introspective Mines –” seems innocent enough, if enigmatic, until the suspicion arises that perhaps it does not signify digging places, but instead is a pluralized noun conversion of the possessive pronoun. Or both. To estimate the number of conversions in Dickinson’s œuvre, I undertook a one-in-five poem sampling process to enable an estimate of their frequency in the complete poems. Nineteen conversions were found in the sample: nine words converted to nouns, four to adjectives, one to a verb, one to an adverb, and four non-count nouns used as count nouns. From this proportion we may extrapolate that there are likely to be somewhere around 90–100 conversions in total in Dickinson’s poems, although that estimate comes with wide confidence limits.

To demonstrate the relative frequency of neologisms in Emily Dickinson’s poetry we may compare the proportion of such usages in her work with that of her peers. Using the same approach as above, I analysed samples of over 50 000 words by Dickinson’s fellow New England poets Emerson and Whittier (texts downloaded from Project Gutenberg, selected so as to be thematically and chronologically close to Dickinson’s work). For all neologisms detectable by the first pass of the method described above (that is, excluding hyphenated compounds and conventionally formed conversions), for Emerson the result was a rate of 1.06 per thousand words and for Whittier a rate of 0.62 per thousand. Dickinson’s 198 are from a corpus of 95 449 words, a rate of 2.07 per thousand. Dickinson’s rate at 2.07 per thousand nearly doubles Emerson’s rate of neologism and more than trebles Whittier’s. While we have compared her here with only two others, the
result is a strong indicator that she is indeed a relatively frequent coiner of words. To give a complete picture, we must also consider the two classes of neologism undetected by the spellcheck/dictionary tool. Both Emerson and Whittier, by inspection, use hyphenated compounds somewhat more frequently than Dickinson. The importance of this difference is mitigated by the observation that their general use of the hyphen is also much greater, and that the hyphenated compound is in any case arguably the least radical form of neologism.

Conversions, on the other hand, appear by inspection to be much more frequent in Dickinson’s work, where based on the one-in-five sample they appear approximately once per thousand words, a figure that increases Dickinson’s overall neologism rate to around three per thousand words. Table 1 summarizes the differences between Dickinson, Emerson and Whittier across all neologism types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neologism type</th>
<th>Dickinson</th>
<th>Emerson</th>
<th>Whittier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affixation</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound (closed)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound (hyphenated) (by inspection for Emerson, Whittier)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>more frequent</td>
<td>frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion (inflected form detected)</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion (by sampling for ED, inspection for Emerson, Whittier)</td>
<td>Approx. 1.00</td>
<td>infrequent</td>
<td>infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Frequency of various neologicist forms in the poetry of Emily Dickinson compared with two contemporaries.
Before proceeding to describe how Emily Dickinson puts her coinages to work in her poetry, I will make a few observations on the list of words found (always bearing in mind that the great majority of conversions are not included). Table 2 shows the classification of the 204 words (adding the six hyphenated compounds to the detected 198, but excluding the conversions found in the 20% sampling process).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neologism type</th>
<th>Subtype</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affixation (total 161)</td>
<td>-er, -est suffix</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-less suffix</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>negative prefix</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion (only those detected by scan)</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound (6 hyphenated, 3 closed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Numbers of neologism types in the poetry of Emily Dickinson (excluding an estimated 95 conventionally formed conversions).  

We are now able to summarize the neologisms detected. Affixation is the most frequent class, accounting for 161: of those, 76 are formed by nonstandard comparative and superlative suffixes on adjectives (contenteder, utterest); 55 by the addition of the suffix -less (perceiveless); 16 by various negative prefixes, all but one of them un- (unconjectured); and 14 in sundry other ways. The first two

27 Adding the approximation of 95 conversions – after first subtracting the 22 already detected, in order to avoid double-counting – an estimate of total neologisms is 277.

28 In the first two cases it needs to be emphasized that the 1844 Webster does appear to list explicitly all standard formations of that type, so that we can be confident that the absence of a word is a strong signifier of neologism: see the list of obscure words in Webster mentioned earlier
classes of affixation listed seem in their frequency to be characteristic of Dickinson, as the Emerson and Whittier neologisms (though from a smaller base) have only two -er/-est forms and no -less forms between them. Lewis Carroll’s “curiouser and curiouser” in *Alice in Wonderland*, noted in Chapter VI, has become famous, but by comparison Dickinson’s liberally scattered equivalents go almost unnoticed.

It is notable that taking the negative prefixations and -less suffixations together, 43 per cent of Dickinson’s affixations are negations of some kind. The meanings of the former types are generally straightforward, or at least as much so as any word in a Dickinson poem might be; those of the -less group, though, are less so. The negating suffix -less is noted by Howard to be popular with another Dickinson favourite, Keats, though “none of the unconventional ones used by Dickinson appear in the concordance to his poems”.29 Morag Harris has listed many echoes of Keats in Dickinson’s work,30 and proposes in particular a lineage that invokes Milton once again:

Among other habits of language, Emily Dickinson may also have developed her predilection for creating poetic ambiguity with unusual compounds of “-less” words after Keats (in turn perhaps after Coleridge, who has a plethora of such usages) and Milton. See for example “pathless” in *Il Penseroso*, II, 69–70.31

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29 Howard, p. 230, n19.
31 Harris, p. 144.
It is striking that many of Dickinson’s -less words are formed from verbs rather than nouns. Most common English words of that form denote simply the absence of something signified by a common noun: for example, breathless, careless, doubtful, to name three common, unexceptional cases in Dickinson’s work.

Many of her coinages (blanketless, crumbleless, pompless) follow that form, an easily translated shorthand for a two- or three-word phrase, though even when the root word is a noun, the poet’s meaning is sometimes not immediately apparent (latitudeless, leagueless). About half of them, on the other hand, add the suffix to a verb, following a pattern Dickinson will have observed in Shakespeare in words such as opposeless, exceptless and confineless, cited in Chapter II. Like those, her coinages of this form, such as conceiveless, o’ertakeless and postponeless, carry meanings that are not easy to gloss immediately on reading. In yet others it is unclear whether the root word is in fact a noun or a verb (grasless, reportless). This is a form especially given to ambiguity: does reportless mean without a report? Unreported? Unable to report? Unable to be reported? Dickinson adopted this peculiar <verb>-less form only in 1861, after practising poetry for some time: there is no instance of it, or indeed of any coinage in -less, in her first 250 poems. Some examples of its distinctive power will be studied in following sections.

Lastly, a note on distribution. Comparison of Emily Dickinson’s poetic output with the number of neologisms year by year shows a significantly higher rate of coinage in her four most prolific years, from 1862 to 1865. On Franklin’s dating, those four years account for almost exactly 50 per cent of Dickinson’s lifetime poetic output; yet (excluding the sampled conversions) 64 per cent of the detected neologisms fall into that same period, and thus 36 per cent in the remainder of her
work, so that she was in those peak years coining words at almost double the rate that she did in the years before and after. Various physical, mental and environmental factors have been proposed to explain the chronological unevenness of Dickinson’s output, but there is general agreement on a connection between her 1862–65 productive peak and the disturbance of which she wrote to Thomas Higginson in April 1862 (Letter 261): “I had a terror – since September – I could tell to none – and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground – because I am afraid – ”.32 Some writers have attempted to pathologize this “terror”. John F. McDermott, in a psychobiographical study of Dickinson’s output, identifies

... a sustained elevation of creative energy, mood, and cognition during [the 1862–65 peak]. They suggest, as supported by family history, a bipolar pattern previously described in creative artists.33

John Cody, employing different terminology, details a mental-illness “crisis” lasting from 1857 to 1864. One does not have to accept his or McDermott’s psychiatric approaches to agree with Cody that Dickinson in a number of poems engages in a form of self-analysis – psycho- or otherwise – exemplified by a poem of early 1862, ‘The soul has bandaged moments’, which includes the startling stanza:

The soul has moments of Escape –
When bursting all the doors –
She dances like a Bomb, abroad

---

And swings opon the Hours … 34

‘The soul has moments of escape’ (Fr360)

The explosively manic sense of those lines is reiterated by Dickinson in her correspondence. McDermott writes of the peak years:

Her almost constant stream of ideas, combined with a newfound energy, marked a new creative period. But she also saw it as a kind of fragmentation in a letter to Higginson: “I … cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize – my little Force explodes – and leaves me bare and charred – ”. 35

As has been shown, most neologisms are created from fragments. A resistance to rules and organization is a perfect mindset for the creation of new words. Perhaps in the letter quoted by McDermott, sent to Higginson in August, 1862 (Letter 271), 36 Dickinson is hinting at the kind of barely – yet so often successfully – controlled energy that might have caused her in that period to venture more frequently beyond the limitations of Noah Webster’s philology.

3. How Dickinson’s neologisms work

In a series of readings of poems employing neologisms, I will demonstrate in this section how they enable Dickinson to achieve many of the poetic effects described in the Introduction, and how neologism is of particular importance for her with regard to poetic closure. Certain classes of neologisms are shown to

35 McDermott, pp. 688–689.
work in recurring ways, indicating conscious intent in their deployment by the poet.

Why does a poet coin a word when an existing one (or several) might do? We noted that in the Renaissance period words might be truncated or extended by a syllable simply for metrical reasons. In Dickinson’s poetry, where metre is also important, the problem to be solved may occasionally be as pedestrian as the number of feet required in a line, but her solution is likely to be a little more interesting than an appended -y.

Where every Bird is bold to go
And Bees abashless play,
The Foreigner before he knocks
Must thrust the Tears away –

‘Where every bird is bold to go’ (Fr1179)

It is easy to believe here that the poet, requiring in line two a three-syllable, middle-accented synonym for “unabashed”, found abashless easily by using a formation she had by then used many times before. Even if this unexciting speculation is true of this poem, things will rarely be as straightforward as that. Dickinson clearly coined words in the service of poetic techniques such as defamiliarization, negation, ambiguity and ellipsis, as the examples throughout this section will show. This section will demonstrate neologism’s importance to Dickinson’s poetics by analysing how it works in some individual poems and remarking on the significance of evident patterns.

In her introduction to Emily Dickinson’s Grammar, Cristanne Miller observes that:
Almost all of Dickinson’s unusual uses of language contribute to the same limited number of basic effects: multiplicity of meaning, indeterminacy of reference and degree of personal involvement in the poem, and the establishment of a diction that swings between stylized aphorism and the informality of speech. Multiplicity, indeterminacy, and a fluctuating tone provide the poet with the linguistic and psychological freedom she needs to express, or inscribe, herself.37

Two of Miller’s effects, multiplicity of meaning and indeterminacy of reference, appear in our list of neologistic effects identified in the Introduction. In her terms, neologism is one of those “unusual uses of language”. This section will begin with some examples of how neologisms play an important part in achieving the effects that Miller identifies, and go on to other examples that illustrate in particular the prominence of negative formations.

As noted previously, some of Dickinson’s neologisms carry an apparently straightforward definition. Others yield up their meaning reluctantly, and the reader must ponder their context before decoding them in one or more ways. The first neologism in ‘Faith is the pierless bridge’ is in its title line, and the reader is immediately appreciative of a Dickinson pun.

Faith – is the Pierless Bridge
Supporting what We see
Unto the Scene that We do not –
Too slender for the eye

It bears the Soul as bold
As it were rocked in Steel

37 Miller, p. 18.
With Arms of steel at either side –
It joins – behind the Vail
To what, could We presume
The Bridge would cease to be
To Our far, vascillating Feet
A first Nescessity.

‘Faith is the pierless bridge’ (Fr978)

To take the punning sense first, the reader who inwardly vocalizes “peerless” is aware of its sense of “supreme”, “incomparable”. At the same time, the literal sense of the coined word connotes a bridge without supports. Further, Dickinson with her classical and Biblical education is likely to have had in mind the association by etymology of “pier” with stone and with the Biblical Peter upon whose faith Christ said he would build his church. So the poem sets out giving two meanings (although those meanings are not in conflict with one another) to the nature of the bridge that bears the soul from this world to the next, and an added association. We learn that it is “too slender” to be seen, which – given the absence of supports – makes the whole structure extremely insubstantial, yet paradoxically able to support a mass of steel. Hiding in the sixth line is a new sense, by conversion, “rocked”. What we have is the noun “rock” – the hard stuff – doing service as a verb meaning “encased securely as in rock”, as well as perhaps a hint of the care and tenderness with which a cradle is rocked; and, for good measure, repeating the Biblical allusion to Peter. In an alternative view, Shira Wolosky sees danger: the soul “‘rocked in steel’ may be more embedded

than secured or, alternatively, may be swaying to and fro on the precarious span, trapped rather than supported by ‘Arms of Steel’.” Wolosky, who sees the poem as a clear-eyed rebuttal of the hymns of the nineteenth-century faithful as exemplified by those of Isaac Watts, detects irony in the early part of the poem, “directed ... against the kind of unquestioning faith revealed in Watts’ verse”.

Having reached the end of the poem, the reader is brought back to the beginning with a fuller understanding of the import of both the literal and punning senses of *pierless*, each of which is individually clear.

Also under the heading of ambiguity fall the cases where the meaning of the single word cannot be pinned down, yet in context the poet’s intent remains relatively clear. ‘A solemn thing it was I said’ (Fr307), in common with a number of other Dickinson poems, contemplates the dedication of the speaker’s life to some more or less unnamed person, deity or cause, the nature of which is a regular cause for scholarly debate. Leaving that question aside, exactly what is the meaning of *plummetless* in the second stanza?

```
A hallowed thing – to drop a life
Into the purple well –
Too plummetless – that it return –
Eternity – until –
```

‘A solemn thing it was I said’ (Fr307)\(^{39}\)

That the life consigned to the metaphorical well does not plummet downwards?

But if it does not, then how has it fallen so deep that it cannot return “Eternity until”? Or is it dropping infinitely slowly because it is not weighed down by a

\(^{39}\) I have substituted alternate words (*hallowed, purple, return*) underlined in Dickinson’s manuscript in this stanza that editors before Franklin have thought to be her preference.
plummet of lead? Or perhaps it is the well that is so deep that it is not measurable by the plummet used for such purposes? Further obscurity is added by the elision of “does not” from between the two words “it return”. Yet at the end of the stanza, because the reader is compelled to ponder for a moment over the unfamiliar, an overall sense is achieved that mediates among depth, distance and mystery, in a way that would have been impossible using any single word from Dickinson’s lexicon.

*Plummetless* is also a case of indeterminacy of reference – the life or the well?

Another example of indeterminacy occurs in ‘Of bronze and blaze’:

```
Of Bronze – and Blaze –
The North – Tonight –
So adequate – it forms –
So preconcerted with itself –
So distant – to alarms –
An Unconcern so sovreign
To Universe, or me –
Infests my simple spirit
With Taints of Majesty –
Till I take vaster attitudes –
And strut opon my stem –
Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,
For Arrogance of them –
My Splendors, are Menagerie –
But their Competeless Show
Will entertain the Centuries
```
When I, am long ago,
An Island in dishonored Grass –
Whom none but Daisies, know –

‘Of bronze and blaze’ (Fr319)

The speaker at the poem’s opening is lost in wonder at the aurora and its glorious self-possession, and feels her spirit touched by it. That in the middle section she is referring to her art is clear from the rejected manuscript alternates: lines 8 and 9 formerly read “It paints my simple spirit / With tints of Majesty”, with the poet later settling upon the pejorative “Infests” and “Taints” to emphasize the negativity of the effect on her soul. The indeterminacy arises in the last six lines, which include two neologisms: the conversion of menagerie from noun to adjective\(^{40}\) and the new word competeless, upon which (in conjunction with the referential ambiguity of the preceding “their”) the poem’s intent turns. This is the first of several examples to be encountered in this chapter of how the previously noted form \(<\text{verb}>\)-less is especially hard to interpret. If that word had been explicated in the verse, to something clearly meaning either “with which I cannot compete” or “with which others cannot compete”, this indeterminacy would be lost. But as it stands: is “their Competeless Show” that of the speaker’s “Splendors”, works of art that outlive her, or is it of the natural wonders to the north, their Show as against My Splendors? If the former, we are reading at the end a confident self-assessment of the speaker’s artistic legacy, in which the effect of “Menagerie” – just a collection of creatures/creations for people to gawp at – reads almost as false modesty; if the latter, she is acknowledging the

\(^{40}\) “Menagerie” is also arguably a conversion of noun to adjective in ‘The show is not the show’ (Fr1270): “Menagerie to me / My Neighbor be”.

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inadequacy of the artist – at least, this artist – in attempting to mimic nature, and so the strut, disdain and arrogance described in the middle section are seen to be idle. Some critics, including Charles R. Anderson and Harold Bloom, do not report this ambiguity (they generally read the “Show” as the poet’s “Splendors”);  

Roland Hagenbüchle, who does, concludes that regardless of which reading is accepted, “it is the unbridgeable difference between the two realms which affects the poet.”  

Perhaps; but there is always the danger, articulated by Joanne Feit Diehl, that “such indeterminacy of language, despite the authoritative force of individual poems, may signal the potential breakdown of the word’s capacity to bear the pressures of simultaneous, antithetical meanings that deconstruct each other.”

Another introspection on the nature of the artistic mind is ‘To own the art within the soul’, a reflection on the self-sufficiency afforded by the inner life of the artist, whose soul supports a kind of silent residency that entertains it.

To own the Art within the Soul
The Soul to entertain
With Silence as a Company
And Festival maintain

Is an unfurnished Circumstance

41 CR Anderson, Emily Dickinson’s Poetry: Stairway of Surprise, Heinemann, London, 1963, pp. 49–54; H Bloom, Poets and Poems, Chelsea House, Philadelphia, PA, 2005, pp. 21–23 (where Bloom states “I no longer agree with Charles R. Anderson’s strong commentary upon this poem, which interprets its teaching as being that ‘the mortal poet corrupts his true nature if he attempts to be divine’ and that ‘the poet must remain earth-bound.’ That tends to negate Dickinson’s subtler ironies, which dominate the poem.”)


Possession is to One
As an Estate perpetual
Or a reduceless Mine.

‘To own the art within the soul’ (Fr1091)

This supply of inner stimulation is as unfailingly permanent as a perpetual estate or a mine whose resources do not diminish. The poem is strangely ambivalent about this apparently enviable situation: in the first stanza we are told that the soul’s theatrical “Company” maintains a “Festival”, yet in the second this is no more than “an unfurnished Circumstance”. “Unfurnished”, though it appears here to mean simply “not supplied from without”, contributes, along with several other words, to a rising air of property and the realtor. The poem begins in the intangible realms of art and the soul, and then, beginning with the word “Company” in the first stanza and strengthened in the second by “unfurnished”, “Possession”, “Estate perpetual” and “Mine”, shifts into a solidly secular diction. There is no punctuation (other than the final full stop) to help clarify the poet’s intent, and, significantly, neither is there a personal pronoun throughout the eight lines – or so it seems. Dickinson’s “degree of personal involvement in the poem” might be guessed from the number of other poems concerned with the artistic imagination, notwithstanding her famous demurral casting “a supposed person” as the “I” in many of her verses (Letter 268).44

At the last line, “Or a reduceless Mine” we encounter the coinage reduceless, yet another case of the previously noted idiosyncratic -less suffixation to a verb root. It is a good example of Dickinsonian ellipsis, coining one three-syllable word

where a much larger number would otherwise be required. The reader’s applause at that neat trick might cause the next word to go unnoticed. The unresolved personal-pronoun tension of the previous seven lines is subtly cleared by the final double meaning of “Mine”. In its punning sense it is a conversion of the first-person possessive into a noun – as Diehl puts it, “the ‘mine’ of the isolate self … whose hidden reserves will never fail because they lie buried deep within”\textsuperscript{45} – and in its ambiguity the unambiguous signing-off of the poet as speaker. The same pun also concludes ‘To tell the beauty would decrease’ (Fr1689): “A Rapture as of Legacies – / Of introspective Mines – ”. That poem, incidentally, earlier invokes “a syllable-less Sea” for an ineffable quality that invokes at once inexpressibility and muteness.

It is no coincidence that the -\textit{less} suffix, which (in different ways) negates the root to which it is attached, has been prominent in the previous set of examples. Its frequency in Dickinson’s work is well known. It was noted in Section 2 that she came to this form of coinage (or it came to her) only around 1861, after she had already written over 250 poems. It is fitting that its first appearance, a double one of \textit{degreeless} and \textit{concernless}, is in ‘A clock stopped’, for Dickinson’s lexical genius is on full display here.

\begin{quote}
A Clock stopped –
Not the Mantel’s –
Geneva’s farthest skill
Cant put the puppet bowing –
That just now dangled still –
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} Diehl, p. 38.
An awe came on the Trinket!
The Figures hunched – with pain –
Then quivered out of Decimals –
Into Degreeless noon –

It will not stir for Doctor’s –
This Pendulum of snow –
This Shopman importunes it –
While cool – concernless No –

Nods from the Gilded pointers –
Nods from the Seconds slim –
Decades of Arrogance between
The Dial life –
And Him –

‘A clock stopped’ (Fr259)

Syntactically the poem is orthodox by Dickinson’s standards, but the extended metaphor of the stopping of a Swiss clock to describe death employs a vocabulary among the richest in all her work. Throughout the poem the reader is repeatedly arrested by startling combinations: “awe … on the Trinket”, “Figures hunched with pain” (unexceptional were it not that the figures, in context, are those on the clockface), “Pendulum of snow”, “Decades of Arrogance”. The lexis connotes both space and time (and their measurement) – “farthest”, “Figures”, “Decimals”, “Degreeless”, “Seconds”, “Decades” – finishing, in the last three lines, with an Einsteinian combination of the two. Even on the page, the poem’s layout models the nature of human life, beginning and ending with lines broken into two, thus exhibiting in the lineation the delimited rise and decline of life – especially
decline, in the finality of the poem’s dying fall. All of this serves to establish the matter of relentless fact that is death, and the immediate opening of the space-time chasm between the living and the dead – “the Distance / On the look of Death”, as Dickinson put it at around the same time (‘There’s a certain slant of light’, Fr320).

There are at least two, and arguably three, neologisms at work in this poem. First is the superb ambiguity of “Degreeless Noon”, placed right at the centre – the noon – of the poem. Here is a case where the inherent polysemy of the word is barely restricted by its context, and in some ways the ambiguity it achieves is enhanced by allusions around it. The reader who thinks of another measuring device, the thermometer, may immediately think of zero degrees, prefiguring the “snow” and “cool” of the following stanza; or, more mysteriously, a place where temperature is irrelevant, indeterminate or non-existent (“out of Decimals”). Further, as Anderson points out in an extended appreciation of the poem, when the hands of a clock have both swept around to meet at 12 and begin a new cycle, there is no angle – zero degrees – between them.\footnote{Anderson, p. 236.} The second -less word, modifying an idiosyncratic non-count noun usage of “no” that is itself borderline neologism, appears in the last line of the third stanza, which is an echo of that of the second. “Concernless No” is clear enough: death cares nothing for our futile attempts to bring it undone (and perhaps it also asserts a kind of omniscience in a homonymic conversion, “Concernless Know”). In the last stanza, as death gains distance between itself and its victim, the unconcern looms into “Arrogance”, a word which Anderson notes is used elsewhere by Dickinson in “defining the
hostile encounter between life and death”. The central metaphor of the poem is
made explicit, casually yet so tellingly, in the second line, “Not the Mantel’s – “, three simple words that merely state what the clock in question is not. That mortal negation echoes through the poem in “can’t”, “will not” and “No” (and the multiplication of that word by alliterative echoes in “Nods” in succeeding lines), and the coined -less words, all of which contribute in their negativity to the purpose of the poem: as Anderson puts it, “her chief concern is with the moment of death … not with the moment beyond.” Katharina Ernst, who also sees the poem as concerned with death’s “inherent aspect of finality”, suggests that “for Dickinson human finitude is generated by the most fundamental negation of infiniteness, death.”

Like her heroes Shakespeare and Milton, especially the later Milton of Paradise Lost, Dickinson was prolific with negative affixation: as established above, suffixation in -less and the nonstandard use of un- and other negative prefixing account for nearly half of Dickinson’s affixations. The importance of negation in Dickinson’s poetry has been analysed by many critics, including Miller, who notes from Rosenbaum’s Concordance that “Dickinson uses the word not more often than any words but articles, a few prepositions, and and, it, is, and that.” Often cited is the quotation from her letter to Judge Otis Lord, “‘No’ is the wildest word we consign to Language” (Letter 562). It is worthwhile to

49 K Ernst, “‘It was not Death, for I stood up...’: “Death” and the Lyrical I’, Emily Dickinson Journal, vol. 6, no. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 2–3.
50 Ernst, p. 6.
51 Garner, pp. 158–166 passim.
52 Corns, pp. 84–85.
53 For example, R Hagenbüchle, ‘Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson’, Emerson Society Quarterly [ESQ], vol. 20, 1st Quarter 1974, p. 42; Miller, p. 89.
54 Dickinson, Letters, p. 246.
remember the preceding context for that declaration, which is not lexical but loving: “Dont you know you are happiest while I withhold and not confer?” The power of the negative to express love in words is well attested: Dickinson used it in such poems as ‘I cannot live with you’ (Fr706) and ‘I have no life but this’ (Fr1432). She would have been familiar with the classic repeated negations, touched on in Chapter I, of both St Paul (I Corinthians 13) and Shakespeare (‘Let me not to the marriage of true minds’, Sonnet 116, which seems likely to have been inspired by the Biblical text).

When one examines the list of Emily Dickinson’s neologisms prefixed with un-, it is notable that a number of them, like many of Milton’s un- words both neologistic and otherwise, negate adjectives that are themselves negative in connotation: for example, unbereft, undecaying, unjaded, unpuzzled and unluctantly all essentially yield a positive meaning when logically unpacked. However, unbereft, in ‘You love me – you are sure’ (Fr218), turns out to be a renegade: the un- does not reverse the meaning but is redundant, the meaning in context being in fact (in the poem’s first irony) “bereft”,55 as in orchards bereft of sunshine. Chapter I outlined two approaches to poetic negation, from Peter Stockwell and Lisa Nahajec. Each can help throw some light on this poem, which is slight in character but packed with negation. It is lexically a classic example of prolific Dickinsonian negation, presenting in the first two stanzas a pattern of repeated negative propositions designed, as they are in I Corinthians 13 and Sonnet 116, to convince the reader of an affirmation: in this case to persuade its

55 A similarly redundant un- appears in the coinage unbared, in ‘She dealt her pretty words like blades’ (“… And every One unbared a Nerve”) (Fr458), a poem which George Frisbie Whicher speculates (This Was a Poet, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, NY, 1938, p. 36) may also refer to Sue.
putative addressee, Emily Dickinson’s sister-in-law Sue, here called by her pet
name, Dollie, of the speaker’s need for reassurance of Dollie’s comforting love
and presence. In this case, though, the negative propositions are phrased as
anxious questions with a required negative response. The first stanza is sufficient
to illustrate the diction:

You love me – you are sure –
I shall not fear mistake –
I shall not *cheated* wake –
Some grinning morn –
To find the Sunrise left –
And Orchards – unbereft –
And Dollie – gone!

‘You love me – you are sure’ (Fr218)

In the following stanza the negatives continue to pile up: “need not”, “never be”,
“no more”, “none”. And in the first two stanzas, similarly to the Biblical and
Shakespearean verses above, there are many other words of an implicit negative
“frightened”, “dark”. Throughout, the feared object is itself a negative: the
absenting, the subtraction, of Dollie from the speaker’s life. All of the above
seems almost excessive in its negativity. In the last stanza the voice changes
slightly from questioning to imploring:

Be sure you’re sure – you know –
I’ll bear it better now –
If you’ll just tell me so –
Than when – a little dull Balm grown –
Over this pain of mine –
You sting – again!

‘You love me – you are sure’ (Fr218)

Line 2 introduces an ambiguous “it”, which might be the fear of Dollie’s absence or might be the “pain” that is introduced only in the penultimate line. Only on reaching the last two lines does the eavesdropping reader realize that the speaker has indeed deliberately overstepped, that the poem is an ironic riposte to a real or imagined neglectful slight from Sue. Nahajec’s second, “expectations” aspect of poetic negation is at work here in the series of feared scenes of what might happen. A variation of Stockwell’s model can also be applied, in which the reader is in this case overwhelmed by the mass of negation – not by its complexity, but by the lexically-fuelled build-up of the speaker’s apparently genuine fear of abjection – so that the relief of the ironic ending is maximized. Returning to the coinage unbereft – is the redundant un-, like the -y in Shakespeare’s vasty, simply a device to fill a metre? In this case, it seems more likely that it is intended to add to the total, excessive weight of negativity in the diction, the more effectively because the prefix itself is logically excessive.

It was noted earlier that a large number of Emily Dickinson’s neologicist -less suffixes are also syntactically unorthodox, in being attached to a root that is a verb rather than a noun, and that this form is inherently more difficult to gloss than <noun>-less, which in most cases is simply and literally “without <noun>”. To demonstrate this, let us analyse how the suffix operates on its root in several examples where the intended meanings are relatively clear but differ from each other in how the -less component operates. In ‘Where every bird is bold to go’ (Fr1179), abashless in the line “And bees abashless play” clearly is synonymous
with “unabashed”. The adverb *consolelessly* in ‘’Tis not the swaying frame we miss’ (Fr1631), in the lines “Ourselves, denied the privilege, / Consolelessly presume – ” glosses (in its adjectival part) as “inconsolable”. These two are similar yet subtly different in their suffixal effects. Slightly different again is *competeless* in the earlier discussed ‘Of bronze and blaze’ (Fr319), clearly meaning “unable to be competed with”, and necessarily differing again in structure from the previous example because of the intransitivity of “compete”.

Entirely at odds with those three, in ‘Always mine’ (Fr942), is *failless*, in the lines “Failless as the fair rotation / Of the Seasons and the Sun”, simply translating as “unfailing”. Each of the above words is relatively straightforward in meaning, and each may well be a case of the poet meeting a metrical requirement, but collectively, in the variety of their parsings, they establish that Dickinson had no consistent pattern of sense in mind when coining words of this form. It follows that the relative ease with which we interpret those examples is a result of their respective contexts, not of a lexical rule. In the polysemy allowed by that fact, and the consequent responsibility imposed on the reader to work at their meanings in context, lies the poetic power of many, more problematic, such coinages.

The examples of *plummetless* and *degreeless* (which as a formation from a noun is particularly unexpected in its three-way ambiguity), given earlier in this section, show how such ambiguity enhances the mystery at the heart of some of Emily Dickinson’s best work. One more example is ‘Still own thee – still thou art’:

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Still own thee – still thou art
What Surgeons call alive –
Though slipping – slipping – I perceive
```
To thy reportless Grave –

Which question shall I clutch –

What answer wrest from thee

Before thou dost exude away

In the recallless sea?

‘Still own thee – still thou art’ (Fr1654)

The poem is addressed to a dying friend who is slipping away “To thy reportless Grave”. Although own in the opening three words falls short of being a neologistic conversion, it is still a creative repurposing. If own is a verb here, it is not the one that we understand from standard English, carrying instead a sense of self-possession, or retention of a soul. Or perhaps this is a sentence fragment, and own is a modifier for thee. The neologism reportless is difficult enough to gloss – either a place from which the dead cannot report back to the living, or perhaps just “anonymous” – and then we encounter the final two lines, “Before thou dost exude away / In the recallless sea?” Dickinson is first using exude in a sense that stretches its archaic, intransitive sense (see the OED) into a cryptic new meaning,56 and then inventing a word, recallless, that breaks a spelling convention for good measure. Three simultaneous possible senses for this word were cited in the Introduction to this thesis, two from Daneen Wardrop (the sea has no memory, we cannot recall the sea), and an additional one of my own (we cannot recall the dying from the sea). The stylization of its triple l and its double s (triple s when the following letter is added) impart a typographical wave-like

56 The manuscript has the prosaic (and inappropriately physical) alternative dissolve rejected for exude. A clue to this strange usage may lie in the surprising fact that exude does not appear in Dickinson’s beloved 1844 Webster, and so she may have inferred its meaning a little inaccurately from her reading.
quality. Wardrop comments further, at the end invoking one of the four attributes of neologism advanced in this thesis:

> Anyone who might still contend that Dickinson practiced her art unconsciously, that she was just a ‘natural’ and wrote spontaneously without craft, would do well to look at this daring and outré word. Surely Dickinson provides few more artificed words ... an example of lexical strangeness gone one step stranger.57

The enigmatic “recallless sea” serves as an introductory example of Dickinson’s fondness for indeterminacy, which was identified in Chapter I as another of the poetic functions achieved through neologism. Dickinson uses many words or phrases, deliberately obscure in denotation, to signify abstract or semi-abstract places or states of being, “circumference” being the most famous. It is striking, and suggestive of deliberate technique, that many of those signifiers are, or make use of, neologisms. A short, representative list is: affixations in “Degreeless Noon”, “Leagueless Opportunity” (both discussed earlier), “Latitudeless Place” and “undepicted Realms”; the compound “By-Thyme”; and the conversions “Death’s immediately” and “the Beautiful”. Even where neologisms are not present, Dickinson frequently achieves the same mysterious effect by choosing words such as “circumference” and “noon” that in prosaic usage carry a clearly-defined meaning; once we exclude their definitions “circular perimeter” and “midday” respectively from her intent, we might as well be dealing with new words. The last four of the above list and “recallless sea” share a further characteristic: they conclude the poems in which they appear. Such a consistent pattern suggests a consciousness of the effects of neologism and the specific

57 Wardrop, pp. 159–160.
intent to leave the reader with a deep impression of the signified places or states.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith summarizes poetic closure thus:

Closure occurs when the concluding portion of a poem creates in the reader a sense of appropriate cessation. It announces and justifies the absence of further development; it reinforces the feeling of finality, completion and composure which we value in all works of art; and it gives ultimate unity and coherence to the reader’s experience of the poem by providing a point from which all the preceding elements may be viewed comprehensively and their relations grasped as part of a significant design.58

Smith’s last point, in relation to the Dickinson poems that end with these enigmatic neologisms, needs to be paired with a complementary one: not only does the conclusion facilitate comprehension of the preceding elements, but its own neologistic mystery is in turn illuminated by them.

This reciprocity is exemplified in ‘As imperceptibly as grief’ (Fr935), which terminates with Dickinson’s conversion of beautiful from adjective to noun. Though Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant both predate her in their philosophical concepts of “the beautiful”, the earlier authors’ shared sense is quite different, being an abstraction something like “the set of things that are beautiful”; and in any case, Jack Capps mentions no evidence for either being among Dickinson’s reading.59

As imperceptibly as Grief
The Summer lapsed away –

59 Capps, pp. 225, 230 (index).
Too imperceptible at last
To seem like Perfidy –
A Quietness distilled
As Twilight long begun,
Or Nature spending with herself
Sequestered Afternoon –
The Dusk drew earlier in –
The Morning foreign shone –
A courteous, yet harrowing Grace,
As Guest, that would be gone –
And thus, without a Wing
Or service of a Keel
Our Summer made her light escape
Into the Beautiful –

‘As imperceptibly as grief’ (Fr935)

Towards the end the reader takes in the double meaning of “made her light escape”, and then reaches the simple last line. The poem in earlier versions was separated into four-line stanzas, each of which except the last terminates with a standard iambic trimeter (“To seem like Perfidy”, “Sequestered Afternoon”, “As Guest, that would be gone”). Smith’s study, which explores many poetic techniques used to effect closure, says of metre, “if the poet wishes to disturb the reader’s complacent expectation of continuation (either for closure or for any other reason), one of the most effective devices he could use would be simply a longer or shorter line.” While Dickinson’s last line is still of six syllables, the metre is no longer firm. The purely iambic reading, “Into the Beautiful” sounds

60 Smith, pp. 43–44.
strained because the normal emphasis in the word “into” is on the first syllable (Webster confirms that this was also the case in Dickinson’s time), and when that word is so read, the iambic beat is disrupted. Depending on the reader, the line either begins with a trochee, or – in the most naturalistic reading – like the light, departs quickly and quietly, as two dactyls, “Into the Beautiful”. This interruption to pattern foregrounds the last word even more than does its own strange place-noun form, prompting the reader to ponder what importance “the Beautiful” has to the meaning of the poem as a whole. Anderson’s account61 attends first to the “strangeness of [summer’s] evanescence … her overt theme”. He highlights a number of single words – “lapsed”, “sequestered”, “foreign”, “harrowing” – as contributing to that effect in different ways. In introducing the “more complex meaning [of] the poet’s ambivalent reaction to this strange evanescence” he offers this possibility:

“Summer made her light escape” into heaven – though without benefit of “a Wing”. This may be another way of saying that the grief of human experience has been transformed into the beauty of her poem. Yet the lapsing of life into art (summer into autumn), like the escape through death into immortality, would seem like “Perfidy” to the living if it did not come about so imperceptibly.

This whole poem is as light as air – or aery-light, to use Milton’s coinage mentioned in Chapter III. There are just three concrete nouns, none of them used in a concrete way: “Guest” is used only in simile, and “Wing” and “Keel” are referenced only by their absence.62 In fact, those two words serve a significant negating purpose with respect to the puzzle of “Into the Beautiful”. Dickinson in

61 Anderson, pp. 149–150.
62 Lindberg-Seyersted (p. 230) cites Teut Andreas Riese’s analysis of the whole poem as employing “negation of a less direct kind”.

“without a Wing / Or service of a Keel”, in case we might think Summer is
heading somewhere more prosaic, like “into the sky” or “out to sea”, explicitly
rules out those directions.

Sigrid Renaux emphasizes Dickinson’s specific intent in respect of the poem’s
abstraction by pointing out that four additional stanzas in the middle of the first
version of the poem, containing descriptions of more tangible natural processes,
were deleted by the poet in four subsequent copies. Unlike Anderson, Renaux
interprets the poem as principally concerned with the nature of light itself,
which she shows to be a constant preoccupation of the poet, explicitly
differentiating herself from critics (she cites Yvor Winters and Roy Harvey
Pearce), who see its principal theme as the transit of grief. Her analysis is mostly
structural and linguistic, and concludes:

[T]he Summer is ‘ours’, but light is ‘hers’, and this is why summer can make it
escape, imperceptibly, confirming the ineffability of the noun ‘Beautiful’ (from
the Latin bell(us)+itat) as a concept or ideal of beauty connoting aesthetic
delight, which always lies beyond our reach.

“Ineffable” is a fine word for “the Beautiful”. What better way for Dickinson to
name something that cannot be put into words than to deploy an old and beloved
word in a new way? “It is the Ultimate of Talk – / The Impotence to Tell – ” (‘If
what we could were what we would’, Fr540).

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65 The phrase “made her light escape” is ambiguous, but the natural reading is surely the one in
which “light” is an adjective and “escape” a noun. That Renaux misses it in favour of her
alternative, in which “light” is a noun and “escape” a verb, may be because English is not her first
language. While the double meaning of “light” does enrich the poem’s conclusion, this appears to
be a rare case where one cannot suspect Dickinson of an intentional ambiguity. Renaux’s apparent
misreading is immaterial to the aptness of her word “ineffability”.

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The example just discussed serves to introduce the “artificed words” that comprise the various forms of conversion, in which Dickinson was especially prolific. Her preferred reading will have provided her with instances:

Shakespeare’s particular propensity for conversions has already been noted. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted writes: “Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Dickinson’s ‘private’ diction is the relatively great freedom she shows in experimenting with form-class categories” (that is, category-shifting, or conversion). Lindberg-Seyersted presents a list, long but still incomplete, of ways in which Dickinson deploys the technique: noun as adjective (“So gay, so Brigadier – ”), noun as verb (“Born – Bridalled – Shrouded – ”), adjective as noun (“We talk in careless – and in toss – ”), verb as noun (“a Shall”), adverb as noun (“Forever – is composed of Nows – ”), non-count nouns as count nouns (“I wish I were a Hay – ”) and – less commonly – vice versa (“Much Billow”). To Lindberg-Seyersted’s list can be added, both from the one poem (‘Experience is the angled road’, Fr899), noun as adverb (“By – Paradox – the Mind itself – ”) and verb as adjective (“How Complicate / The Discipline of Man – ”); and, no doubt, more examples from other poems.

Lindberg-Seyersted suggests that conversions may be a more noticeably “private” feature of Dickinson’s diction than other classes of coinage: “Since grammar is more fixed than lexis, it is natural that the poet’s deviations in that category should be more conspicuous.” The line from ‘A clock stopped’ containing both an affixation and a marginal conversion, “While cool – concernless No – ”, serves

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67 The poem’s contextual sentence makes it clear that paradox is an ellipsis for “paradoxically”.
68 It is noted in Chapter VII, section 4, that Mina Loy and Wallace Stevens also both employed this form.
69 Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 117.
as a useful, if not conclusive, illustration. Before proceeding to the next line, the reader has already processed “concernless” as a new word and translated it without difficulty into “unconcerned”, but the odd sound of “No” reverberates through the next two lines until its unorthodox syntactic and semantic role has been fulfilled. Paradoxically, this two-letter word is typically associated with negation, yet is made to nod; and it is typically associated with finality, yet is made to run on into two more lines. Lindberg-Seyersted’s “conspicuous” may be not quite the right word in this case: the newness of “concernless” is plain, whereas the way the poet is deploying “No” (and possibly its homonym) might not be so manifest to the reader’s eye yet is still more important to the poem.

Emily Dickinson’s occasional blurring of the distinction between count and non-count nouns is perhaps of minor poetic power, the strangeness of the usage contributing rather to a general sense of oddity where it appears. But it is a technique very much her own: Lindberg-Seyersted notes a total of nineteen instances70 (that count may not be exhaustive), whereas among the poets who were on her bookshelf, and for that matter poets generally, it is rare. No doubt Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ would have been very familiar to her – indeed, one imagines it might have been a particular favourite – and there Dickinson would have found “verdurous glooms”. (For good measure, a few lines on, there is “Darkling I listen” – not a neologistic conversion, but hovering in a Dickinson-esque ambiguity somewhere among noun, adverb and adjective.) Of particular interest in this category is her usage of the word “plush”, significant because it is one of her “favourite” words, used both frequently (eleven times) and variously:

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70 Lindberg-Seyersted, p. 117; notes 2, 4.
in its conventional senses, in other senses that are clearly nonstandard, and twice
– “One would as soon assault a Plush – / Or violate a Star – ” (‘What soft cherubic creatures’, Fr675) and “Such pluses at command” (‘How soft a caterpillar steps’, Fr1523) – as a count noun. In Language as Gesture, R. P. Blackmur exemplifies the early deprecatory view of Dickinson’s lexis, and, more widely, of the methods of her work as a whole, seeing the unorthodoxies as simply

wrongness, that “plush” was not what was meant at all, but was a substitute for it.
The word has been distorted but not transformed on the page; it is not in substantial control.71

That matter of “control” was at the heart of the difference between Dickinson’s early detractors and admirers, and it is surprising to see the modernist Blackmur, in 1952, still in the former camp. It was not simply a matter of faith, among those who disagreed with him, that in her best work Dickinson knew exactly what she was doing in such a deployment of a chosen word. Jane Donahue Eberwein’s view is representative of that now largely consensual opinion, in her assessment that “Dickinson welcomed words with delight, employed them with reverence, and excused them when they failed her summons”,72 but she still appears to miss the point about “a plush”:

Counterpointing “a Plush” (one tiny thread of a chair cover, one hair of a stuffed toy) with “a Star” (a seemingly microscopic but actually vast image), she startles the reader of ‘What Soft – Cherubic Creatures – ’ (P 401) by freshening the

72 JD Eberwein, Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA, 1985, p. 150.
To this reader, who didn’t visualize anything like Eberwein’s concrete translations of it, the effectiveness of “a plush” is precisely because the conversion into a count noun makes it suddenly indeterminate, deliberately removed from the set of possible familiar significations, leaving only something slight, soft and, well, plushy. Its nature is as elusive to us as that of a star, and it is that elusiveness that makes any form of “assault” futile.

One other category of Emily Dickinson’s neologisms should be mentioned: the unorthodox suffixations in -er and -est, particularly of long words (odiouser, antiquest) where one would expect to find “more” and “most” used. They introduce an archaic note, consistent with the observation of Bruce McElderry that such forms were common in Spenser’s time. Many of these appear to be idiosyncratic, almost flippant, or simply coined for the sake of brevity or scansion; rarely do they contribute greatly to the impact of a poem. One subgroup, though, is of interest. A small number of words, chiefer, chiefest, finallest, infiniter, perfecter, perfectest, supreme, supremest and utterest, gild the lily by taking a word which is itself a superlative and adding a comparative or superlative suffix for even greater emphasis. Many of them are deployed more than once – chiefest appears five times – giving a total of eighteen cases, enough to suggest a specific intent. This kind of thing had been done before in Dickinson’s country’s history; perhaps she had the founding fathers in mind with perfecter, but at least the “more perfect union” of their Declaration of Independence was achieved using dictionary words. In some cases metrical convenience may still be Dickinson’s

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73 Eberwein, pp. 150–151.
74 McElderry, p. 157.
motive, but alternative words would have been available in others: for example, in
the line “Together chiepest they are found” (‘As old as woe’, Fr1259) the
orthodox “chiefly” would have lost nothing in surface meaning or in metre. A
little web-based searching found no attestations of these words in Dickinson’s
New England, but chiepest, perfecter and perfectest are all present in Shakespeare
(as well as many non-superlative constructions in -er and -est such as such as
unhopefullest and wholesom’st). Perhaps there was some element of conscious or
unconscious modelling present in Dickinson’s more extensive use of amplified
superlatives.

4. Two qualities of Dickinson’s poetry

There remains a question of why: what is it about Dickinson’s poetics that made
her peculiarly disposed to create her new words, especially as she was writing in a
country, and at a time, where for poets neologism was not a common technique?
For those neologisms that are easy to parse and transparent as to meaning, the
answer can mostly be attributed to a combination of two factors. The first is
Dickinson’s quest for intensity of meaning through her distinctive form of
brevity, many of her coinages being simple ellipses, as shown in section 3, that
replace two or three other words. The second factor, which occurs often and
delightfully, is sheer playfulness, as seen examples rich in charm such as the droll
foolisher and New Englandly, or in the affixation omnifold, which thumbs its nose
at notions of well-formed etymology by mating a fancy Latin prefix with a
Middle English base. The many coinages that carry a greater weight of meaning
and significance, though, arise out of more momentous requirements. This chapter
will conclude by noting two aspects of Dickinson’s poetry – especially her best
poetry – that involved poetic challenges which neologism was particularly well suited to answer.

I will address first the quality of “scenelessness”, which has been noted by, among others, Gary Lee Stonum and Robert Weisbuch: that, in Stonum’s words, “[i]n poems that by their emotional intensity seem bound to specific, perhaps highly personal experiences or events, Dickinson regularly and conspicuously omits referents, occasions, scenes, narratives, contexts or anything else that might identify a concrete focus.”75 Weisbuch writes that she does so

... because assigning the poem to one aspect of experience will rob it of its vital versatility. This versatility depends upon what we can call scenelessness ...

scenes are not concrete but mentalized, illustratory, chosen, temporary, analogous. There is nothing quite like this scenelessness in any other poet ...76

This “sceneless” quality can be seen as a specific manifestation of indeterminacy, which we have identified as a poetic effect associated with neologism. Achieving it is no easy task for the poet, as it must defeat the natural tendency of the reader to create a mind’s-eye setting for “specific, perhaps highly personal experiences or events”. A number of techniques contribute to Dickinson’s achievement of it in those poems where it is a feature. One, ironically, is the large number of exotic place-names that she uses. William Howard notes 85 instances of “geographical place-names or terms”,77 yet almost all of them are alien – Tunis, Tenerife, the Alps. Local, even American, references are scant. Amherst, for example, appears

77 Howard, p. 230.
only twice, and in each case serving not as a setting but as a counterpoint to somewhere more mysterious, respectively Cashmere (‘If I could bribe them by a rose’, Fr176) and Paradise (‘What is “Paradise”’, Fr241). Dickinson’s fascination with other places has overtones of Victorian Orientalism, but it is more purposefully directed: one effect of Dickinson’s use of exotic locations is to divert the reader’s mind away momentarily from prosaic mental scene-setting to somewhere completely different. For instance, in ‘Civilization spurns the leopard’ (Fr276), the scenery of “Ethiop” and “Asia” opens our mind to a much wider range of possible interpretations of the poem than if it had been a first-person, domestic lament. A similar effect, of widening the reader’s scope beyond the ordinary, is gained by the use of neologisms. ‘Still own thee – still thou art’ (Fr1654), discussed in section 3, is one of a number of Dickinson poems concerned with a specific death. It addresses its subject in the second person, yet manages to direct our gaze away from the death-bed scene and the dying person – unlike, say, ‘The last night that she lived’ (Fr1100) – to his or her physical and spiritual destinations, by catching our attention with the thought-provoking reportless and recallless. ‘A nearness to tremendousness’ achieves a similar effect:

A nearness to Tremendousness –
An Agony procures –
Affliction ranges Boundlessness –
Vicinity to Laws

Contentment’s quiet Suburb –
Affliction cannot stay
In Acres – It’s Location
Is Illocality –

‘A nearness to tremendousness’ (Fr824)

The specific “Agony” that one suspects might have prompted the poem cannot be placed in time or space, an indeterminacy that is initiated with the rare, not neologistic, but very Dickinsonian tremendousness and boundlessness, and then is actually declared in the last four words of the poem with its concluding paradox-neologism.

The second aspect is Dickinson’s concern with the inexpressible, frequently noted by critics. Hagenbüchle, for example, writes:

Dickinson knows from the start … that the essentials of life cannot be put into language… [But] Like all great poets, Dickinson cannot stop trying:

My will endeavors for its word
And fails, but entertains
A Rapture as of Legacies –
Of introspective Mines – (P, 1700)

… [I]n total contrast to Emerson’s optimistic “presentiments” of a progressively increasing knowledge, Dickinson knows that she cannot know…

If I could tell how glad I was
I should not be so glad – … (P, 1668)78

Not only does she know she cannot know, but that knowledge is a constant theme in her poetry. Dickinson describes or alludes to this inexpressibility in a number

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78 Hagenbüchle, ‘Sign and Process’, pp. 152–153. The poems referred to as 1700 and 1668 are Fr1689 and Fr1725 respectively.
of other poems, some of them quoted elsewhere in the article by Hagenbüchle: to give just two instances, “By intuition, Mightiest Things / Assert themselves – and not by terms – ” (‘You’ll know it as you know ’tis noon, Fr429), and “Nature is what we know – / Yet have no art to say – ” (‘Nature is what we see’, Fr721). These are examples of what Josef Raab has called the “metapoetic element in Dickinson”, demonstrating her propensity to write about the act of writing poetry.79 Of the inexpressible, Raab writes: “Whereas a conventional and direct use of language cannot elucidate any hidden mysteries, an indirect use of words coupled with the poet’s indirect gaze (i.e., her imagination) may yield new insights.”80 Andrew Bennett makes a similar point, citing phrases from a poem, ‘Otherlife’, by John Burnside to illustrate how poetry can enable us to “catch / the otherlife of things” “before a look / immerses them”:

The poem is about the “pull of the withheld” in relation to the “known world” that surrounds us, about “something more”, something “half-seen”, that is not seen. It’s not only, of course, that the poem is about what is not known, not only that it tells a story in which nothing becomes known, but that it expresses that knowledge in a language of half-knowledge ...81

Bennett identifies the indeterminacy in Burnside’s poem as arising out of the disorder of its prosody and syntax, but clearly in Dickinson’s case neologism contributes, along with her slant and quirky diction, to her own “language of half-knowledge”. Hagenbüchle puts it like this:

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80 Raab, p. 281.
81 A Bennett, Ignorance: Literature and Agnoiology, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2009, p. 34.
... Emily Dickinson, despite all precision, also throws a veil of indeterminacy
over her poems; not because she wants to mystify the reader, but because

The thought beneath so slight a film
Is more distinctly seen –
As laces just reveal the surge –
Or Mists – the Appenine – (J 210)

Dickinson herself offers a prose version of this poem: “the inferential knowledge
the distinctest one” (L685).82

This indirectness is far from being a habit of mind. Dickinson’s well-known
devotion to her “lexicon”, the great number of alternative words she considered
and rejected in the process of composition, and the many poems that glitter with
clarity all attest to her capacity for word choices in the service of forceful, direct
and precise language in poems as diverse as ‘I taste a liquor never brewed’
(Fr207), ‘I felt a funeral in my brain’ (Fr340), ‘A bird came down the walk’
(Fr359) and ‘There’s been a death in the opposite house’ (Fr547). As Jed
Deppman, in an article on Dickinson’s definition poems, writes,

Dickinson’s definition poems and her general concern with naming as an index
of power also demonstrate her attentiveness to language and her concern that its
force be respected. Yet diction often failed to encompass the inexpressible ...83

So we can be sure that when she expands her vocabulary beyond Webster she is,
in Daneen Wardrop’s previously quoted words, not writing “spontaneously and
without craft”, but with deliberate calculation. Hagenbüchle’s “veil of

82 Hagenbüchle, ’Precision and Indeterminacy’, pp. 46–47. The poem referred to as J 210 is Fr203.
83 J Deppman, ‘I Could Not have Defined the Change: Rereading Dickinson’s Definition Poetry’,
indeterminacy” is often in evidence, with neologisms that are elusive as to meaning playing their part, in poems relating to the themes of the inexpressible. Examples from section 3 are *pierless, leagueless* and *o’ertakeless* in poems dealing with the territory between this world and the next, *syllable-less* in ‘To tell the beauty would decrease’ (Fr1689), a poem also quoted in this respect by Hagenbürchle in a passage appearing above, and the noun conversion of *beautiful* in a poem concerned with the nature of light.

One last example follows. Deppman goes on to write of Dickinson’s inexpressible themes that

... one can say as a rule that Dickinson’s definitional impulse was especially activated by the most undefinable of concepts and experiences. As she put it in the poem “How Human Nature dotes / On what it can’t detect – ” (Fr1440) the “subjects that resist” are the most intriguing … for Dickinson they were ecstatic encounters with overwhelming mastery and authority and with elusive, intense inner experiences such as awe, grief, love, solitude, shame, hope, and remorse.84

That poem ties together Dickinson’s knowledge about not knowing:

How Human Nature dotes
On what it cant detect –
The moment that a Plot is plumbed
It’s meaning is extinct –

and her concern with an aspect of the inexpressible:

Of subjects that resist

84 Deppman, p. 52.
Redoubtablest is this
Where go we –
Go we anywhere
Creation after this?

‘How human nature dotes’ (Fr1440)

Look at redoubtablest. Structurally, that word is a simple nonstandard superlative, easy enough to gloss as “the most redoubtable”, and as a word choice it looks like a simple case of an idiosyncratic neologism responding to a scansion requirement. But on closer inspection it shines out as a classic Emily Dickinson invention. It is self-reflexive (it is a most redoubtable word); it embraces doubt; and it is, in the end, blest. All qualities, in her very own word, of the poetry and the poet.
CHAPTER V: GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

It is important to emphasize that Hopkins was in many ways part of this philological movement, displaying the same painstaking care in definition and description of words that was displayed by the lexicographers, and the same fascinated interest in the history and relationship of words. Only a generation of scholars spoiled by the foolish separation of ‘language’ and ‘literature’ studies (to the detriment of both) could seriously refer to Victorian philological research as ‘dry’ or ‘brain-starved’. In the nineteenth century it was new, stimulating and full of wonder.

James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins*

1. Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Word

A study of acts of lexical creation by Gerard Manley Hopkins needs to be informed by some understanding of his philosophy of language and how it relates to his poetics and theology. The mass of critical judgments on the subject is even more divergent than might be expected for any poet, for two main reasons. First, the material on language in the primary sources, Hopkins’ journals, notes and letters, is scattered, unsystematic, frequently obscure and developing over time. Hopkins is the anti-Wittgenstein in this respect, giving the reader no sense of structure or sequence to aid conceptual understanding. Second, the body of criticism in the field is divided not only by the usual schools of literary theory but also by something of a partition between a religious and a secular approach. No other prominent poet since the Early Modern period has woven a personal Christian faith so intimately into their work, nor been championed so passionately
by Christian scholars. The diffuse source material, the added complication of religious interpretation, and a tendency of some critics – not only Christian ones, who might be thought more likely to claim a special understanding – to assume a privileged insight into Hopkins’ mind combine to produce an unusually subjective critical literature.

Three major aspects can be distinguished in Hopkins’ own writings on the subject: lexical, cognitive and religious. To expand: the forms of words and (especially) the relationships between them; the effect of the read or spoken word on the mind of the receiver; and the presence of God. In this rather long introductory section, I will touch on Hopkins’ writings, pointing up those aspects as they emerge, and present a brief selection of commentary on them, with the aim of informing later sections that will demonstrate the poetic and, as I will argue, the devotional significance to Hopkins of neologism.

Hopkins’ writings from an early age evinced a fascination with words, their etymologies and the relationships between them. His earlier diaries contain hundreds of fragmentary notes and speculations, variously ambiguous, insightful or erroneous, and often more than one of those three at once. One line reads simply, “Spuere, spit, spuma, spume, spoom, spawn, spittle, spatter, spot, sputter.”¹ It is not clear whether Hopkins was suggesting etymological kinship among these words, which was often his explicit purpose in such entries; in any case, commentary by Alan Ward in a philological appendix to the House and Storey edition of Hopkins’ journals and papers shows that some are related, some may be, and others are not.² As exemplified in the above list, Hopkins was a

¹ Hopkins, Journals and Papers, p. 16.
student of archaic, regional and otherwise obscure words; some of those recorded in the diary reappear later in his poetry, often with shades of meaning or ambiguous senses that arise out of the etymological relationships proposed. For example, William Gardner, in an extended and valuable analysis of obscure Hopkins diction, examines “flitches of fern” in ‘Inversnaid’. Flitch, the normal contemporary meaning of which was a side of bacon or slab of wood, appears in an early diary, in a paragraph that also discusses flick, fillip, flip, flick, flake, fly, flee and flit and their possible relationships. Gardner’s commentary postulates an association by sound with switch and patch, and perhaps one by colour, between autumnal bracken and smoked pig. It goes on to confirm from the OED Hopkins’ speculation that flitch is related to flick and flake; all of which

... may justify our taking flitches to be a portmanteau word from flake, switch and patch. This is supported by a line in the preceding stanza, in which the burn “Turns and twindles over the broth Of a pool”. Twindles is obviously a Carrollian compound of twist, twiddle, spindle and (as eddies do) dwindle.

This usage of flitches may not be pure neologism, but is certainly a new sense. It is not necessary to agree with Gardner in every detail (in the above, for instance, that twindles is “a Carrollian compound” of four words is far from obvious) to appreciate it as an exemplar of the layers of meaning so often packed into a single Hopkins word. Ward offers a more detailed historical-linguistic treatment of the relevant (“remarkable”) diary entry, suggesting that, though some of the content

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3 WH Gardner, p. 117.
4 Hopkins, Journals and Papers, p. 11.
5 WH Gardner, p. 117. But Norman H. MacKenzie, quoting Gardner, notes that “Hopkins would also know the Lancashire verb to twindle, “to bring forth twins” – here applicable to the breaking up of the foam into two.” (NH MacKenzie, Hopkins, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1968, pp. 123–124.) One often just doesn’t know where to stop with these speculations.
6 Ward, pp. 509–510.
echoes material to be found in nineteenth-century philological works, “[l]ittle if any of this is likely to have been consciously derived from books.” That conclusion is ironically supported, perhaps, by Ward’s findings that Hopkins was frequently wrong in his musings.

The *flitch* example offers a fitting conduit into Hopkins’ key 1868 journal Note on words, beginning: “All words mean either things or relations of things”. He postulates three “moments” of a word:

... its prepossession of feeling; its definition, abstraction, vocal expression or other utterance; and its application, ‘extension’, the concrete things coming under it.

It is plain that of these only one in propriety is the word; the third is not a word but a thing meant by it, the first is not a word but something connotatively meant by it...

Gardner reads the above thus:

[Hopkins] draws, in his own interesting way, the now familiar distinction between *denotation* and *connotation*. The former he calls “definition, uttering”; the latter “a prepossession of feeling or enthusiasm”, by which he seems to imply the emotion and attitude evoked by a word.

In the first part this either misreads Hopkins or misunderstands denotation, for the modern reader would surely identify the third of Hopkins’ “moments” with the

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9 WH Gardner, p. 112.
signified, or denoted, part of a linguistic sign. Later in the Note, Hopkins deprecates what one suspects he sees as Romantic excess:

Some minds prefer that the prepossession they are to receive should be conveyed in the least organic, expressive, by the most suggestive way. By this means the prepossession and the definition, uttering, are distinguished and unwound, which is the less sane attitude.\(^\text{10}\)

This quotation is evidence for Gardner that he is

… a strict Classicist in his conception of words as tools rather than pigments; yet he did not ignore their connotative value. The strength of his diction lies in his power of preserving the organic unity of definition and prepossession, of writing poetry which is at once precise in statement and aglow with individual and universal feeling.”\(^\text{11}\)

The word “organic” recurs in the more religiously inclined view of Margaret R. Ellsberg, who describes Hopkins as simultaneously Victorian linguist and

... Christian Realist, who would consider the word itself an object, since from Creation and Incarnation to the minutest thing that could be named, all derived from the Divine Word ... words were not merely symbols, except in the most unavoidable sense. Words were treated as particulars, as rooted in nature, as visceral, organic, direct.\(^\text{12}\)

Similarly the Jesuit critic W. A. M. Peters: “No word was to this poet [merely] a conventional sign for a thing ... Hopkins loved the words, each of them; they were

\(^{10}\) Hopkins, \textit{Journals and Papers}, p. 126.
\(^{11}\) WH Gardner, p. 112.
all of them alive; as of other objects which he had inscaped, so it is true of words, that they throw off sparks, if we know how to touch them.”

Michael Sprinker’s long and detailed analysis placing Hopkins’ views on language into the linguistic revolution of the nineteenth century shows the poet’s views evolving. His youthful position, as expressed in the Note above and another titled ‘Parthenidoes’, is consistent with the divine revelation theory of language, in which “God imparts the knowledge of creation to man by endowing him with a language (or a language capacity) that reflects the things in the world.” Sprinker quotes Hopkins late in life, though, writing to a friend:

And here consider that in religion no more than in language a thing may have no one origin, it may be at the meeting point of many influences. Even words (as they say is shewn in Murray of *allow*) are sometimes two words rolled into one, approximated till they blend meanings.

It should be emphasized that there is no contradiction here for a man who matured through the initial Darwin controversies and was familiar with the scientific method (it is telling that he uses the classical mechanics term “moments” in his Note on words quoted above). Rather, as Cary Plotkin says, Hopkins “finds a way

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16 This view is akin to that of Noah Webster in the Introduction to the 1841 edition of his dictionary: “It is therefore probable that language, as well as the faculty of speech, was the immediate gift of God.” (Webster, p. ix.) Another connection across the Atlantic between Hopkins and a young Emily Dickinson.
17 The first volume (*A-B*) of James S. Murray’s *Oxford English Dictionary* had been published just two years previously. “[T]hey say” implies that Hopkins had no immediate means of confirming the entry. It is surprising that his philology had not compelled him to acquire the volume for his bookshelf.
18 Sprinker, p. 53.
past the deus absconditus of deism and the impersonal immanence of scientific law by discovering a way of looking at nature that does not deny these laws but does not accept them as final truths.”

Eugene R. August links Hopkins’ view of Creation as the word of God to the creation of the human word. August’s doctoral thesis does a superb job of gathering and organizing Hopkins’ scattered materials on this subject, and it is worth quoting his paraphrase at length:

[C]reation is a mirror image of the Creator, and the world is the word spoken by God… Hopkins believes that if we look hard at, if we inscape, creation, we can see the Creator reflected there… Hopkins views the world figuratively as a poem spoken by God; the words of this poem are the selves of creation.

...

[F]or Hopkins, the words of human language have inscapes just as surely as the words of divine language. When God spoke the poem of creation, he created inscapes in the various “words”, or creatures. These inscapes are beautiful to behold, or “listen to”, and each of them reflects, in its own distinctive way, the Speaker’s self... So also with words of human language. Human words have inscapes composed of their sound and lexical meaning. By listening carefully to a word and by examining its meaning, Hopkins caught its inscape – he glimpsed the distinctive self of that word. Moreover, words used well by a speaker provide a glimpse of the speaker’s self. Thus, words are like other creatures: they have inscapes beautiful in themselves, and they reflect the speaker’s self.

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Or, as James Milroy puts it in a more worldly way:

... Hopkins collects and observes language specimens with much the same
delight with which he observes the characteristic patterns of flowers, leaves,
clouds and trees.... The observation of language is as natural to him as the
observation of colour in the fields, and throughout nine years of the Journal we
find more and more of these linguistic observations appearing cheek by jowl
with, and often in the same paragraph as, his descriptions of nature.... Like ‘the
weeds and the wilderness’, the living variety of language enriches the inscapes
of the world.21

Both of the above quotations include the first Hopkins neologism to be examined
in this section, and it is not from his poetry. A reader with even a passing
acquaintance with Hopkins’ prose writings will be familiar with his concept of
inscape and other related coinages such as instress and selve. Dennis Sobolev
enumerates twenty-one critics’ attempts to define inscape,22 and no doubt misses
many more. Ellsberg observes that “One reason that these words are so difficult to
define is that Hopkins himself used them in different ways on different
occasions.”23 She goes on to attempt her own definition: “simply, inscape is the
form of a thing, especially as it reveals some strain of universal form or harmony;
instress is the recognition or feeling of an inscape.” The inevitable inadequacy of
such short attempts is made immediately clear simply in noting the use of inscape
as a verb by August in the second line of the passage above, mirroring Hopkins’
frequent use of it in the same way, as in: “if you look at the rest of the sunset you

21 Milroy, p. 53.
22 D Sobolev, The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology,
CUA Press, Washington, DC, 2011, p. 27.
23 Ellsberg, p. 11.
must cover the sun, but today I inscaped them together”\textsuperscript{24}, or as a participial modifier: “Two plants especially with strongly inscaped leaves”.\textsuperscript{25} A number of commentators have discussed inscape in connection with Duns Scotus’ idea of \textit{haecceity}, \textit{haecceitas} or \textit{haeccitas}, which translate as “thisness”. Hopkins was familiar with Scotus and frequently quoted him approvingly, and there is undoubtedly a kinship between the concepts. However, two short quotations may be enough to establish the diversity of views on the nature of that connection.

According to Peters, “inscape precisely covers what Scotus calls \textit{haecceitas}”.\textsuperscript{26} But Sprinker disagrees: “The contention of Father Peters and others that Hopkins was a confirmed Scotist and that Hopkins’ “inscape” is the equivalent of Scotus’ \textit{haeccitas} can thus be seen to be in error.”\textsuperscript{27} This thesis does not propose to go into that debate any further.

At the time of its creation, the distinctiveness of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poetry was arguably greater than that of any other notable poet up to his time, a quality about which he demonstrated keen self-awareness in his correspondence. In the same way, his prose writings on his own work and on wider poetic theory bear little resemblance to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. It is a pity that, as remarked earlier, they are so sporadic and frequently opaque; had he dedicated some time to organizing his materials into a single work, we might have had something to rival Wordsworth and Coleridge.\textsuperscript{28} Hopkins left us in no doubt about the centrality to his work of the concept of inscape, referring to it in terms

\textsuperscript{24} Hopkins, \textit{Journals and Papers}, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{25} Hopkins, \textit{Journals and Papers}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{26} Peters, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{27} Sprinker, pp. 105–106.
\textsuperscript{28} Their work in poetics was well known to Hopkins: see for example the essay ‘Poetic Diction’, in Hopkins, \textit{Journals and Papers}, pp. 84–85.
such as these: “All the world is full of inscape”;

“the very soul of art”,

(of poetry) “the essential and only lasting thing”,

“what I above all aim at in poetry”,

“Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape’s sake – and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on.”

The last quotation embodies the point made by August in the quotation above, that Hopkins saw language and words themselves as possessing inscape. No matter what the approach of the countless commentators on his work, few can avoid the term, but there appear to be two distinct schools of thought as to how to handle it – and they are possibly applicable to other idiosyncratic concepts in poetics – which I will call adoptive and descriptive. Commentators of the first school embrace inscape as a valid, useful concept, with the writer essentially using it (and generally its companion terms as well) in the same sense(s) as Hopkins did to express concepts relating to his work. Those of the second take an arm’s-length, or third-person, approach, reporting how Hopkins used the term but not using it directly to express their own ideas. It is not as easy as one might think to guess who belongs in which school: for example, the academic linguist Milroy is adoptive, the Jesuit Walter J. Ong descriptive.

I will take an adoptive approach to inscape in this chapter because, apart from it being simply fitting to use such a coinage, to have to translate Hopkins’ words into some other technical vocabulary (for his is frequently very technical) can

29 Hopkins, Journals and Papers, p. 230.
32 Hopkins, Letters to RB, p. 66.
33 Hopkins, Journals and Papers, p. 289.
only serve to lose a little meaning along the way. Ong on *instress* is in accord
with Ellsberg: “‘Instress’ is the action that takes place when the inscape of a given
being fuses itself in a given human consciousness in contact at a given moment
with the being.” But a fuller description includes a second, distinct usage of the
term by Hopkins, as given (along with the first) by W. A. M. Peters – “the force
that holds the inscape together”, or “the power that ever actualizes the inscape”.
Just to confuse his readers further, Hopkins also uses *instress* as a verb in ‘The
Wreck of the Deutschland’: “His [Christ’s] mystery must be instressed,
stressed”. And there is at least one instance in prose, as a simple phonetic term:
“you can without clumsiness instress, throw a stress on/ a syllable so supported …”.
I am persuaded by the views of critics, including Ellsberg and August cited
above, that Hopkins regarded words as possessing inscape in the same way as
other divine creations. From there we must therefore posit an associated instress
in both of the above senses: a force that actualizes or holds together the inscape of
a word, and, significantly for this thesis, its action on “a given human
consciousness”: that is, that of the reader. It may be that in Hopkins’ philology
what we now call defamiliarization is a manifestation of the unusual intensity of
instress associated with the poetic power of neologism. There would be a certain
symmetry to one of the great coiners of words in poetry providing both a word
and a theory to explain poetic neologism.

34 WJ Ong, *Hopkins, the Self and God*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1986, p. 17.
2. Hopkins’ neologisms: a survey

It is possible that Hopkins coined words more frequently than any other major pre-modernist poet. A near-contemporary of Emily Dickinson, he shares a number of characteristics with her: occasional acts of rebellion against family and society, apparent periodic mental affliction, putative lifetime celibacy, little poetic publication or fame in his lifetime, a posthumous champion of his work, and anticipation of aspects of poetic modernism. Stylistically, both adopted unorthodox techniques to a degree that startled their early readers. Neologism is common to both, as is strangeness in syntax, but each of those is pursued in different ways. Hopkins regularly deploys complex, unorthodox rhythms, chopped-up grammatical structure, and various forms of play with the sounds of words, none of which is strongly present in Dickinson’s poetry. Although Hopkins’ sentences are often broken and rearranged, they have a structure that can generally be put back together (sometimes with hints from the poet’s notes) and then parsed with certainty, whereas Dickinson’s syntax is fluid in a way that frequently results in ambiguity. She surprises us with unexpected word choices, juxtapositions and exotic allusions, but does not engage in the exuberant soundscapes characteristic of Hopkins. And unlike the poet–priest, as Cristanne Miller observes, Dickinson often deploys within a poem “a diction that swings between stylized aphorism and the informality of speech”, a technique that requires a momentary adjustment by the reader. In Hopkins’ and Dickinson’s respective defamiliarizations, neologism is the major common factor, though even

38 Miller, p. 18.
there, as noted later, their preferences for the various classes of coinage are very different.

Neologism features regularly in the bursts of wordplay characteristic of much of Hopkins’ work. In a single phrase in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’,39 “the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps”, he gives us a compound and two affixations, and within those two, “child” itself (and possibly “father”, in its context) is a conversion. ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection’40 is a poem so thoroughly epitomizing the inventive extreme of Hopkins’ diction that it risks tipping over into self-parody. But Hopkins was ever a risk-taker. Here he flirts with the line but does not cross it, and the payoff ranks with his highest religious expressions. The poem in twenty-four lines contains seventeen words that Hopkins probably coined independently: cloud-puffball, air-built, heaven-roysterers, gay-gangs, shivelights, shadowtackle, yestertempest, rutpeel, manmarks, treadmire, footfretted, million-fueled, clearest-selved, firedint, manshape, disseveral, heart’s-clarion.41 The first thing to note about this list is that it exhibits the strong preference for Anglo-Saxon words that characterizes Hopkins’ poetry in general. A brief focus on this, the densest collection of neologisms in all Hopkins’ poems, will provide a snapshot of the variety of ways in which he created words to serve his poetic and religious ends, and will prompt some of the questions to be addressed later in an extended reading of the poem and in general discussion of his poetics and philosophy.

41 If the reader wishes to see the context of these words, the entire poem is quoted in the extended reading in section 3 of this chapter.
Of the seventeen words above, fifteen are compounds, a preponderance that is reflected across Hopkins’ work, and most are notable for their breadth. The qualification of compounds as bona fide neologisms can sometimes be moot in cases where the conjoined words form a pair that go naturally together; thus, I have no hesitation in including clearest-selved, whereas “clearest-sighted” might have been passed over. The (admittedly rather subjective) difference is between a linkage that seems merely a syntactic variation, up-thought on the moment-spur, and one that is a genuine act of verbal creativity. Examples of the former are rare in Hopkins: generally, if he makes a compound, it means something. In many cases the pairing would be equally remarkable even if the words were separate but adjacent, and indeed such memorable juxtapositions are also common. In this poem, for example, “immortal diamond” – two common enough words – once read can never be read together again without thinking of them here, nor written by another poet except in homage. Robert Frost commented on this effect, citing a similarly striking pairing in Keats’ “alien corn” from ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, and echoing Hopkins’ previously quoted dictum for poetic language, “the current language heightened”:

In poetry and under emotion every word used is “moved” a little or much – moved from its old place, heightened, made, made new. See what Keats did to the word “alien” in the ode. But as he made it special in that place he made it his – and his only in that place. He could never have used it again with just that turn. It takes the little one horse poets to do that.42

The fifteen compounds comprise seven hyphenated and eight unhyphenated. Inspection of the list may provoke the reader to wonder, for example, why hyphenate *air-built* but not *footfretted*? Too much can sometimes be made of questions like this, especially where manuscript ambiguities arise. W. H. Gardner’s and N. H. MacKenzie’s edition of Hopkins’ poems renders *rutpeel* (line 6) as “rut peel”, while adding this textual note (from an observation by Bridges): “construction obscure, *rutpeel* may be a compound word, MS. uncertain”. That question is made difficult, as so often in Hopkins, by the tortured syntax of the contextual sentence. Conversely, they note that “MS. does not hyphen or quite joint up *foot* with *fretted*”. Of Hopkins’ inconsistency in hyphenation, Peters remarks:

> The absence of any system of using the hyphen often leads to obscurity that has nothing to do with the poetry ... the danger that we look for a difference between various kinds of compound formations according as they are joined by means of a hyphen or not, where in fact there most likely is none.

Compounds are so widespread in Hopkins’ work as to make it worthwhile to divide them into subclasses. W. H. Gardner’s discussion identifies no fewer than fifteen types; more simply I propose four, which I will term *modifier-noun*, *modifier-verb*, *associative*, and (inevitably) *other*. In the first two, one word of the compound (generally the first, but not always – see for example the modifier-noun compound *cloud-puffball*, or *beadbonny* in ‘Inversnaid’) amplifies or restricts the meaning of the other. These two types cover most of the compounds

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44 Peters, pp. 118–119.
45 WH Gardner, p. 286.
in the above list, and in most cases they are easily recognizable. In the “associative” subclass the two words (it is generally two, though Hopkins in particular may exceed that) are joined in an equal relationship that is often more difficult to parse. Each word may simultaneously be modifying the other; the relationship may be one-way, but the direction ambiguous; or the association may not involve a modifier effect at all, simply combining a pair of adjectives or objects to signify something that is both, or that somehow modulates between them. Three words seem to me to be of this type: *treadmire, firedint* and *manshape*. Peters comments of the adjectival form:

> These adjectival formations are new specific marks for qualities, just as the noun-compounds of Hopkins were new specific marks for things. Let the reader place side by side, e.g. “kindly cold”, “kind and cold”, and “kindecold”, and he will agree there is a falling off in the first two expressions: in the third he is face to face with that “terrible crystal” of Hopkins’ poetry.  

Peters here seems oblivious to Milton’s *cold-kind* in ‘On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough’, which one imagines was in Hopkins’ mind. No compounds in ‘Heraclitean Fire’ end up in the “other” bin, but it will later be seen to be rich in joined phrases: one need only glance at the last line of its near-contemporary ‘Harry Ploughman’ to find *with-a-fountain’s shining-shot*, which is discussed below. Often such “other” constructions work by mental association to evoke meaning through allusion. Consider the last three lines of the earlier, more orthodox sonnet ‘The Candle Indoors’, with a compound in each:

46 Peters, p. 119.
47 It is a surprising association, as Hopkins’ sensual celebration in ‘Epithalamion’ has almost nothing else in common with Milton’s sad elegy.
What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault
In a neighbour deft-handed? Are you that liar
And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?48

In the penultimate line deft-handed is a straightforward construction, yet gains a little antonymic kick from its aural association with “left-handed”. The other two are brilliant, broad compounds in the “other” category. Each, with considerable ellipsis that can only be correctly restored by a reader familiar with its allusion, carries the import of a verse from St Matthew’s Gospel. Beam-blind: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matthew 7:3). And spendsavour, which the OED compilers have judged worthy of an entry: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matthew 5:13).

It is difficult to imagine that Hopkins in forming these descriptors did not have in mind the similar ellipses in George Herbert’s ‘Prayer (I)’, mentioned in Chapter III, “Christ-side-piercing spear” and “six-days world”.

Two affixations, yestertempest49 and disseveral, appear. Each is worth a little attention. Disseveral is an ingenious two-way affixation deserving of the more detailed discussion in section 3 of this chapter. Yestertempest stands out in the OED,50 with Hopkins the sole citation, among a number of prefixations in yester- such as yestereve, yesternoon and yesterweek, as not just indicating a past time but an event that happened then (when? yesterday?). The evocativeness of this

49 Yester appears in the OED as an archaic word in its own right as well as a prefix, so technically this might have been a compound.
50 See the discussion in the Introduction on the OED’s treatment of nonce- formations.
formation has been more recently exploited in popular music by Stevie Wonder in ‘Yesterme, Yesteryou, Yesterday’. This formation by pattern analogy from an existing word is common among Hopkins’ coinages: for example, inscape and lovescape (‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’) from “landscape”, and quickgold (‘The Starlight Night’) from “quicksilver”.

One apparent candidate not on the list of neologisms, squadroned, occasions particular interest. As a participial adjective it is first cited under Milton in the OED (“a quire / Of squadroned angels”),\textsuperscript{51} and it is likely that Hopkins remembered it from there. As a functioning verb, though, squadron is dated to 1862 in the OED, which cites David Gray’s ‘The Luggie’, an extended, somewhat Tennyson-esque idyll to the author’s life in his Scottish home town and the eponymous stream that runs through it. Gray died from tuberculosis at 23 leaving a small body of youthful work, thought by some contemporary critics to show tragically unfulfilled promise, and popular and well-noticed enough to have been published internationally.\textsuperscript{52} While Hopkins may have recalled squadroned from Milton, I think it also very possible that he read ‘The Luggie’ and found that the poem, and details of Gray’s life, resonated with him, and they might well have been in his conscious or subconscious mind as he composed ‘Heraclitean Fire’. Consider the following circumstantial evidence: Gray’s work was first published, posthumously, in 1862, at a time influential in Hopkins’ poetical development; on the evidence of ‘The Luggie’ and other work, Gray was a pious man who saw God everywhere in nature; he wrote a series of bleak sonnets in the months approaching his death that have something in common with Hopkins’ “dark

\textsuperscript{52} WC Bryant, \textit{Library of World Poetry}, Avenel, NY, 1871, pp. 142, 304, 321.
sonnets”; and he was adventurous in poetic diction, including the occasional neologism, in a way that Hopkins might have found attractive. The lines in which the word appears prefigure a little of Hopkins’ poem, even though the squadroning applies to different entities. This is the contextual sentence for the first entry in the OED for _squadron_ as a verb:

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At night across the heavens
Swift-journeying, and by a furious wind
Squadron’d, the hurrying clouds range the roused sky,
Magnificently sombrous.53
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Note the compound in the second line. In the fourth, _sombre_ is rare but established, the OED dating it to 1754. The opening lines of ‘The Luggie’ are:

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That impulse which all beauty gives the soul
Is _languaged_ as I sing.54
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_Language_ as a verb is not a coinage but rare, and in fact one of its OED citations is Gray’s employment of it elsewhere in the poem, “When _languaging_ in love the radiance / Of maids”. These lines would also, one imagines, appeal to Hopkins. And lastly consider the following, noting the compound in the fourth line:

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Blow high and cleanse the sky, O South-West wind!
Roll the full clouds obedient; overthrow
White crags of vapour in confusion piled
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54 D Gray, p. 3.
Precipitate, high-toppling undissolved:55

Earlier Gray makes it clear that he sees the wind as an instrument of God
(“Causing Thy wind to blow”),56 so that these lines have in them a little of the
weather report from ‘Heraclitean Fire’.

A rough analysis of the chronological distribution of neologisms across Hopkins’
body of work reveals it to be fairly even. Because W. H. Gardner devotes a
number of pages to them, attributing each to its poem, one can, on the assumption
of an unbiased sample, use his commentary as a scattergram. The youthful and
light works are unsurprisingly less dense with coinages, and those mostly
compound. Composed at fifteen, his earliest known poem, ‘The Escorial’,
includes zeal-rampant, acanthus-crowned, golden-girdled, mountain-echoed and
down-splinter’d, all of them bar the first being unremarkable constructions. Three
or four years later, the still-immature gothic ‘Spring and Death’
anthropomorphizes Death with charnelhouse-grate ribs. However, by the time
Hopkins is twenty-one, greater originality and poetic force are already apparent in
lovely-dumb lips and feel-of-primrose hands in ‘The Habit of Perfection’. Of an
analysis of Hopkins’ major period in “Poems (1876–89)”, counting either per
page or per year, the most one can say is that in the first few poems up to ‘The
Sea and the Skylark’ (May 1877), the rate of neologism is lower, with the salient
exception of ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’; then from ‘The Windhover’ it is
more or less consistent. Of course, the rate varies from poem to poem, so that the
joyful, declamatory works or those more experimental in form will generally
exceed sombre pieces such as ‘Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend’ or the so-

55 D Gray, p. 20.
56 D Gray, p. 18.
called “terrible sonnets” – although even the deep melancholy of ‘No worst, there is none’ gives us *forepangs, herds-long, world-sorrow* and *no-man-fathomed*.

A number of authors – three main ones are cited here – have discussed Hopkins’ neologisms at length. The earliest treatment is in Chapter IV, ‘Diction and Syntax’, of the earlier cited *Gerard Manley Hopkins* by W. H. Gardner. Indeed, Gardner describes Hopkins’ predilection in a way that might have opened this chapter: “Hopkins belonged to that relatively small class of poets (including Shakespeare, Keats and Meredith) who, not content with the language as they find it, tend in varying degrees to create their own medium of expression.”

Gardner’s earlier cited discussion of Hopkins’ speculations on, and poetic usage of, idioms and obscurities, leads on to the observation that “[f]rom such an intensely personal manipulation of meanings to frank coinages is but a short step.”

Gardner exhibits a number of Hopkins’ coinages of a variety of types, as well as dialect words and the occasional archaism – purposeful, rather than Spenserian mood-setting – turned to poetic use. He devotes much commentary to compounds, devising a plethora of sub-classifications and pointing out echoes of (among others) Shakespeare, Keats and Tennyson. In noting the “air of strangeness” produced by Hopkins’ neologisms, Gardner pronounces it “not in itself an undesirable quality”, a curious understatement seemingly oblivious to the identification by commentators of defamiliarization, *ostranenie* or “making strange” as integral to the poetic effect of neologism.

59 WH Gardner, p. 118.
60 WH Gardner, p. 112.
It is difficult to summarize Gardner’s long and entertaining parade of neologisms, and I will restrict myself to a handful of arresting remarks. On compounds “which show a touch of conscious artistry” – or, in the terms of this thesis, rich in charm – he cites *churlsgrace* from ‘Harry Ploughman’, *heaven-roysterers* and *gay-gangs* from ‘Heraclitean Fire’, and *downdolphinry* from ‘Epithalamion’. Gardner comments: “[S]uch words show a spontaneous glee, the *liveliness of a living* as opposed to a merely literary language” (my emphasis).61 The italicized phrase is yet another example of the use of descriptors for Hopkins’ language that allude to the world of nature and life, echoing the outlook of Ellsberg, Peters and others quoted previously: “rooted in nature”, “visceral, organic”, “alive”. Gardner’s lists of affixations highlights Hopkins’ repeated use of components such as *-self*- (as both a prefix and a suffix, “a further illustration of Hopkins’ great debt to Shakespeare in the matter of diction”), *-sake* and *fore*-62. These components carry more semantic weight, and therefore offer the possibility of greater breadth in the blending, than the more commonplace signifiers of usage change (*-ness, -y*) or negation (*un-, -less*), and indeed might be considered more as repeated fragments of compounds than as prefixes and suffixes. Another common component, whether considered to be affixed or compounded, is *-fire-*, significant for its association with Heraclitus, whose recurring presence in Hopkins’ philosophy has been widely noted. *Self* and *fire*, in particular, represent concepts important in Hopkins’ poetics. Regarding negative prefixes, Milroy notes in passing that Hopkins’ examples in context, such as *disremember* (‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’, *unchild, unfather* (‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ and *untwist* (‘Carrion

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Comfort’) are mostly readable as privative or reversative – that is, they concern removal or undoing – rather than as simple negation.63

On conversions, Gardner is relatively brief; I will cite here instead from others. Peters notes an example from the late sonnet ‘My own heart let me more have pity on’:

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day …64

Peters cites Bridges’ opinion that comfortless and dark are missing the noun “world” simply because “there was no room”, but, as Peters observes, if Hopkins had meant that, “he would have managed to find room for it, for obscurity without a sufficient reason he hated” (my emphasis). Peters writes that Hopkins “inscaped” his circumstances and found essentially not that they were without comfort, but that they were comfortlessness itself. Oddly, he fails to comment on the striking conversion of day to a verb in the same passage. Milroy’s take on conversions (which he refers to as “transference or ambiguity of word-class”65) focuses on how freeing a word from its traditional functional role may amplify what critics such as Ellsberg and August have argued to be its own inscape:

In his later poetry, Hopkins is particularly prone to tear a word out of its normal syntactic place and function, and the feeling is somehow communicated that the less grammatical binding a word has, the more its “selfhood”. One gets the

64 Peters, p. 122. Poem in Hopkins, The Major Works, p. 170, where the comma after comfortless is omitted.
65 Milroy, p. 60.
feeling that some at least of Hopkins’ words are being set off independently of
the sentence so that they can be savoured for themselves.66

This weakening of “grammatical binding” was noted by Hopkins’ earliest
published critic, Robert Bridges, in the strangely apologetic commentary
accompanying his first posthumous edition of Hopkins’ work. He is here referring
to Hopkins’ use of standard English words that function as different parts of
speech, but the effect is closely related:

English swarms with words that have one identical form for substantive,
adjective, and verb; and such a word should never be so placed as to allow of
any doubt as to what part of speech it is used for; because such ambiguity or
momentary uncertainty destroys the force of the sentence. Now our author not
only neglects this essential propriety but he would seem even to welcome and
seek artistic effect in the consequent confusion; and he will sometimes so
arrange such words that a reader looking for a verb may find that he has two or
three ambiguous monosyllables from which to select, and must be in doubt as to
which promises best to give any meaning that he can welcome; and then, after
his choice is made, he may be left with some homeless monosyllable still on his
hands.67

3. How Hopkins’ neologisms work

Late in his life, Hopkins emerged from the “terrible sonnets” period to pen three
poems, ‘Tom’s Garland’, ‘Harry Ploughman’ and ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean
Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection’, whose unorthodoxies of prosody,

66 Milroy, p. 59.
syntax and lexis recalled those of earlier glories. All three were rich in neologism, boasting around 38 coined words in all. This section will use the latter two, quite different from each other in purpose and mood, to exemplify the functions of neologism in Hopkins’ poetry.

‘Heraclitean Fire’ is a riot of neologism and other wordplay, making it a primary subject for exegesis here. The poem has been generally assessed as inspired by the doctrine, espoused by Heraclitus, of flux, continuous worldly change and renewal in nature as a kind of self-fuelling perpetual fire.68 Some commentators, such as Gardner,69 explore possible wider connections to other Greek philosophers, and Hopkins himself in a letter to Robert Bridges wrote that “a great deal of early Greek philosophical thought was distilled” in the poem.70 It is certainly suffused with the four classical elements, air, earth, water and fire, and the first section, at just over eight lines, celebrates the way in which the first three of those interact with one another in the natural world:

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-
Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng; they glitter in marches.
Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm arches,
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare
Of yestertempest’s creases; | in pool and rut peel parches
Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches

70 Hopkins, Letters to RB, p. 291.
Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there
Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature’s bonfire burns on.
But quench her bonniest, dearest | to her, her clearest-selvèd spark
Man, how fast his firedint, | his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indig | nation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, | death blots black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time | beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
A heart’s-clarion! Away grief’s gasping, | joyless days, dejection.
Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. | Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; | world’s wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, | since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.71

For a brave paraphrase of this poem in twelve lines of prose, the reader is referred
to Gardner.72 I will simply remark on its three sections: the first describing the
aftermath of a storm in elemental terms, the second noting that the mortality of
Man is as inevitable as all other things that pass in Nature, and the third recalling
the Christian promise of resurrection. One of the poem’s many remarkable
features is its sheer pace, made most plain when it is read aloud, which can be
ascribed to a combination of three characteristic effects. First, Hopkins is a poet

much given to enjambment, by the standards of his time; and the effect of speed is
driven by repeated enjambment, with thirteen of the poem’s twenty-four line
endings punctuation-free, including the first, where Hopkins exercises his
occasional trick of splitting a word. Second, in many lines a high number of
unaccented syllables in between the six feet – line two contains a total of twenty
syllables – accelerates the reading. Allied to these rhythmic factors is the sheer
intoxication of the non-stop alliteration and assonance. It interlaces and overlaps,
thus emulating on a white page the light-show effect of the wind-tossed boughs
on a white wall in lines three and four – a small but superb example of Hopkins’
integrated view of language and the natural world. The first section isn’t quite
finished at the end of the octet, so Hopkins simply carries on for another three
words into the sestet, rendering the classical division non-existent. The point “nor
mark”, where the sonnet proper ends and the coda (or perhaps it is three codas)
begins, is again a strong enjambment, occurring where the middle thematic
section is still about a line short of completion. A lesser, or more orthodox, poet
might have engineered the work to observe convention in those two divisions, but
this poem must maintain its pace.

Hopkins was not averse to striking the reader with a neologism in the first line of
a poem. He did so on at least seven occasions,73 a frequency that strongly
suggests a pattern of intent to surprise. But cloud-puffball is the only coinage that
begins a Hopkins poem, with the arguable exception of the transcribed birdsong

73 Others are dare-gale (“The Caged Skylark”), die-away (“Morning Midday and Evening
Sacrifice”), world-mothering (“The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe”), attuneable
(‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’), not-to-call (“Moonrise”, not hyphenated in some texts), columnar-
severe (“Margaret Clitheroe”). There are others among Hopkins’ fragments, including heltering
(‘Strike, churl’) and an ingeniously rhythmic creation in ‘To his Watch’, worth quoting in context:
“bearing my rock-a-heart / Warm beat with cold beat company”.

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“Teevo cheevo cheevio chee” that opens the incomplete ‘The Woodlark’. It is a curious word choice, quite apart from its status as a compound neologism. After it, the sentence that constitutes the first two lines is couched entirely in the plural, using a playful series of other likenesses to describe the rollicking progress of clouds across the sky in a high wind. The *OED* entry for “puffball” suggests that the primary meaning of the word in Hopkins’ time was the same fungal one as now. So why not “Cloud-puffballs”? Maybe this is a kind of introductory heading denoting a large cloud mass from which tufts and pillows are breaking off, evoking the spores blowing away from an exploded puffball. In any case, the image is utterly clear, so that it does not make us pause, but rather we just rattle on straight away, perhaps only subconsciously aware that in its very first, compounded word the poem has lodged in our mind an immediate connectedness of the two elements air and earth. Nor do his next two compounds, *[h]eaven-roysterers* and *gay-gangs*, slow us down; they are low in three of the four attributes, though they possess a degree of charm. In the next two formations, *shivelights* and *shadowtackle*, Hopkins returns to the motif of light and shade that recurs throughout his work – a concordance reveals seven instances of variations on the word “dapple” alone. These two coinages were probably more easily glossed in Hopkins’ time: the *OED* indicates that *shive* (slice or splinter, among other related meanings) was, at least, not rare, and Hopkins had used it previously (“grassy glassy quicksilver75 shives”, in ‘Epithalamion’); and *tackle* here is clearly, given Hopkins’ poetical affinity with the sea and the “foundering deck” allusion later in this poem, the specialist sense of ship’s tackle, essentially


75 A slight but neat coinage too, in its context.
the ropes of its rigging. Even if the present-day reader lacks such background knowledge, the interplay of light and shadow is clear. The charm attribute present in the two coinages is only enhanced by the symmetry of those two antonymic components – light(s) and shadow – of the words and of the scene, touching each other across the “and”. Again, Hopkins’ linguistic art imitates – or more than that, in his word, inscapes – life.

The long sentence from “Delightfully the bright wind” to “Footfretted in it” is difficult to parse, especially after the semicolon, and the first-time reader is likely to have a “huh?” moment. Yet though it contains five coinages it is, as so often with Hopkins, difficult because of the complex syntax rather than obscurity in lexis. The affixation yestertempest carries a little strangeness and much charm, and in the service of the poem gives us efficiently, in a single word, a contextual story accounting for what is being observed in its first section. The remaining four neologisms in the sentence are all relatively easy to grasp for meaning, their main functional virtues being compression and contribution to the musical soundscape. The following short sentence is a kind of Heraclitean keystone that centres the poem, and in fact assumes that the reader is familiar with the philosophy of Heraclitus. Unlike its immediate predecessors Million-fuelèd is a compound of some breadth, harnessing an abstract number to a process of nature. In “million” we hear simultaneously an abstract counter for all of Creation and, ominously, the sense introduced (as the OED suggests) by Shakespeare, the mass of humanity. 76 Immediately following are the lines that make clear the inevitability of Man’s mortal death, reading the more powerfully for Hopkins’ use in compounds of

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76 Hamlet, 2.2.417–18.
components -selved and fire-. Both the coined verb selve and fire\textsuperscript{77} as a life-affirming symbol are recurring figures in his writings, both poetry and prose, on the nature of nature, humanity and the mind. Structurally, the cryptic affixation disseveral is readable either as a prefixation of “several” (dis-several – thus, perhaps, a group separated one from another – or maybe the reverse, un-separated – unified, as one); or as a suffixation of the uncommon verb “dissever” (dissever-al – separated from – what?). These alternative, or concurrent, deconstructions lend a high degree of polysemy to an innocent-looking coinage, one which has always put me in mind of an affirmation of the unity-in-diversity of humankind. Milroy’s nuanced treatment lays out the two possible formations, then adds a further layer by noting the link of “sever” with a punned “shear” in the immediately preceding “sheer off”.\textsuperscript{78} On this kind of linkage, which occurs elsewhere in Hopkins’ poetry, sometimes in longer chains, sometimes with different kinds of link, sometimes intermingled with sound-based links,\textsuperscript{79} Milroy comments:

We may also see such a series as an instance of semantic ‘rhyme’, and note that each word in a series may also carry two or more clear meanings. They are semantic blends, of complex meaning.

The interpretation of Hopkins’ coinings or special uses of words depends, therefore, on the relationships contracted by the words in two different dimensions of language: on the one hand [paradigmatic relationships], the underlying systems to which the words are made to belong, and on the other [syntagmatic relationships], the order in which Hopkins actually employs them

\textsuperscript{77} “Fire” and related words appear eighteen times in Hopkins’ poems (Watt, \textit{The Concordance}).

\textsuperscript{78} Milroy, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{79} The sequence beginning “This Jack …” at the end of ‘Heraclitean Fire’ is a classic example.
– their contexts in the poems.... Indeed, it may even be suggested that Hopkins defines many such words [where the contexts are necessary to account for their meanings] by his actual use of them in particular contexts, and even that it is one of his purposes to define words by foregrounding such relationships.80

Milroy in this latter paragraph is in essence explaining the effect described in Chapter I whereby the number of possible senses of a polysemous neologism is reduced by context, leaving the remainder as the available senses of an ambiguity.

Finally, in the third section pronouncing the “comfort” of the Resurrection, the broad compound *heart’s-clarion* is the last neologism in the poem, with seven lines still to go, perhaps signalling that it is time for verbal play to cease and the essential point to be made. With its exclamation mark, it is itself a kind of fanfare for the lines that follow, echoed shortly in the “trumpet crash” that signals the final triumphant assertion of eternal life. If you think this proposition improbable, Hopkins seems to be saying, then think of me or you – Jack – and then from there through a chain of sound and logic81 think of matchwood; and then think on the allomorphic – elemental! – kinship of that humble substance, once burned, with diamond. The chaining and interlacing of words through the entire poem, often effected through neologism, lends this final argument a kind of inevitability.

A near-contemporary poem, ‘Harry Ploughman’, deploys about a dozen neologisms with a density rivalling that of ‘Heraclitean Fire’. I have italicized those that I have identified.82

80 Milroy, pp. 161–162.
81 The least obvious link in that chain, between “joke” and “poor potsherd”, is generally proposed to involve the Biblical Job. See for example Peters, p. 167.
82 *O*newhere, which Milroy treats as a neologism, has citations in the *OED* that suggest Hopkins would have encountered it previously.
Hard as hurdle arms, with a broth of goldish flue
Breathed round; the rack of ribs; the scooped flank; lank

*Rope-over* thigh; *knee-nave*; and barrelled shank –

Head and foot, shoulder and shank –

By a grey eye’s heed steered well, one crew, fall to;
Stand at stress. Each limb’s *barrowy* brawn, his thew
That onewhere curded, onewhere sucked or sank –

Soared or sank –,

Though as a beechbole firm, finds his, as at a roll-call, rank
And features, in flesh, what deed he each must do –

*His sinew-service* where do.

He leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow, and liquid waist
In him, all quail to the wallowing o’ the plough: ’s cheek crimsons; curls

Wag or *crossbridle*, in a wind lifted, *windlaced* –

See his wind- *lilylocks* -laced;

*Churlsgrace*, too, child of *Amansstrength*, how it hangs or hurls

Them – broad in bluff hide his frowning feet lashed! raced

With, along them, *cragiron* under and cold furls –

*With-a-fountain’s shining-shot* furls.83

Structurally similar in being an “augmented sonnet”, although with interpolated burden lines rather than codas, ‘Harry Ploughman’ is very different from ‘Heraclitean Fire’ in purpose and mood. Enjambments, alliteration and assonance are less prominent here, and there are more frequent pauses in the punctuation, so there is not the urgent movement found in ‘Heraclitean Fire’. Indeed, the subject in the octet, which is essentially the ploughman’s body, is static; only in the sestet

does his immense stored energy begin to guide the movement of the plough, and indeed only in the last two lines is there any departure from the intense concentration on the body and motion of the man. Hopkins manages to depict him without trite classical references to an Adonis or Hercules, and he does so in a matching vocabulary (palate/palette for a verbal portrait) that includes even fewer than usual Latinate words. The first three coinages all fix the shapes of body parts in workaday or agricultural terms (*nave* here being a wheel-hub, not a church section). Phrases akin to “thigh muscles like rope”, or “kneecaps like naves”, would have deadened line three; and as a bonus we get the wordplay on “knave”, a word still in use in the nineteenth century in several moods. The affectionately familiar one, akin to the Australian “bastard”, springs to mind here as an epithet that Harry might attract in the inn after work. And *barrowy*, in the shape of a hillock, a perfect word both in its form – alliterative with “brawn”, with “barrelled” before it and with “beechbole” below – and its association with the earth. It is a simple enough construction, with none of the four dimensions prominent, yet it had to be invented because no existing word would be as exactly right in that spot. The octet exemplifies Hopkins’ syntactical eccentricity. The first sentence leads the reader through nearly five lines of its subject before it ends at the double verb of “fall to; / Stand at stress.” The second also has an extended subject, deploying *barrowy* and the rare but not neologistic *onewhere*; it anthropomorphizes parts of the body by attaching male personal pronouns to them and calling them up for *sinew-service*, with – if I am not mistaken – a pun on “senior service” (which is carried out on naval vessels that plough the ocean wave).
A further unorthodoxy is the interpolation, between a possessive pronoun and its referent, of a phrase qualifying the earlier “finds”: “his, as at a roll-call, rank”.

This construction lends a rhythmic musicality to the line, with “as at a roll-call” echoing “Though as a beech-bole” in several ways that would be lost with any alternative sequencing. Such displacement of a phrase to a place where it seems to intrude is a trick Hopkins has used many times before, so the regular reader is barely fazed by it; but there is more to come. Tmesis is a technique usually applied for comic and/or emphatic effect. It is common in the Australian vernacular, C. J. Dennis using it in that vein a few times in his classic ‘The Austral------aise’, as in the fourth line here:

Get a ------ move on,

Have some ------ sense.

Learn the ------ art of

Self-de- ------ -fence.84

Hopkins’ purpose here is more complex, if not more passionate. As Milroy puts it: “In ‘Harry Ploughman’, Hopkins extends his customary interruption of sentences and phrases to interruption of the word itself.”85 The ploughman’s curly hair, fair as lilies, is tousled in the wind; the curls are windlaced, but not content with this freshly-minted adjective, Hopkins in wind- lilylocks -laced wants to capture the unity of wind and hair. He wrote to Bridges:

I want Harry Ploughman to be a vivid figure before the mind’s eye; if he is not that the sonnet fails. The difficulties are of syntax no doubt. Dividing a

84 CJ Dennis, Backblock Ballads and Later Verses, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1919, pp. 147–150.
85 Milroy, p. 220.
compound word by a clause sandwiched into it was a desperate deed, I feel, and I do not feel that it was an unquestionable success.\textsuperscript{86}

Milroy devotes some time to the “sandwich”, concluding that to rewrite it as (say) \textit{lilylocks windlaced}

… destroys the unity of this small inscape, which suggests the perceived inseparability of the wind and the locks…. The interrupted compound foregrounds the perception that the wind and the locks are inseparable; and action is indifferently performed by either and indifferently affects either. Objects and motion are all one; things and “the relations of things” (\textit{JP}, 125)\textsuperscript{87} are unified.\textsuperscript{88}

Of the compound neologisms in the remaining three lines, \textit{cragiron} is a straightforward rendering of the ploughshare, and \textit{Amansstrength} seems to me the only weakness of the poem’s inventions, a proper-name compound of a strangeness that has no obvious purpose, despite Gardner’s view that Hopkins “seems to have wanted a tight, compact word which would harmonize with the muscular tension of the whole figure”. The two (or is it one?) in the remarkable last line will be discussed in detail in the next section. \textit{Churlsgrace}, though, is perhaps the most significant word in the poem. As a compound it is broad by virtue of its two constituent spaces being not so much different as seemingly inconsistent, to the extent that the incautious reader might see it as an oxymoron. But Hopkins places it here to summarize and unify all the impressions inscaped in the poem. Not once to this point has he used a value-word such as “grace” or

\textsuperscript{86} Hopkins, \textit{Letters to RB}, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{87} A reference to Hopkins’ journal note mentioned in the Introduction to this Chapter.
\textsuperscript{88} Milroy, p. 220.
“beauty” to tell us what he sees, and now he unites one with another word to make inseparable the common countryman and the grace – which for Hopkins, of course, carries meanings both of beauty in physical bodily movement and of divine favour – that he embodies. The word is in two sonic halves, a heavy and a light, and is bound into the poem by its rhyming and alliterative connections (churl/curls/hurls/furls, grace/laced, churl/child); after we encounter it, and shortly afterward reach the poem’s end, churlsgrace stays with us.

4. Hopkins’ uniqueness, inscape and human cognition

Leaving aside the special case of the nonsense poets, all of the poets identified in this thesis as prolific in neologism, regardless of whether they enjoyed public popularity in their lifetimes, attracted criticism from some of their contemporaries for their perceived sins of unorthodoxy in poetics. Hopkins was perhaps more unorthodox, overall, than any prominent poet up to his time. His inventiveness in poetic technique was manifold: he devised complex metres, used syntax deformed from the orthodox by reordering and ellipsis, and employed various forms of rhyme, rhythm, assonance and alliteration that were often striking for both their oddness and their frequency. So, to quote myself from the previous chapter on his differently distinctive contemporary, Dickinson: “Little wonder, then, that [he] should also have invented new words when required, to serve [his] poetic purposes.” Hopkins’ declared primary purpose, as quoted in the Introduction to this chapter – “what I above all aim at in poetry” – is inscape, and compound neologisms were a central lexical tool in achieving it.

It has already been noted that compounds form the majority of Hopkins’ neologisms. Of the 38 words in the three late poems mentioned in the previous
sections, 34 are compounds; though this is a small and non-random sample, the preponderance is clear. Compare that proportion to Dickinson, for whom the compound count is nine in her entire poetic output. Conversions are in moderately common use by both Hopkins and Dickinson, while the latter is proportionately much more prolific with affixation.

The contribution of his richest compounds to Hopkins’ project of inscaping nature might best be exemplified by the last line of ‘Harry Ploughman’: “With-a-fountain’s shining-shot furls.” Milroy, in a chapter devoted to syntax, pays close attention to this syntactically opaque construction, and finds with-a-fountain’s and shining-shot to be “not simply compound words”, but together form “the ultimate in syntactic compression of modifying phrases”:

The furls (furrows) … are shot with the shining of a fountain. They shoot up from the earth, as if they were water, shining like water, and then curl over back to the earth again, like a fountain. However compressed and difficult such syntax may be, it is a remarkable achievement to inscape the quick movements, the texture, sheen and shape of the furrows as economically as Hopkins has done here. Indeed, it is only by compressing the syntax that he can capture so many instantaneously perceived effects in a unity."89

I believe Milroy underreads the line a little here. As furling is an act usually associated with a fabric, I suggest that “shot” here is – at least in part – referencing the play of light on shot silk. Nevertheless, in its intent Milroy’s parsing is persuasive: what Hopkins has constructed here is a genuine five-word compound modifier, with-a-fountain’s shining-shot, and it is rather a pity that he

89 Milroy, pp. 219–220.
didn’t go for the full unorthodoxy (and greater reading clarity) of five hyphens, as Gardner records that he did in alternates in an earlier manuscript: *with-a-wet-sheen-shot* and *with-a-wet-fire-flushed*. It is sad to contemplate that many readers in the present day might never have seen damp earth being turned by a ploughshare, and so have had no chance of comprehending what Hopkins is capturing here. Even those who have seen it might, like me, be initially perplexed by his construction, until it abruptly becomes clear – with or without assistance from a helpful commentary. Then, the effect is as described by the poet himself:

One of two kinds of clearness one shd. have – either the meaning to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else, if dark at first reading, when once made out to explode.  

Take a moment to consider how those “two kinds” of clarity are manifested at different levels in Hopkins’ work. Poems that are “dark at first reading” are present in abundance and, as I have already observed, many of them tend also to be the ones richest in neologism. At the intermediate level of sentence or phrase, Hopkins’ often baroque syntax continually forces the reader to stop, reread, reparse, until (in the most rewarding cases) the words suddenly form themselves into a meaning that “explodes”. Then there are the words themselves. Hopkins’ vocabulary, for the most part, is very much in line with his express desire, “current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself”; that is, the words are commonplace, “current language”, but their significance is often extended or elevated in poetic context. But the neologisms are, of course, anything but commonplace, and in their radicalism they make the language

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91 Hopkins, *Letters to RB*, p. 89.
“unlike itself”. In the terms of the four-dimension framework of Chapter I, they are generally rich in strangeness and charm, and the compounds in breadth. Multivalence, perhaps surprisingly, is less frequent than for other poets – though meaning might be hard to grasp, once seen it is generally singular – “clearness” is all. Contrast Dickinson, for example, for whom affixations constitute the greatest proportion of coinages, and negations a majority of those. Some of them are straightforward, striking us only by a degree of strangeness; but many others, such as (to name two superb examples) *illocality* and *recallless*, offer a variety of meaning.

Returning at last to inscape, both of nature and of word, as Hopkins’ central poetic purpose, we can see that Milroy’s last few words above contain the key to the expression of natural inscape in poetry: to “capture so many instantaneously perceived effects in a unity.” Asynchronous media in art such as prose, drama and music are inherently ill-suited to the catching of inscape compared with painting and other instantaneous (generally visual) media. Indeed, Hopkins showed early inclination to the study and practice of painting, and detailed notes in a late journal entry on a visit to the Royal Academy show that he judged artworks on their inscaping of their subjects. In this example he is moved to a poetic rendering of a painting of leopards that he obviously admires: “Leopards shewing the flow and slow spraying of the streams of spots down from the backbone and making this flow word-in and inscape the whole animal and even the group of them”. But elsewhere he is dismissive: “Scotch Firs: ‘The silence that is in the lonely woods’ – No such thing, instress absent, firtrunks ungrouped …”. So to best

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93 Hopkins, *Journals and Papers*, p. 244.
94 Hopkins, *Journals and Papers*, p. 244.
capture an inscape, a serially read medium such as the written word will need to approach, though it cannot match, the instantaneity of a painting. Clearly a poem, by its form, is better suited than prose to this purpose. Milroy is somewhat reductive in his “only by compressing the syntax”, as there are other contributing factors at work, but he is correct in perceiving the essence of Hopkins’ most successful achievements in inscaping nature: the capture of the moment in a single impression. The last line of ‘Harry Ploughman’ does that. The first section of ‘Heraclitean Fire’ captures an entire scene after the passing of a fierce storm, like the one of the third section of the William Tell Overture, but in a little over eight rapid lines. In these and countless other examples, syntax is not only compressed but given a thorough working-over. Ann C. Colley has expressed it beautifully:

Flung from their usual arrangement, words lose their habitual sequence ... In his attempt to conquer grammar Hopkins lards his poems with clumps of words – new units of meaning … this new order of meaning brings the reader closer to the subject’s psychological reality.95

For “the subject’s psychological reality” read “inscape”. Colley goes on in the same passage:

And, more significantly, it allows Hopkins to recover the natural function of the mind for which the linear model of grammar is not sufficient. The new order restores for the reader a pre-linguistic unity of experience in which the world is not divided into verbs and nouns.

That is, the world where, as in Hopkins’ simple words quoted earlier, “All words mean either things or relations of things”. If Hopkins’ compounds, “clumps of words”, are enablers of compression, then his less frequent but still significant conversions contribute to this de-linearization of language, not just breaking the rules and conventions of syntax but masking the types of elements so that the rules themselves are subverted.

What of words’ own inscapes? W. A. M. Peters contends:

To this poet a word was as much an individual as any other thing; it had a self as every other object, and consequently just as he ever strove to catch the inscape of a flower or a tree nor a cloud, he similarly did not rest until he knew the word as a self. He attended to the various meanings this word might have, he let its sounds grow upon him and take hold of his ear, he realized its likeness in sound with other words, he felt its instress, in brief, he caught its inscape.  

Much literature exists on Hopkins’ philosophy in this respect, all of it outside the formal scope of this thesis; but the inscapes specifically of his own neologisms is a question that I have not seen discussed. Does it make sense for this poet to speak of the inscape of a thing created by him? As well as the powers of neologism in poetry to compress and to subvert structure, Geoffrey Leech, in discussing the remarkable phrase from ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ quoted earlier, “the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps”, identifies what he calls

… the ‘concept-making’ power of neologism. If a new word is coined it implies the wish to recognize a concept or property which the language can so

96 Peters, p. 142.
far only express by phrasal or clausal description... Hopkins’s three epithets seem to invest the sea with three awe-inspiring qualities. The paraphrase by means of a relative clause simply describes tragic happenings connected with the sea, whereas *widow-making*, *unchilding*, and *unfathering* seem to attribute to the sea properties which are as inseparable from it as are the properties of wetness, blueness and saltiness.97

Now, clearly not every coinage of any poet carries this much weight of meaning, and often, as in the ambiguities of Dickinson, or deliberate vacuity in nonsense words, the purpose of neologism is otherwise, and there is no “newly formulated idea”. Hopkins, though, is particularly prolific in such original, “concept-making” creations. To sample a few, in this chapter we have already seen *lovely-dumb*, *churlsgrace*, *sinew-service*, *million-fuelèd* and *heart’s-clarion* (all of them, as compounds, notable for their breadth). In ‘No worst, there is none’ there appears the concept of *forepangs*, an anticipation of pain, an idea that was perhaps, as surmised in Chapter VII, adopted by T. S. Eliot. ‘Pied Beauty’ gives us *fathers-forth*, and surely *achieve* in ‘The Windhover’ (“The achieve of, the mastery of the thing!”)98 is something more than “achievement”, a difference made most apparent when it is read aloud. The vowel sound of the second syllable is irresistibly drawn out to a triumphant length. To read “achievement” in the same way leaves “-ment” as an anti-climax.

Though *inscape*, as a word, does not appear in Hopkins’ poems, many critics have seen its meaning captured in the last four lines of the octet in ‘As kingfishers catch fire’:

97 Leech, p. 44.
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*.99

If all of language is descended from the original Divine Word of creation spoken by God, then Hopkins’ neologisms are words not invented, but discovered. In that world view, Hopkins is simply the first person to utter them so that we, his readers, may catch their inscape. He is carrying out his priestly duty in revealing the Word of God.

CHAPTER VI: VICTORIAN NONSENSE

Thripsy pillivinx,

Flinkywisty pommm,
Slushypipp


Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.

– Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

1. What poetry is nonsense?

Neologism appears frequently in nonsense poetry, but while central to the poetics of many texts in that genre it is not a necessary element of it. Consider together, for example, Lewis Carroll’s celebrated ‘Jabberwocky’, in Through the Looking Glass, and his untitled poem (sometimes dubbed ‘The Mad Gardener’s Song’, a title which I will adopt here) strewn stanza by stanza throughout Sylvie and Bruno. The first stanza of the former will be familiar to most readers:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.¹

The latter is exemplified by its opening:

He thought he saw an Elephant,
That practised on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
A letter from his wife.
“At length I realize,” he said,
“The bitterness of Life!”²

This poem’s success is based on the two juxtapositions contained in each of the structurally similar stanzas. The first is between the observed objects of lines 1–2 and lines 3–4: usually one is nonsensical in itself and the other prosaic, and often one concrete and the other abstract; the higher nonsense of the juxtaposition being the idea that the two could be mistaken for one another. The second is the sum of lines 1–4 against the protagonist’s statement in lines 5–6, usually mournful, sometimes bathetic. His words may be a response to the first object, or to the second, or may be a non sequitur. There are no neologisms in the poem, nor any other unusual, silly or high-flown language. ‘Jabberwocky’, by contrast, is essentially dependent upon neologism for its poetic effect. In ‘The Mad Gardener’s Song’ we understand each of its two-line components perfectly, and most of them are prosaic by themselves; in ‘Jabberwocky’ most lines contain new words with no prima facie meaning, and its pleasure for the reader is at least

² Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno, in Complete Illustrated Works, p. 277.
partly that of a coded word-puzzle. Yet both poems, seemingly with little but their author in common, are widely regarded as classic nonsense poetry.

It is tempting to address the question, “What is (literary) nonsense?” with – in common with US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart on pornography – “I know it when I see it”. But to describe its characteristics will help explain exactly how and where neologism contributes to it. A host of critics have proposed definitions, or at least descriptions, of literary nonsense. An extensive literature survey up to 1988 can be found in *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, where Wim Tigges shows that there is substantial disagreement even on such fundamental matters as whether nonsense is a genre. Tigges, with whom I agree that it is, synthesizes the work of others (three in particular) in proposing a four-part definition that is helpful for the purposes of this chapter. He even devotes a chapter to distinguishing nonsense from its relatives: humour, nursery rhyme, curiosities, light verse, fantasy, the grotesque, surrealism, Dada, absurdism and metafiction. Tigges summarizes the four components of nonsense as

\[\text{… an unresolved tension between presence and absence of meaning, lack of emotional involvement, playlike presentation, and an emphasis, stronger than in any other type of literature, upon its verbal nature.}\]

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7 Tigges, pp. 51–55. His definition would be too narrow, though, for compilers of nonsense anthologies, as inspection of such books shows.
8 Tigges, pp. 90–137.
Only the second of these would provoke disagreement among scholars. Elizabeth Sewell is prominent among those supporting emotional disengagement as a distinguishing characteristic,\(^9\) to the reductive extent that she would label Edward Lear’s nonsense Songs, such as ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’ and ‘The Jumblies’, and Carroll’s ‘The Hunting of the Snark’ as “strictly speaking, failures as Nonsense.”\(^{10}\) Marijke Boucherie, in contrast, writes: “[I]n critical writing which favours the affective dimension of nonsense [as does Boucherie herself], Lear is privileged over Carroll, and the frame of ‘nonsense’ remains imbued with suggestions of an emotional complicity linked to the cult of the author and the feel of language.”\(^{11}\) Unemotional treatment of physically violent or traumatic events is certainly a frequent feature of nonsense, but I would suggest that emotional distance in general is not essential to it. So, noting also that the second of Tigges’ four components is the only one with no clear relevance to the discussion of neologism, I will set it aside, and return in section 3 to consider that relevance for the other three.

This chapter will concentrate chiefly on Carroll and Lear, the twin pillars of Victorian nonsense. If there is little commonality among critics in what constitutes literary nonsense, there is a rare unanimity in the view of those two men as dominant in the genre. That is surprising enough, but the surprise is magnified by the fact that the two share so much in common: they were bachelors, near-contemporaries, notoriously socially awkward, and wrote

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\(^9\) Sewell, pp. 130–148.  
\(^{10}\) Sewell, p. 147.  
nonsense as an adjunct to non-literary professions with scientific connections; and yet, as Ann C. Colley points out, they never met or even alluded to each other in their writing.  

12 Why nonsense suddenly prospered in that time and place has been widely theorized upon, mostly in variations upon the themes of a play-like element of the English character and a reaction against the strictness of Victorian society. There are three cultural strands of nineteenth-century Britain that are worth mentioning for their common influences on Lear and Carroll. First, a remarkable flowering of science occurred. Both Carroll, a lecturer in formal logic and mathematics, and Lear, an illustrator of natural history books, were acquainted with science and scientists, and each exploited that familiarity at times in his poetry. Carroll, for example, devotes a large part of the fifth Fit of The Hunting of the Snark to a subversive mathematical “proof” that in fact proves nothing at all, and a four-stanza parody of zoological observation that begins:

As to temper the Jubjub’s a desperate bird,
Since it lives in perpetual passion:
Its taste in costume is entirely absurd –
It is ages ahead of the fashion:  

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Daniel Brown describes extensively the influence on Lear’s writing of his acquaintance with the biological sciences. Among other examples, Brown likens

13 Carroll, The Hunting of the Snark, in Complete Illustrated Works, p. 750.
14 D Brown, The Poetry of Victorian Scientists: Style, Science and Nonsense, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 9–27. This book revels in a world where science and the humanities were more easily conversational with one another than now. Brown surveys the poetic interests of the likes of William Rowan Hamilton, James Sylvester and James Clerk Maxwell, the last of whom is revealed to have had a predilection for nonsense poetry.
many of Lear’s limericks to “a burlesque version of a natural history text”, identifying subjects

… by age and gender, as a generic human type, and then by the place they inhabit, a peculiar habitat parallel to those of animals:

There was an Old Man of Dundee
Who frequented the top of a tree;
When disturbed by the crows, he abruptly arose,
And exclaimed, “I’ll return to Dundee.”

Both writers commonly deploy technical terms in their verse that are well known to themselves but possibly unfamiliar to their readers – not neologisms, but carrying similar poetic effects. Examples include Lear’s ‘The Cummerbund: An Indian Poem’, quoted in section 2 of this chapter, and this delightful stanza from Carroll’s ‘Four Riddles’ (I):

Yet what are all such gaieties to me
Whose thoughts are full of indices and surds?

\[ x^2 + 7x + 53 \]

\[ = \frac{11}{3}. \]

Also influential was the expansion in literature for children that had gathered speed in the second half of the eighteenth century, so that by the time Lear and Carroll were writing, more British children were reading a greater variety of material than ever before. Both men were continually ambiguous about the

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16 Carroll, ‘Four Riddles’, Complete Illustrated Works, p. 872. The reader should note that if this verse seems not to rhyme properly, the last line should be read as “equals eleven-thirds”.

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intended audience for their work, which was clearly popular with both children and adults. Among other effects, the rhythmic oral traditions that fed into rhymes in print of the “Mother Goose” school can be heard in countless similar chants in Lear (“Ploffskin, Pluffskin, Pelican Jee”); both men took inspiration from the relatively recent (from the mid-eighteenth century) upsurge in fiction produced specifically for children, in which anthropomorphized animals were often prominent;¹⁷ and both, at times, gleefully subverted the moralistic tone of much children’s literature of the time.

The third influence was the Romantic movement, which had established itself as the dominant popular school in British poetry by the time Lear and Carroll began their nonsense work. Lear and Carroll were both friends of Tennyson,¹⁸,¹⁹ who had inherited the mantle of Romantic champion. Lear especially, in his longer poems, reflects Romantic preoccupations with love, dispossession and travel to alien lands. Emile Cammaerts expressed their relationship to the movement thus:

Nonsense poets may be compared with the children we see … cutting capers in front of a band. Ought we to express astonishment when finding that they are specially boisterous when the band is most powerful and the rhythm most compelling?²⁰

I have discussed in Chapter II the association of the explosion of neologism in English Renaissance poetry with the exuberant experimentation in poetic

¹⁹ F Lennon, The Life of Lewis Carroll, Dover, New York, NY, 1972, pp. 88–91. Carroll and Tennyson were later estranged through a petty grievance that appears to be down to the latter’s bad grace (pp. 165–167).
language then taking place. Similarly, the upswing in poetic neologism in Victorian poetry generally can be linked to the liberation of the poetic imagination initiated by the Romantic poets.

2. A brief survey of neologism in nonsense poetry

Before examining instances of neologism in their poetic nonsense contexts, I should point out that the patterns of construction of these words generally differ from those employed in conventional poetry, which were laid out in the Introduction. The most extensive catalogue of neologisms in Lear’s and Carroll’s work, which serves as a useful though incomplete index to them, has been assembled by Eric Partridge. An inspection of it shows that affixations and conversions are uncommon, compounds are common enough, but the great majority of words made by nonsense poets fall into the “other” category.

“Orthodox” affixations – words creatively topped or tailed by prefixes or suffixes to form a negative, superlative or some other modification of the root – are very hard to find in Partridge’s review. Carroll’s famous curiouser, which is of course from a prose source, is mentioned, but beyond that the nearest examples, from Lear, are typified by abruptious. In these the tail is not strictly a suffix, and the meaning is not modified in the usual sense. Partridge’s coverage excludes conversions, but that may be because there are none – I did not spot one in my reading of Lear and Carroll. It is noted later in this chapter that adherence to conventional syntax is a common property of the genre, so a scarcity of conversions is not unexpected. Conversions, because they are not new in their

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21 I will use this term in this chapter for want of a better one for non-nonsense poetry.
form on the page, can be difficult to identify in most conventional poetry, especially where the syntax makes sentence structure obscure. But in the plain narrative verse forms common to nonsense poetry they would be more likely to stand out, and so we may be confident that if they are unobserved then they are rare – though not non-existent, as evidenced by a poem by an anonymous parodist of Freudian analysis that begins:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Across the moorlands of the Not} \\
\text{We chase the gruesome When;} \\
\text{And hunt the Itness of the What} \\
\text{Through forests of the Then.}^{23}
\end{align*}
\]

As for compounds, though there are many, they appear mostly in the less radical hyphenated form. Carroll, for example, in ‘Jabberwocky’ has *snicker-snack*, a kind of found (and, one would imagine, inaccurate) onomatopoeia\(^{24}\) for the sound of sword in Jabberwock; and in the ghostly nonsense of ‘Phantasmagoria’ he gives us the punning office-holders *Inn-Spectre* and *Knight-Mayor*. In Lear the hyphen is everywhere, most often joining partners in alliteration or rhyme such as *sniffle-snuffle* and *chatter-clatter*, or fixing colour shades, such as *sea-green* and *pea-green* in the one stanza of ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’. Perhaps his most striking compound is in ‘The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò’. A superb neologistic oxymoron, *silent-roaring* – understandable to anyone who has been alone by the sea – in one line is matched by the not-quite-paradox between

\(^{23}\) C Wells (ed.), *A Nonsense Anthology*, Dover, New York, NY, 1958, p. 36.

\(^{24}\) E Partridge notes (p. 185) that “snicker” is an archaic term for a blade, although this may be simply a happy coincidence.
classically slow animal and adverb in the next: “Through the silent-roaring ocean
/ Did the Turtle swiftly go”\(^{25}\).

At this point I will define a new category that appears to be peculiar to nonsense
poetry. It is a form of catachresis that appears to be almost unique to Lear, and he
uses it to great nonsense effect. It is worth quoting a complete limerick here to
give the example some context:

There was an Old Man of Peru,
Who never knew what he should do;
So he tore off his hair
And behaved like a bear,
That intrinsic Old Man of Peru.\(^{26}\)

The use of intrinsic in a (non)sense that is entirely unrelated to its accepted one
can be considered as analogous to the neologic conversion. Whereas the latter
radically changes the syntactic usage of a word, Lear here is radically changing –
not just shifting, as a conventional poet might do – its semantics. Indeed, he is not
so much changing as annulling it. Whatever meaning the reader might understand
by the signifier intrinsic here, it is not “intrinsic”: hence my term for it, “radical
semantic conversion”. In ‘The Cummerbund: An Indian Poem’, Lear deploys a
succession of everyday Indian words in essentially the same way, except that to
the majority of readers, unfamiliar with the language, their effect is as if they
were English neologisms, as in: “She sate upon her Dobie – / She heard the
Nimmak hum”, where Dobie is a Hindi word for launderer and Nimmak for salt.


\(^{26}\) Lear, Complete Nonsense, p. 87.
Carroll apparently uses the technique poetically\textsuperscript{27} only once, in ‘The Hunting of the Snark’: “As the man they call’d “Ho!” told his story of woe / In an antediluvian tone.”\textsuperscript{28} It is noteworthy that his example is in a similar anapaestic rhythm to Lear’s limerick-last-line examples, a polysyllabic lilt whose sonic charm may be a possible factor in their respective effects.

I regard the radical semantic conversion as being just inside the definition of neologism. I will briefly remark on a related technique that is perhaps just outside it: the use of the “low-value” words of English such as pronouns, prepositions and even articles in a way that does not convert their usage category, is syntactically valid, and is semantically orthodox within a small local context of a few words, yet through logical inconsistency in the wider context of a whole sentence blurs their normally straightforward meanings to produce a form of nonsense. An example is the anonymous evidence in verse at the trial of the Knave of Hearts in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, which begins:

They told me you had been to her,
And mentioned me to him:
She gave me a good character,
But said I could not swim.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} In his prose, in Through the Looking Glass, the word \textit{glory} undergoes a radical semantic conversion to “knock-down argument” at the beginning of Humpty Dumpty’s well-known exposition of the arbitrary nature of signifier-signified mapping (Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, in Complete Illustrated Works, p. 184). E Partridge (p. 180) cites one other case in Carroll’s poetry, which I regard as misclassified – just another example of the subjective nature of judgments in this area.

\textsuperscript{28} Carroll, The Hunting of the Snark, in Complete Illustrated Works, p. 743.

\textsuperscript{29} Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, in Complete Illustrated Works, p. 108. Martin Gardner notes an earlier version of this poem, published in The Comic Times, London, 1855 (M Gardner, The Annotated Alice [revised edn.], Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1970, p. 158n.) In this version the first line of a then-popular song, “She’s all my fancy painted her”, is echoed in Carroll’s first line as “She’s all my fancy painted him”, a more immediate pronoun-gender challenge to the reader than the Alice version.
These lines would be entirely meaningful and prosaic if the last word of the second line were “her”, but the “him” trips the reader up. The remainder of the poem piles up successive pronouns that are inconsistent with one another as to gender or number and/or have no antecedent. It leaves the reader with a final impression similar to that of Alice: “I don’t believe there’s an atom of meaning in it.” Other poets have achieved similar effects: for example, A. C. Swinburne in ‘The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell’, which begins: “One, who is not, we see; but one, whom we see not, is; / Surely, this is not that; but that is assuredly this.”\(^{30}\) Swinburne’s own penchant for poetic neologism, incidentally, is on full display in later poems such as ‘March: An Ode’ (\textit{frost-flower, snow-blossom, blossomlike, outlightens} (an invention of which he was clearly fond, using it in at least two other poems), \textit{snowshine} and \textit{swan-soft}).\(^{31}\)

All the above forms, though, are greatly outnumbered by the category “other”. The variations included under this type were found to be so uncommon in neologism in conventional poetry that I did not further subdivide it there. In nonsense, “other” comes in many forms that are not easy to distinguish from one another, existing as more an assortment than a taxonomy. Rather than attempt to impose an inevitably debatable order upon it, I will simply note a general characteristic. Words in all the previous categories are wholly constructed out of building-blocks that are either English words or parts (roots, prefixes, suffixes, etc.) of words. This is not true of most of the nonsense neologisms that will be examined here: that is, part or all of the word is simply made up, even though it

may bear a sound or appearance that reminds us of an English word or words. Three examples from ‘Jabberwocky’ are: *Jubjub*, with no English component at all; *uffish*, with a non-English root and a standard English suffix; and *slithy*, which nearly everyone agrees with Humpty Dumpty is a lexical blend, or, to use Carroll’s word, portmanteau, combining the words *lithe* and *slimy*, and yet it is not actual English nor an orthodox compound. I say “nearly everyone agrees” on that derivation, but Sewell gives a set of examples of various critics’ more divergent interpretations of Carrollian portmanteaux that serves as a warning against presuming the author’s intention.32

As observed at the start of this chapter, neologisms are not a constant feature of Carroll’s nonsense poetry, and nor are they of Lear’s. Lear’s *The Book of Nonsense* and *More Nonsense*, which between them essentially comprise his complete collection of limericks, contain very few. Of those I have already mentioned radical semantic conversions, of which there is a handful, and there is a comparable number of coined adjectives used mostly in a similar anapaestic mode and to similar effect: “That *ombliferous* Person of Crete”33 Some readers may be inclined to search for a degree of constructed meaning in these words, as Brown does at length for *ombliferous*: he relates its initial *O*, “gently closed by the consonants that follow it”, to the open mouth of the sack worn by the Cretan subject, and connects it to the familiar natural-history usage of the -ferous suffix.34 Others may simply relish their charm, sonic and otherwise. In any case, the occasional neologisms in the limericks are not prominent in their success as nonsense – that arises more out of other factors. These include the incongruous

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32 Sewell, p. 120.
33 Lear, *Complete Nonsense*, p. 164.
34 Brown, pp. 26–27.
juxtaposition of moods, one of which is frequently melancholy, a characteristic also common in Carroll in poems such as ‘The Mad Gardener’s Song’ and *The Hunting of the Snark*; the emotionally detached description of episodes of absurdly violent or eccentric behaviour (see the second of Tigges’ components, above); and clever rhymes with exotic place-names (“There was an Old Man of Thermopylae / Who never did anything properly”).

Most of Lear’s limericks are set in a place declared at the end of the first line. While a few sound as if they might have been invented for the sole purpose of rhyming (such as Thermopylae with “properly”), every one of them exists. Lear’s later, more extended nonsense poetry, on the other hand, abounds in neologistic place-names, as well as the people, creatures and plants that live in them. As an extensive traveller to Europe, the Middle East and India who wrote many diaries and letters about his destinations, Lear would have been aware of the rising English orientalist fascination with alien lands and people. ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’ alone refers to the great Gromboolian Plain, the Hills of the Chankly Bore and the Zemmery Fidd; the Dong and the Jumblies; and the Bong-tree and Twangum Tree. Many such inventions occur in more than one poem: the Bong-tree, for example, also turns up in ‘The Owl and the Pussy-Cat’ and ‘The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bô’. A number of creatures from other poems turn up on the Quangle Wangle’s hat in the poem of that name. Lear also scatters invented adjectives, mostly opaque, and some of them, such as *runcible* and

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36 See E Partridge (pp. 174–175) for an extensive (though he does not claim complete) list.
37 Used variously in his poetry to modify the nouns *hat, cat, raven, spoon, goose* and *wall*. Amusingly, E Partridge (p. 172n) describes *runcible* as “correctly used by Lear in ‘runcible spoon’”, appearing to imply that his understood meaning of a spoon with a cutting edge pre-dated Lear’s usage, whereas all the evidence suggests that it entered the language via the reference in the hugely popular ‘The Owl and the Pussycat’ and that the edged-spoon meaning was attached afterwards.
scroobious, recurring; and occasional neologism by de- and reconstruction of compounds, such as “battlecock and shuttedore”.

This survey has largely been concerned with Lear and Carroll. In The Origins of English Nonsense, Noel Malcolm finds that the first substantial flowering of the genre in English was in the early seventeenth century. Tigges, on the other hand, perhaps because of a narrower definition, dates it to the Victorian era that produced Carroll and Lear. While Malcolm’s early examples do include enough instances of nonsense poetry to suggest Tigges may have had a blind spot, there is among them little or no presence of neologism as a poetic tool. Rather, the nonsense, as illustrated by examples from John Taylor, is sustained largely by incongruity (“Even as the waves of brainlesse butter’d fish / With bugle horne writ in the Hebrew tongue …”) rather than wordplay of any kind. Apart from that style of nonsense, there are verses written in mock-foreign tongues that Malcolm describes as “gibberish” (“Thoytom Asse Coria Tushrump codsheadirustie, / Mungrellimo whish whap ragge dicete tottrie”). The reason such lines are gibberish, whereas ‘Jabberwocky’, for instance, is not, is mostly tied up with the absence or presence of syntactic structure, which is addressed in more detail in section 3 of this chapter. While the words are neologisms, and fragments of them resemble English signifiers, the verse is not in any meaningful way nonsense. Maria Yaguello explains the difference this way:

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39 Tigges, p. 138.
40 Malcolm, p. 127.
41 Malcolm, p. 19.
42 This may seem a prescient compound, given that tush in the sense of the human posterior is first cited in the OED from 1962; but that entry derives it from the Yiddish toches or tuches, “rump”, so the poet appears to have been riffing on that relationship and simply fluked the twentieth-century loanword spelling.
43 Malcolm, p. 139.
We saw earlier how Verlaine [sic – this should read “Valéry”, who is correctly identified in Yaguello’s earlier passage] defined poetry as a ‘prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning’. A gentle nudge is enough to destroy this delicate balance. By giving priority to pure sound, we leave the way open to meaninglessness, the absence of meaning, as distinct from nonsense. The link between signifier and signified is a vulnerable one. It can be lost, just as it can be created.44

There are also fragments of nonsense in the songs of the fools and mad in Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers, but their “hey nonny” and “a-down” refrains are not neologism in those contexts but reprised from the common songbook of the time. All such refrains, of course, had once been neologisms, and their role in folk song and popular song more generally is touched on in the Introduction. Other poets, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have produced some verse that is more or less classifiable as nonsense poetry: a random roll-call includes Rudyard Kipling, E. C. Bentley, T. S. Eliot, Hilaire Belloc, Edith Sitwell, E. E. Cummings, A. A. Milne and Stevie Smith. They are variously children’s poets, humorists, experimental poets experimenting, or “serious” artists slumming it for a lark. While a handful, such as Cummings and Milne, have also employed neologism in their nonsense, none of them matches the two major Victorians for sustained commitment to nonsense as their primary poetic genre.

3. Neologism at work

Finally, we look at how neologisms work in what many would see as the two peaks of Carroll’s and Lear’s respective poetic achievements: ‘Jabberwocky’, and Lear’s longer, later ballads, particularly ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’. This chapter began with the observation that the presence of neologism is not a necessary characteristic of nonsense poetry. Conversely, profuse neologism alone does not guarantee success in the genre. The “gibberish” poem by John Taylor cited above fails as nonsense not for the quality of its words, which are entertaining enough, but because there is little or no infrastructure, either in recognizable morphemes in the words themselves (such as a -y ending, indicating a likely adjective, or -s, either a plural noun or a singular present-tense verb), or in the form of intervening functional words such as articles and prepositions. Most nonsense poetry involving extensive neologisms would not work if the text of the poem were not strictly orthodox in its construction. Indeed, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle puts it, “we may even go further, and note that they relish their syntax.”

There is no better example than ‘Jabberwocky’, which works, says linguist Robert D. Sutherland, because of “Carroll’s awareness of the respective roles of referential and structural meaning.” Indeed, it is almost as if Carroll wrote it as an exercise in linguistics. The first (and, repeated, last) stanza illustrates perfectly the information contained in the functional words, as they and the neologisms constitute the entire content; unlike the other stanzas, which are laced with

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orthodox English words such as *beware, sword, dead* and *joy* that lend some semantic weight to the story. The following treatment is based on Sutherland’s linguistic analysis.47

The structural content of the first stanza of the poem can be represented as follows:

'Twas _______, and the _______ _______s
Did _______ and _______ in the _______;  
All _______y were the _______s,
And the _______ _______ s _______.48

The syntax here is uncomplicated, and the reader coming to it without knowledge of ‘Jabberwocky’ will subconsciously put together a story framework. The first two words seem to indicate a time, or perhaps a condition (*'twas evening*, or *summer*, or *chilly*). The poetic effect of indeterminacy is multiplied here. Not only do we not know what *brillig* signifies, we don’t even know the nature of it: whether it’s time, temperature or something else! Note that meaning expands with further information: for example, the last three words of the first line taken out of context could be *the <noun> <verb>s* (*the river flows*). But we have already taken on board *'Twas*, which leads us to expect that putative verb would be in a past tense, and so that option has already been excluded as we read, in favour of the equally possible *the <adjective> <noun>s*. However, not every function is fully determinable this way. The second line seems to be describing physical actions (*gyre* and *gimble*) in an indeterminate place (*wabe*); yet if *did* is construed

47 Sutherland, pp. 208–210.
as a transitive main verb rather than as an auxiliary, then in theory the following
two blanks could be nouns of activity (did maths and physics in the class) – so
again, the indeterminacy is at two levels. In the end, we have constructed at best a
flimsy, ambiguous outline of a story from the skeleton of that stanza.

Now, ignoring that outline, consider in isolation the list of neologisms: brillig
slithy toves gyre gimbble wabe mimsy borogoves mome raths outgrabe. Beyond the
already noted -y and -s morphemes, and perhaps a suspicion of meaning for two
or three words, there is no semantic content in any of them; the list out of context
means nothing, a little like Taylor’s “gibberish” poem. By contrast, as Marina
Yaguello illustrates, the list of nouns alone from a piece of orthodox Romantic
poetry, Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, “if read with feeling, retains some of the
evocative power of the original”: heart numbness sense hemlock opiate drains
minute envy lot happiness trees plot beechen shadows summer ease.

So, when Alice asks Humpty Dumpty about the meanings of the words, she is
already informed by the structural elements of the poem. His various
pronouncements range from intuitively true (slithy, portmanteau of lithe and
slimy) through plausible but not entirely convincing (mimsy, portmanteau of
flimsy and miserable) to arbitrary and capricious (rath, a sort of green pig).
Yaguello proposes the existence of two co-existent reader strategies for
interpreting new words. The first is that employed in most instances by Humpty
Dumpty: “a connection is established between an unknown or invented term, on
the one hand, and on the other, a word – and therefore a meaning – which actually

49 Yaguello, p. 92.
50 Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, in Complete Illustrated Works, pp. 185–187.
exists in the language.”\textsuperscript{51} In the case of the portmanteau\textsuperscript{52} there are two connections, which, Michael Holquist points out, exemplify Saussure’s insight of meaning through divergence.

The portmanteau word creates a new meaning by phonologically exploiting the divergence between the two old meanings. It thus provides one of the most economical proofs of Saussure’s insight into language.\textsuperscript{53}

Sutherland too is concerned with Carroll’s amateur but scholarly interest in linguistics, and in particular “Carroll’s concern with and speculations about the nature and functions of signs”\textsuperscript{54} some decades before Saussure’s historic lectures. One imagines Carroll might have appreciated their insights. That speculation might be especially true if you agree with the suspicion of Sutherland and this writer that for most neologisms, Carroll “merely recorded forms which spontaneously occurred to him […] and] called upon to give an ‘etymology’, he merely fabricated his derivations from plausible choices.”\textsuperscript{55}

Yaguello’s other described reader strategy, which presumably is generally not a conscious one, relies on the proven association in the mind of a listener between the sounds of certain phonemes, the pitch in which they are spoken (if the communication is oral), and the received meanings of words in which they appear. For example, a high-pitched versus a low-pitched sound may be

\textsuperscript{51} Yaguello, pp. 83–86.
\textsuperscript{52} Excess baggage here.
\textsuperscript{53} M Holquist, ‘What is a Boojum? Nonsense and Modernism’, \textit{Yale French Studies}, no. 43, 1969, p. 160. The logician Dodgson, though, might have been offended by Holquist’s finagling of an instance into a proof.
\textsuperscript{54} Sutherland, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{55} Sutherland, p. 151.
associated with light versus heavy, happy versus sad, and so on. Similarly, as Yaguello illustrates:

… when presented with two unknown words – mil and mal – and told that one means ‘large table’ and the other ‘small table’, there is a very good chance indeed that mal will be associated with bigness and mil with smallness… Indeed, the back vowels (/u/, /o/, /a/) are perceived as dark, round, low-pitched and the front vowels (/i/, /e/) as light, pointed and high-pitched.56

Thus in ‘Jabberwocky’, without the benefit of Humpty’s glosses, the reader might well be influenced by what Roman Jakobson calls the “sound shape”57 of mimsy in interpreting it, and perhaps the sibilant consonantal opening to slithy, but the phenomenon will be more apt for Lear’s neologisms.

‘Jabberwocky’ is wholly orthodox in its versification and syntax, and tells a simple story that is little more than a Proppian cliché. Why then has it been so wildly popular and critically celebrated? It may be safely said that it is the only prominent poem in the language the success of which rests solely on neologism. If its first two lines were “’Twas evening, and the limber elves / Did twirl and tumble in the glade” we would be unmoved. We are not entranced by the excitement of the quest/battle/triumph sequence. The intrigue lies in the neologisms that fill our heads with ideas. They are instrumental in the strong presence of three of Tigges’ four properties of nonsense: the emphasis on the verbal dimension; the tension between presence and absence of meaning (or in a closely related dipole, between order, in the regular syntax, rhyme and metre, and

56 Yaguello, p. 84.
disorder, in the lexis); and the element of play, not only in wordplay but also in the surrounding context of a nursery-rhyme character toying with Alice’s understanding.

Nowhere else in Carroll are neologisms anywhere near as dense as in ‘Jabberwocky’. Partridge lists a few, and some from ‘Jabberwocky’ appear also in ‘The Hunting of the Snark’. In Lear’s poetry they are also scattered, but more significant – where they do appear – than in Carroll’s, ‘Jabberwocky’ excluded. As a kind of prose segue here, it is interesting to read the brief letter from Lear that appears as the first epigraph to this chapter. It is one hundred per cent neologism, in common with the Taylor poem mentioned earlier, but it is a fraction short of being entirely gibberish. The formal layout of a letter, punctuation, repetition and the sheer exuberance of the phonemic construction of its words all combine to lend a faint semantic impression, probably greater than that made on Alice by Latitude and Longitude in the second epigraph.

Critics such as Sewell have noted a strong commitment to “rhyme, rhythm and repetition” as characteristic of nonsense poetry. This may be an accident of its flowering at a time when accentual-syllabic metre and end-rhymes were as prominent in English poetry as they ever were. Lear was typical in this respect, the formats of his longer poems being rich in all of those three Rs. Critics such as Colley have noted “Lear’s indebtedness to Romanticism in the composition of his nonsense songs”. His close friendship with Tennyson possibly influenced the metres of poems such as ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’ and ‘The Courtship

58 E Partridge, pp. 182–183.
59 Sewell, p. 76.
60 Colley, Lear and the Critics, p. 6.
of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò’, where rhyme and metre are both omnipresent, yet the
stanzas are distinctively structured and end with a chorus-like repetition that
contributes to the element of song. Those characteristics are found in a few
Tennyson poems, including ‘Mariana’ and ‘The Lady of Shalott’, which also
share the theme of solitary yearning for an unattainable love.61 Compare these
scene settings from the opening stanzas respectively of ‘The Courtship of the
Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò’ and ‘The Lady of Shalott’:

On the Coast of Coromandel
Where the early pumpkins blow,
In the middle of the woods
Lived the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.  

And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott. 

In each of these long poems, the iambic phrases “the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò” and
(with variations) “The Lady of Shalott” echo at the ends of stanzas.

‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’ is composed in irregular stanzas in which
rhyme, metre and repetition are still prominent, but there is a degree of variation

61 Peter Levi (Levi, pp. 238–239) persuasively argues that Lear is parodying a poem by Thomas
Moore, ‘The Dismal Swamp’, in which the male lover seeks, rather than carries, a light:

They made her a grave, too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true
And she’s gone to the Lake of the Dismal Swamp
Where all night long, by a fire-fly lamp,
She paddles her white canoe.

between stanzas in the number and length of lines and in rhyming patterns. This degree of freedom, while still relatively uncommon in nineteenth-century poetry, was becoming more frequent, particularly in later Romantic verse, from Wordsworth’s ‘Intimations of Immortality’ to Tennyson’s ‘The Lotus Eaters’ and ‘Eleânore’. Edgar Allan Poe, too, used similar variation in ‘The Bells’; the repetitions and gloomy onomatopoeia in its “iron bells” stanza is echoed in ‘The Dong’, making one wonder a little about Lear’s choice of eponym. While I have seen no direct evidence that Lear knew Poe’s poem, Sara Lodge has noted that he quotes ‘The Raven’ in his diary in 1871, a few years before the publication of ‘The Dong’ in 1877.

Neologism in ‘The Dong’ names a range of places, trees and people (or humanoids – the anatomy of the Jumblies clearly differs from our own, while the Dong appears more human in Lear’s drawing than he ever did in my imagination). Unlike ‘Jabberwocky’, one can imagine ‘The Dong’ as a poem even if stripped of its neologisms and of its fantastical elements. A story of a mad, abandoned lover wandering abroad with a lamp, watched in awe or fear by the locals, with its echoes of Heathcliff and Diogenes, might still work. But the coining of Dong and other words allows Lear the freedom to sculpt the sound-shapes of his names and places to maximum poetic effect in a way that transcends those available to non-nonsense poets. The names work in several ways. The name of the love object, the Jumbly Girl, evokes a sweet playfulness. The Dong and his wandering-ground, the Gromboolian Plain, contribute to Lear’s

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onomatopoeic evocation of melancholy, which at its most intense allows not a single foregrounded front vowel in this entire refrain:

“The Dong! – the Dong!

“The wandering Dong through the forest goes!

“The Dong! the Dong!

“The Dong with a luminous Nose!”

While the Gromboolian Plain and the Chankly Bore are placed clearly in the landscape, the Zemmery Fidd is not obviously a place-name, a geographical feature or a made structure, but presumably is one of those three. The strangeness of its spiky consonantal structure stands out against the surrounding verbal landscape like the Oblong Oysters against the plain “smooth and gray” rocks.

It is not just the alien words that add the extra dimension to the poem, but the alien-ness of the characters and places. Lear here shares the Romantic tendency to use – both in literature and art – the distant, never-seen Other to evoke inner emotions and feelings. Places such as Coleridge’s Xanadu, Keats’ Grecian landscapes and Dickinson’s “siren Alps”, and creatures such as Blake’s Tyger, Dickinson’s Leopard and Mary Shelley’s monster, all tell us something about our inner selves. Lear in ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’ and other longer poems does the same. Indeed, in one respect his nonsense maintains its effectiveness in the present day better than the work of his Romantic contemporaries. Film, television and personal travel have shown us alien places and beings: we know what other environments and creatures look like, we have watched David

66 Sewell (p. 126) hears occasional verbal echoes of actual places in names such as Boshen (Goshen), Chankly Bore (Branksome Chine) and Tinniskoop (Tinnevelly), but these seem too strained to be persuasive.
Attenborough cavorting familiarly with gorillas, and many more of us than in the past have seen these things first-hand, so that they have lost the otherness that they had for nineteenth-century readers just as much as for the writers, and so lost a part of the affect they once provoked. But the entirely make-believe Dong, Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò and the rest, and their strange landscapes, remain inside us, peculiar in our imaginations.

To return finally to Tigges’ four-part characterization of nonsense: as noted in section 1, I have not regarded emotional disengagement as essential, and there is no lack of emotion in ‘The Dong’. The poem’s emphasis on the verbal is highlighted by the neologisms we have identified. The quality of play is less evident, although actual play itself is represented, as it often is in nonsense poetry, in this case in the activities of the Jumblies. Wordplay for its own sake is more prominent elsewhere in Lear: in limericks, for example, such as this one:

There was an Old Person of Wick,

Who said, “Tick-a-Tick, Tick-a-Tick;

Chickabee, Chickabaw.”

And he said nothing more,

That laconic Old Person of Wick.67

The sonic charm of the nonsense words here is in tension with the slightly ominous fourth line. Lodge has pointed out that ‘Incidents in the Life of my Uncle Arly’ features a clear parody of Poe’s ‘The Raven’68 in a stanza that begins, “Never – never more, – oh! Never, / Did that Cricket leave him ever,” and

67 Lear, Complete Nonsense, p. 338.
68 Lodge, p. 342.
includes the very Lear-ish coinage *cheerious*, evoking *serious* while not even
deigning to use that word as a rhyme.\(^69\) Perhaps the description of the Old Person
of Wick is also recalling the taciturn bird. Then there is the refrain of ‘The Pelican
Chorus’, playing not only in the coined nonsense words but also in the logical
inconsistency between tenses and adverbs\(^70\) in the last line:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ploffskin, Pluffskin, Pelican jee!} \\
\text{We think no Birds so happy as we!} \\
\text{Plumpskin, Ploshkin, Pelican jill!} \\
\text{We think so then, and we thought so still!} \text{\(71\)}
\end{align*}
\]

As to the first and most crucial of Tigges’ features: in ‘The Dong’, as in many
other successful nonsense poems, more than a “tension between presence and
absence of meaning”, there is a tension between presence and absence of
seriousness. The reader is immersed in the dark Victorian story-that-might-have-been,
yet continually joggled from that familiarity by the neologisms and
incongruities of the text. These tensions augment the one postulated by Valéry,
mentioned in section 2, between sound and sense. Valéry’s definition is for every
poem, but there is a special aptness in it for the poetry of nonsense.

G. K. Chesterton, an early advocate for nonsense as literature, magisterially
prefers Lear over Carroll because the former “with more subtle and placid
effrontery, is always introducing scraps of his own elvish dialect into the middle
of simple and rational statements”, to achieve in his nonsense “a genial ring of

\(^{69}\) Lear, ‘Some Incidents in the Life of my Uncle Arly’, *Complete Nonsense*, p. 457, lines 29–35.
\(^{70}\) Compare Carroll’s “They told me you had been to her” poem, mentioned in section 2, which
achieves similar effects with number and gender.
commonsense”. It is always refreshing to find an epithet for neologism, and “scraps of his own elvish dialect” is among the best.

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72 GK Chesterton, ‘A Defence of Nonsense’, in *The Defendant*, 2nd edn, J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1914, p. 67. I find it impossible to leave this chapter without at least acknowledging the old question of the relative merits of Carroll and Lear, which has historically been an evenly divided one. I regard Carroll’s overall literary achievement as the greater, but in the matter of poetry I agree with Chesterton’s preference for Lear. He goes on: “The poet seems so easy on the matter [of a Pobble being better off without toes] that we are almost driven to pretend that we see his meaning, that we know the peculiar difficulties of a Pobble, that we are as old travellers in the ‘Gromboolian Plain’ as he is.”
CHAPTER VII: MODERNISM

Incipit and a form to speak the word
And every latent double in the word,
Beau linguist.

Wallace Stevens, ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’ (‘It Must Be Abstract’, VIII)

1. Of modern poetry

In the nineteenth century, various forms of poetic bravery by a small number of innovators anteceded a wider movement in the first part of the twentieth, which over time radically expanded the thing we know as poetry. Modernism was a movement that defined itself more by what it sought to avoid or to rebel against than by the setting out of favoured positive poetic qualities. As Rainer Emig notes dryly, even Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, in rejecting Romanticism,

... assert[ed] their roots in an earlier tradition trumpeted as “Classicism”. Pound’s slogan, ‘make it new’, was in practice a demand to ‘make it old’, to kick out last year’s words in favour of the year’s before.¹

Indeed, “make it new” was certainly not an imperative to make new words; Pound and the Imagists in general are barely present in this chapter, being notable

chiefly for a smattering of hyphenated compounds. F. S. Flint’s exhortation, paraphrasing Pound, to provide “Direct treatment of the ‘thing’”, a central tenet of the Imagist quest for cut-glass clarity and exactness, was incompatible with the requirement for the often-obscure constructions of poetic neologism to be contemplatively glossed by the reader. Eliot, perhaps less prescriptive by nature than the Imagists, does contribute a few examples here, including one or two that survived editing by Pound. But “make it new” was observed in diverse ways and by diverse poets, so that Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings, Mina Loy, Dylan Thomas, W. B. Yeats, Gertrude Stein and many others each practised neologism as a part of their own modernisms. Thus, even more so than for earlier chapters, I can only aspire here to discuss samples from the wealth of lexically creative poetry available.

Chapters II–V were largely structured around one or two poets for whom neologism was a significant feature of their individual body of work. All of them – Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dickinson and Hopkins – are recognized by common consent as widely influential on succeeding poetic eras (Lear and Carroll in Chapter VI are seminal in a much narrower sense.) But modernism sent poetical styles, like Stephen Leacock’s Lord Ronald, riding madly off in all directions, and so although the modernist names mentioned earlier are still celebrated in varying degrees, their individual influences on poets who followed are attenuated because of that stylistic spread. No single one could be said to be as broadly inspirational to successive generations as those we have studied so far. Exploring across a wide range rather than closely examining one or two writers

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2 FS Flint, ‘Imagisme’, *Poetry*, vol. 1, no. 6, March 1913, p. 199.
will reveal a correspondingly extensive variety of poetic effects and ways of achieving them via neologism. Accordingly, this chapter, other than for the final section on one exceptional poem, will not be organized by poet or by effect, but will thematize its examples by the classes of neologism that were introduced at the beginning of this thesis: affixation, compound, conversion and (inevitably) other.

It will be seen that such an approach does in fact provide some clustering of work by poet because many of the modernists tended to favour one class: Loy conversions, Yeats compounds, and so on. Indeed, the different biases of modernist poets in this respect contribute to their often highly individual stylizations. By contrast, as we have seen, most of those covered in Chapters II–V ranged across the classes, except for Dickinson’s conspicuous and surprising disinclination to compounds. Of the modernists’ neologisms we will study, perhaps those of Stevens, Cummings and Crane vary the most widely by type. It may surprise the reader that I spend relatively few words on Cummings here, because he is the most prolific in coinages of all the prominent modernists. However, their ubiquity in his work makes them an elemental part of its make-up, so that he becomes of less interest for this thesis than, say, Stevens, whose individual neologisms are much the more remarkable for their presence within the formality of his poetic structures. Gertrude Stein is similarly of lesser interest in the specific terms of this thesis: she is not highly prolific in neologism apart from her numerous conversions, but those are an inevitable, almost incidental, consequence of her radical prosody and semantics rather than a purposeful engagement with neologism as a poetic tool.
I would like to draw some specific links, here and in following sections, between Dickinson and Hopkins and certain poets who appear in this chapter. In the Introduction I described those two as “honorary modernists”, and it would seem from this short exploration of explicit and implicit connections that such a description would have been agreeable to some members of that movement. Both were given favourable notice in 1914 in *Poetry* magazine. As the house organ of American modernism, we can be confident that it reached most, if not all, of the American writers mentioned in this chapter, and some, if not most, of the British. The words of these critics must surely have piqued the interest of their readers.

On Hopkins, Joyce Kilmer writes that his language “in its curious perfection is exclusively his own”, declaring him “the most scrupulous word-artist of the nineteenth century!” 3 And having myself already given Dickinson honorary status both as a Victorian and as a modernist, I find my presumption matched by Harriet Monroe, who dubs her “an unconscious and uncatalogued *Imagiste*” 4 in an enthusiastic review of *The Single Hound*, the first new collection of Dickinson’s work since the initial two volumes in the 1890s.

Hart Crane was an admirer of both poets, displaying at times in his poetry a kinship with each one. In the case of Dickinson we can speak of actual influence, which shows out more in his shorter poems. 5 A fitting example is his stirring, allusive, elegiac sonnet, ‘To Emily Dickinson’ (1927), the sestet of which reads:

> – Truly no flower yet withers in your hand.  
> The harvest you descried and understand

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5 But echoes come through in longer poems; indeed, Part VI of *The Bridge*, ‘Quaker Hill’ bears an epigraph from Dickinson’s ‘The gentian weaves her fringes’ (Fr21), and she is mentioned by name later in the poem: “pain that Emily, that Isadora knew”.
Needs more than wit to gather, love to bind.

Some reconcilement of remotest mind –

Leaves Ormus rubyless, and Ophir chill.

Else tears heap all within one clay-cold hill.  

The first line is sensible to Dickinson’s custom of greeting visitors clasping a flower, or perhaps it refers to the posy placed in her hands at her instruction for her funeral. The following two are perceptive of her unique excellence at a time when her reputation among New Critics was controversial and just beginning to form. Several Dickinsonian touches close the poem: remotest is a typical superlative, in fact occurring six times in her poems, and rubyless a classic coinage in the spirit of her negating suffixes such as (to quote an alphabetical group) plashless, plummetless and pompless. The references to Ormus and Ophir as metonymic associations for wealth and plenty are comparable with Dickinson’s uses of exotic places, from the Alps to Brazil (and in one poem, Ophir). At the end we find the compound clay-cold, recalling Dickinson’s allusions to mortal flesh as “clay”, and the hill that for her so often connotes the grave-mound or Calvary.

As to Hopkins, there is no doubt of Crane’s high regard for his poetry: Gregory Woods reports that in 1928 Crane “was making efforts to get Gerard Manley Hopkins, to whose work Yvor Winters had introduced him, back into print.”

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7 This time-honoured practice was a favourite of Milton, who cited Ormus similarly (“the wealth of Ormus and of Ind”) in Paradise Lost (II, 2) in describing Satan’s throne at the beginning of his rousing address to his lieutenants, referred to here in Chapter III, section 3.

Brian Reed recounts how that introduction came about, when Winters was reminded of Hopkins as Crane recited to him the opening of ‘The Hurricane’:

Lo, Lord, Thou ridest!
Lord, Lord, Thy swifting heart
Naught stayeth, naught now bideth
But’s smithereened apart!
Ay! Scripture flee’th stone!
Milk-bright, Thy chisel wind
Rescindeth flesh from bone
To quivering whittlings thinned –
Swept – whistling straw!10

Reed identifies five characteristics of Hopkins’ verse present in this short excerpt, two of which are “word coinage through hyphenation” and “the blurring of distinctions among parts of speech”. These are respectively, in the terms of this thesis, compounds (milk-bright) and conversions (chisel and probably smithereened).11 There is surely what Reed describes as “profound affinity”12 between the two poets, but a critical consensus has it that Crane’s best work had been written before Hopkins was brought to his attention. A minority, such as Reed, nonetheless argue that “there ... exist continuities between Hopkins’s and Crane’s poetics that do seem ‘essential’ and that still await elucidation.”13

11 *Smithereen* as a verb has only very obscure earlier attestations in the *OED*; in fact, in the 1989 edition, its first and only entry is the one under consideration here. It thus seems likely to have occurred to Crane independently.
12 Reed, p. 22.
13 Reed, p. 27.
Harvey Oxenhorn notes that Hugh MacDiarmid “much admired Hopkins’s experiments with diction and metre”, citing MacDiarmid’s autobiography, and goes on to illustrate Hopkins’ “unmistakeable influence” on his poetry.\(^{14}\) Eliot’s attitude to Hopkins’ work fluctuated over time, as documented by Ronald Bush,\(^{15}\) who finds some echoes of Hopkins in *Four Quartets*. However, in a late (1953) commentary, Eliot was sceptical of Hopkins’ reputed legacy of influence, indicating that he felt it had been “exaggerated” and finding him “a remarkable innovator in style”, who, along with Whitman, “found an idiom and a metric perfectly suited for what [he] had to say; and very doubtfully available to what anyone else has to say.”\(^{16}\)

Returning to Dickinson, whose poetry may well have escaped Eliot’s attention until the 1920s, there is clear evidence of his regard for her. He refers in a letter to Conrad Aiken to “your admirable essay on Emily Dickinson”,\(^{17}\) presumably referring to Aiken’s editorial introduction to a selection of her poems that had been recently published. Subsequent letters show that Eliot was keen to arrange a review of that edition in *Criterion*.\(^{18}\) And lastly, I have always been struck by the opening line of one poem that Eliot left, in the Dickinson way, untitled: “The wind sprang up at four o’clock”,\(^{19}\) published in *Chapbook* in November of 1924, the year of the correspondence just cited. It echoes in metre and content several


other opening lines to Dickinson poems, almost merging them into one: “The wind begun to knead the grass” (Fr796), “The birds begun at four o’clock” (Fr504), and “The day came slow till five o’clock / Then sprang before the hills” (Fr572). Eliot appears to be practising his now-famous dictum of four years previous:

> Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.20

The reader should bear that in mind for the rest of this chapter, where we will occasionally glimpse some modernist neologism that seems familiar.

2. Our beginnings and our ends: affixation

Affixation, more than other classes of neologism, is often relatively trivial. We have seen, particularly in Renaissance examples, that it may simply be a metrical adjustor such as -y. Emily Dickinson, for whom it is her favourite neologistic form, sometimes appears simply to be striving in both prefixing and suffixing for a degree of quirkiness-by-defamiliarization, by using a nonstandard attachment to create a synonym for an already-existing word or phrase, such as contenteder for more contented. More often, though, she is busy constructing new words of great depth of meaning, many of which were exhibited in Chapter IV. We saw examples of similar import from Hopkins in Chapter V, where two prefixations, unchilding and unfathering, were among the words described in a quotation from Geoffrey Leech as “concept-making”. In the same passage Leech cites Eliot’s coinageforesuffered, spoken by the seer Tiresias in The Waste Land. I want to

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spend a little time here explaining just how this poetic prefixation works, using the terms of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

First, consider *foresuffer* outside its poetic context, specifically as it relates to multivalence, one of the inherent characteristics of neologisms established in Chapter I. As a prefix *fore-* is common and well understood as signifying “before”, but it has shades of meaning in different contexts. At an elementary level, it may signify “before” either in time (*foretell*) or in physical position or importance (*foreground*). Sometimes, as in *forego*, either of those two is possible. For the root *suffer* there are again shades of meaning in two distinguishable groups: to experience pain or distress, or (generally archaic) to tolerate or allow, as in “Suffer the little children …” So, with no context, using different interpretations for each of its two parts, the meaning of *foresuffer* could relate to, say, the injuries of soldiers on the front line in wartime, or some kind of permission notified in advance. It is only the context, “I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed”\(^{21}\) that allows the reader to make sense of the word, when it is combined with further background knowledge: first, that Tiresias has the power of premonition – of *foreseeing*, an alliterative verbal association that augments the sense – and second, that he(/she) is androgynous, making his potential experience literally “all” of each enacted sexual encounter. A reader familiar with Eliot’s subsequent work may also be reminded that the association of suffering with sexual activity recurs in ‘Marina’: “Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals”.\(^{22}\) So, as Leech puts it, *foresuffer* is “not just a new word, but the encapsulation of a newly formulated idea: that it is

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possible to anticipate mystically the suffering of the future.”23 To conclude this treatment, it is interesting to note that Hopkins coined several words in fore-, most notably and appropriately forepangs, in the opening to one of the most “terrible” sonnets: “No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief, / More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.”24 The word signifies not so much an anticipation as a predecessor of suffering to come, but it is conceivable that it was in Eliot’s conscious or unconscious mind: Hopkins’ poetry first reached the public in 1918; *The Waste Land* was published in 1922.

Eliot coined relatively few words of his own, instead achieving similar effects to neologism, especially lexical defamiliarization, mostly through rare but not original words and untranslated borrowings from other languages. This practice is most apparent in his early work, notably *The Waste Land* and the quatrains poems of *Poems* (1920). Eliot in the latter shares with Dickinson a dedication to a simple formal metre; both poets achieve remarkable effects in several ways through the tension created by straining against that formality, but because Dickinson’s overall lexis remains mostly simple, her neologisms tend to stand out where they occur. In Eliot’s case, to quote Vincent Sherry,

> His tautly formed stanzas employ normative syntax and mechanical metre to create a feeling of reasoned meditation that dissolves constantly, however, into imponderable propositions, unpronounceable words. As in ‘Mr Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service’:

> Polyphiloprogenitive
> The sapient sutlers of the Lord

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23 Leech, p. 44.
Drift across the window-panes.

In the beginning was the Word.

In the beginning was the Word.

Superfetation of ὀῦν,

And at the mensual turn of time,

Produced enervate Origen.25

The poem that begins with those two stanzas is perhaps the most opaque and most controversial of all the quatrain poems; I have not the knowhow to join that theological discussion, but will rather just observe its lexis. Depending on their vocabulary, even high-literacy readers may be unfamiliar with many words in its 32 lines (I had to look up six, as well as the Greek ones.) The prodigious super-affixation polyphiloprogenitive is presumed to have derived via oneupmanship from Matthew Arnold’s use of philoprogenitiveness in *Culture and Reason*, and to meaning something like “loving to procreate plentifully”. Later in the poem we encounter piaculative, a kind of affixation-by-replacement from the orthodox piacular and presumed to carry the same meaning, “expiatory” These two are apparently original with Eliot. Also appearing here for the first time as English is mensual, a borrowing from Spanish, originally from the Latin mensis. While the Spanish mensual translates as “monthly”, and its standard reading in the poem is associated with a fertile period and eggs, there is a suspicion of a double meaning if one considers the possibility of an affixation to the Latin mens, “mind”. To sum up, we have a poem on a religious theme, strewn with polysyllabic, mostly Latin-rooted affixations, some of them coined by the poet, that are seemingly designed

to affect a grandness of style. We last saw that combination in Chapter III, but Milton would have frowned on the Greek-Latin hybrid in Eliot’s first line. Perhaps that was the young Eliot’s ironic way of prefiguring his subsequent critical assault on Milton’s English.

Eliot’s poetic language is augmented less by English neologism than by untranslated phrases and passages in languages other than English, especially French. Wallace Stevens shares his affinity with French but deploys it differently in his borrowing, occasionally slipping actual or adapted words such as *douceur*, *lascive* and *pleure* – but sans italics – into his poems as fully-paid-up guest members of the English language. In discussing *tournamonde*, which as a French-derived portmanteau is atypical for Stevens, he once wrote, “I don’t think that I have used many words of my own invention.”26 This assessment seems far too modest, at least by the definitional standards set in this thesis. Stevens was more prolific in all forms of neologism than most of his fellow modernists, especially in his longer poems, and accordingly he makes an appearance in each section of this chapter.27 It will be seen that, more so than for most poets, certain patterns tend to recur in the formation of his coinages. His affixations are sometimes not especially poetically engaging, mostly doing no more than to lend a slightly quirky air to his expression, but there are some recurrent forms that deserve attention here. One is of passing interest for its similarity to comparable constructions by Emily Dickinson. Instead of the accepted practice of adding *more* and *most* before a root adjective to form comparatives and superlatives

where adding -er and -est would give an awkward result, each poet in dozens of instances prefers the nonstandard form. Thus, for example, Dickinson’s admirabler and patientest are matched by Stevens’ blissfuller and difficultest.

Indeed, there is even a little overlap: Stevens’ terriblest is prefigured by three of terribler in Dickinson, and antiquest, extremest, chiefest and supremest are used by both. The last two, maybe three, of these are not so much awkward as arguably redundant in adding -est to a root whose meaning is already superlative, a poetic practice with respectable Renaissance antecedents, which we touched on in Chapter II. I have investigated the possibility that these forms might reflect an idiom existing in north-eastern USA through the relevant times, without finding any evidence for it; and some random checks on the Google Ngram server confirm that most such words are, if not original with the poet, at least so rare as to be de facto neologism.

The reader has no difficulty in glossing these comparatives and superlatives, but there is greater poetic richness in two other repeated forms that are identifiable among Stevens’ affixations. The first is the attachment of the suffix -ness to words that would not normally attract it, in words such as changingness and possibleness. I also include here words where the -ness form is standard but is normally a non-count noun, made unorthodox by Stevens in pluralizing it, as in rightnesses, largenesses and deepnesses. (The conversion of non-count to count nouns more generally, as in pandemoniums and vigors, is another quirk Stevens shares with Renaissance writers and with Dickinson, whose similar penchant was noted in Chapter IV.) The fact that these forms, among others, recur in his work may simply be an idiosyncratic preference, but I would like to suggest that Stevens may have one or more specific effects in mind when he deploys them. I
have selected some instances here that illustrate a degree of consistency in what
he is doing. There are two notable features of the singular cases: with few
exceptions, the concept of the root word is highly abstract, which I will shortly
show is significant in the light of Stevens’ stated criteria for poetry; and the
coinage is often associated with a paradox, duality or contradiction. Each of the
following three examples, *changingness*, *giantness* and *westwardness*, is also
associated with additional neologisms within its quotation.

The title of the late poem ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’, as has been widely
remarked, alludes to the opening line of the early ‘A High-Toned Old Christian
Woman’: “Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame.” Like Pound for the Imagists
(though, one imagines, with greater modesty), Stevens sets out in ‘Notes’ three
rules, in the form of section headings of this long, formal poem: “It Must Be
Abstract”, “It Must Change” and “It Must Give Pleasure”. The eight-line prologue
to that poem, perhaps addressed to the “interior paramour”\(^\text{28}\) either exhibits or
alludes to each of those dictums, and is worthy of quotation in full for its
restrained beauty. *Extremest* can be spotted here on the way to *changingness*,
which serves (in an agreeably reflexive touch, suggestive of the first two rules) as
our first example:

And for what, except for you, do I feel love?

Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man

Close to me, hidden in me day and night?

In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,

\(^{28}\) Many readers were confused by the placement of the dedication in the since-superseded 1954
*Collected Poems*, which makes the introduction to the poem appear to be addressed to Stevens’
close friend Henry Church. That this is not the case is made clear by Stevens in a letter (L538) and
pointed out by many critics: for example, HH Vendler, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens’
Equal in living changingness to the light
In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,
For a moment in the central of our being,
The vivid transparence that you bring is peace.²⁹

Here the abstract quality of the strange changingness is undeniable, and it is juxtaposed to the contrarian uncertain/certain pairing and the opposition between the stillness in which “we” sit “in the central of our being” and the animated surrounding light.³⁰ Such dualities engaged Stevens throughout his poetic career; a canto of ‘Notes’ (‘It Must Change’, IV) is dedicated to a meditation on many of them, beginning:

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined
On the real.³¹

Variations on the last-mentioned, imagination and reality, appear regularly in Stevens’ work, and ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’ is consistently engaged with that pairing. The poem in its entirety contains many other neologisms worthy of note; a discussion of it appears at the end of this chapter.

Another poem from the World War II period, ‘Repetitions of a Young Captain’, serves as a second example, but this one is explicitly concerned with the speaker,

³⁰ Surprisingly to this writer, central as a noun meaning “centre” is obsolete rather than a neologism, but it has a recent specialist US sense of a telephone exchange, which may have been a part of Stevens’ intent here.
and with all men, as they live out wartime. As well as giantness, magnificences, another Dickinson-like conversion of a non-count to a count noun, is found in the excerpt below. The word giant recurs throughout the long poem both as adjective and noun, generally adverting to the role of individual men in the conflict and how it can give each a sense of destructive power and strength. So giantness here is more abstract than it might have appeared out of context: not simply size but the sense of the Colossus that grips (or is taught to) the soldier, and which, just as for Samson, or Jack’s beanstalk combatant, finally “come[s] to nothing”.

Secrete us in reality. It is there
My orator. Let this giantness fall down
And come to nothing. Let the rainy arcs

And pathetic magnificences dry in the sky.
Secrete us in reality. Discover
A civil nakedness in which to be,

In which to bear with the exactest force
The precisions of fate, nothing fobbed off, nor changed
In a beau language without a drop of blood.

We see again a series of oppositions, oxymorons and contradictions – giantness/nothing, rainy/dry, pathetic/magnificence, and finally “civil nakedness in which to be”, perhaps a statement of the ideal of what it means to be a person, living, be-ing, at once in both the complexity of human society and the simplicity

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32 Stevens might also have considered Dickinson’s stranger option for a similar coinage from “giant”: “The Giant tolerates no Gnat / For Ease of Gianture –” (Fr707).
of the animal kingdom. Those two *milieux* coexist under the same sky, and Stevens’ fascination with the firmament is apparent from his hundreds of poetic references to sky, heaven, moon, stars and their fellows.

In our third example, part II of ‘Our Stars Come from Ireland’, he writes as if on an eastern US Atlantic beach at nightfall as “the green stars from Ireland” rise:

> Wet out of the sea, and luminously wet,
> Like beautiful and abandoned refugees.
>
> The whole habit of the mind is changed by them,
> These Gaeled and fitful-fangled darknesses
> Made suddenly luminous, themselves a change,
> An east in their compelling westwardness ...34

Remarkably, on a liberal interpretation, there are five neologisms in the last four-line stanza. Three are in the second line: the conversion Gaeled, compound *fitful-fangled* (a prettily Irish construction that hints at stars’ habits of disappearing and reappearing, as well as twinkling), and conversion from non-count to count noun, *darknesses* (things of mystery; and from a sensory perspective, they exist even when we cannot see them). In the fourth line, “An *east*” again converts a noun from non-count to count, incidentally echoing Dickinson’s “Withdrew the Sun – to other Wests – ” (‘I could suffice for him, I knew’, Fr712). By the time we encounter *westwardness* we are conscious of dualities similar to those seen previously: darkness and light, east and west.35 Light may emerge out of

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35 The east-west duality exploited in “An east in their compelling westwardness” is remarkably akin to one in ‘The Bouquet’, Canto III, which similarly coins a conversion: “The real made more acute by an unreal”.
darkness; like the stars, change and new life come from out of the east, but immediately the stars are headed in the direction of their expiry. As are we all: the poem’s sectional title is ‘The Westwardness of Everything’.

In the plural -ness cases, at least some seem to be chosen as a deliberate way of framing an ambiguity, as seen above with darknesses. In ‘The Comedian as the letter C’, Crispin foresees in Yucatan “beautiful barenesses as yet unseen”.36 That, in the context of his journey, may signify the plains, both arid and green, of the peninsula, but also – especially given the frequency of nakedness as a trope in Stevens’ early poetry – the desirable human form. In ‘The Bouquet’, section III, the titular flower arrangement is described using several neologistic and near-neologistic (quirked is rare but not new here) forms: “quirked / And queered by the lavishings of their will to see”, and “embellished by the quicknesses of sight”, where quicknesses is suggestive of both life and speed.37 Lastly, consider ‘Flyer’s Fall’, a poem entire in six lines:

This man escaped the dirty fates,
Knowing that he died nobly, as he died.

Darkness, nothingness of human after-death,
Receive and keep him in the deepnesses of space –

Profundum, physical thunder, dimension in which
We believe without belief, beyond belief.38

As well as deepnesses here, we have two other words that may be termed neologism. The first, after-death, is another compound that acquires a defamiliarizing joggle by trading on its better-known model, after-life, in order to challenge it. The second, profundum, is an example of Stevens’ propensity for foreign borrowing into his poetic English, mediating between deepnesses (in meaning) and thunder (in sound). As for deepnesses, imagine if instead Stevens had chosen depths: “the depths of space” is a common phrase that calls to mind only a physical vastness. Stevens’ choice of deepnesses, as well as forming a culmination to the long vowels of receive and keep, alerts the reader to his ambiguous intent. We are assisted in conceiving the flyer’s destination by an analogy with outer space, but we are also reminded by the plural that there is a different, non-physical dimension of deepness contemplated by mortals throughout their lives, and indeed that every person’s deepness is their own alone.

The other noteworthy affixation in Stevens’ repertoire is the participial plural suffix -ings, which appears over thirty times in words of varying eccentricity. Again, the construction is not of itself unconventional: we have examples in standard English such as comings and goings, writings and beginnings. But Stevens creates words that are decidedly original, such as (to quote an alphabetical group) enflashings, engenderings, enkindlings, enlargings and ensolacings. Whereas engender and enlarge are common enough words in their own right, it is notable that even without the -ings ending, the en- prefix in the other three of these (it also occurs in other Stevens coinages such as endazzled and englisted) is unorthodox enough to render them as doubly coined affixations, giving them additional interest to justify detailed consideration here.

In their contexts those three, enflashings, enkindlings and ensolacings, might
respectively be legitimately replaced (in a syntactic sense and semantic sense, ignoring the imperative of metre, which as we shall see is partially the point) by flashes, flames and solace. The question of the effect of the neologism in each case amounts to: what difference is made by the added prefix and suffix? The three of them, seemingly similar constructions, will be seen to serve the poet’s purposes in different ways.

I want first to unpick the respective semantic effects of en- and -ings. The prefix is given several possible effects by the OED, which are dependent on the nature of the root word to which it is attached. When attached to a noun, it may signify (using the OED numberings and excluding an inapplicable option) “[1a] to put (something) into or on what the latter member indicates” (as entomb); “[1b] to put what the latter member indicates into or upon (a person or thing)” (as encourage); or “[2a] to bring into a certain condition or state” (as endear). To a verb, it is added “[3] with additional sense of in, or simply intensive (in poetry often merely to give an additional syllable).” The suffix is simply the plural form of the verbal noun in -ing. All of this tells us the number of ways in which we may parse the affixations. Taking enflashings as an example, note also that flash may be either a noun or a verb (or, indeed, an adjective, but we won’t go there!). So, before we know its context, we may theoretically construe enflashings in either of the following ways:

(i) noun flash prefixed (in each of senses [1a], [1b], [2a]) → verb enflash suffixed → pluralized verbal noun enflashings.

(ii) verb flash prefixed (in each of the three different senses of [3]) → verb enflash suffixed → pluralized verbal noun enflashings.
The above alternatives are greatly multiplied by the fact that each of the noun and verb senses of *flash* has dozens of subsenses listed in the *OED*. It is not necessary to enumerate all available results to understand that we have in *enflashings* a highly polysemous neologism. We can only hope it will be constrained in its possible glosses by its poetic context, which is in the first part, ‘It Must Be Abstract’, of the previously cited poem ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’. We will defer consideration of how that happens until section 5 of this chapter, which surveys the ways in which that poem is enriched by Stevens’ use of neologism in several forms.

It will be seen there that the sense of *enflashings* is an internal one, bound up in the reasoning processes of the mind. The difference between *enflashings* and *enkindlings* might not seem great, but consider in contrast the grand scale of these lines from the end of canto II of the densely allusive ‘The Auroras of Autumn’:

\[
\text{The man who is walking turns blankly on the sand.} \\
\text{He observes how the north is always enlarging the change,} \\
\text{With its frigid brilliances, its blue-red sweeps} \\
\text{And gusts of great enkindlings, its polar green,} \\
\text{The color of ice and fire and solitude.}^{39}
\]

Unlike the observer in the passage from ‘Our Stars Come from Ireland’, this beach walker looks northward. Earlier lines in the canto convey a preoccupation with ageing and the approach of death, and, according to Charles Berger, with the threat of atomic war: “[Stevens] would not have had to look far for the source of a

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phrase such as “gusts of great enkindlings” ... or for the image of a world ‘on flames’”.40 Certainly the kind of synaesthesia on display in this merging of cold and light and colour and wind and fire has ever been a feature of apocalyptic visions, from St John’s Revelation to Bob Dylan’s ‘Chimes of Freedom’. One could imagine that in 1947 such a vision was in the foreground of Stevens’ mind. While the use of *en-* in this case seems to be as a simple intensifier, the use of the verbal noun from *kindle* rather than a simple noun in *flame* or *fire* adds to the unique sense of motion that is essential to the aurora. One superb effect in these lines is the sudden expansion of view from the close-up of the man on the beach to the hugeness of the borealis, then the contraction back in the final word “solitude”. Stevens’ unorthodox plurals – *brilliances*, another noun-form conversion from non-count to count, plays its part here too – seem to add to the auroral display a sense of expansiveness that assists in the swiftness of that zoom.

Like *enkindlings*, the surface reading of the third example, *ensolacings*, is relatively straightforward. Again, there is no room here to canvass the import of the long poem, ‘Esthétique du Mal’, in which it appears. At the end of section X appear the lines “To say that it was [that is, that life was innocent] / Disentangled him from sleek ensolacings.”41 In the context of the poem, the solace referred to is implied by the speaker to be false comfort, and in the service of that proposition the seductive sinuosity suggested by *disentangled* and *sleek* is amplified by the sibilance and the serpentine form of *ensolacings*.

40 C Berger, *Forms of Farewell: The Late Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 1985, p. 35.
Stevens’ fondness for -ings as a neologistic form is not shared to the same degree by any of his contemporaries, but Hugh MacDiarmid occasionally indulged, in words such as slackings (the work of a sailor on the sheets of a sailing-ship, ‘The Birlinn of Clanranald’) and frivolings (‘Folly’). Crane, especially in certain passages of The Bridge (1930), uses similar common and less common words that are not coinages, such as surfeittings, eastings and swivellings. One near-neologism (Joseph Warren Beach points out that Crane is likely to have borrowed it from its apparent progenitor, Herman Melville)\(^{42}\) of that type in ‘Voyages’, leewardings, occurs in two lines about the sea that are a little Stevens-like, perhaps partly because of that very word: “– And yet this great wink of eternity, / Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings ...”\(^{43}\) ‘Voyages’ also contains in its celebrated final quatrain a negation that is not in the OED:

> The imaged Word, it is, that holds
> Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
> It is the unbetrayable reply
> Whose accent no farewell can know.\(^{44}\)

Unbetrayable may be Crane’s independent creation: the few preceding instances found in a web search are extremely obscure, except for Francis Thompson’s only moderately obscure ‘Whereto Art Thou Come?’ (“So he betrays, / Not Truth, the unbetrayable, but himself”).\(^{45}\) There is critical disagreement as to the exact

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\(^{43}\) Crane, ‘Voyages (II)’, Complete Poems, p. 36.

\(^{44}\) Crane, Complete Poems, p. 41.

meaning of Crane’s stanza, but most concur that the “imaged Word” is a representation of poetry, and so Thompson’s use of *unbetrayable* as a property of Truth may have been in Crane’s mind as he grappled with his, or his speaker’s, final pronouncement with its negation-laden last two lines. He has also left us with the minor metrical mystery of why he should leave a pentameter as the penultimate line in an otherwise purely tetrameter section, especially as the “It is” at its start seems entirely redundant.

Crane’s negations, especially in *un-*, are frequently unusual even when not original with him: for example, among many others in *The Bridge* are the unusual-sounding *undoubtful, unwalled, unknotting*, yet all of those are antedated in the *OED*. In that same poem cycle can be found three words of this type that the *OED* does not list, *unfractioned, uncoy* and *unaccounting*, but all of those can be found by internet search in earlier sources, of differing levels of obscurity. Because *un-* is deployed like this frequently in nonpoetical contexts it is difficult to know whether Crane independently coined these, but his predilection for such obscure examples suggests that many were formed in his own mind. Two last neologisms are noted here, one of which, the adjective *inchling*, is arguably both affixation and conversion because it sounds as if it ought to be a noun, and indeed it once was. The word is antedated by publication date in Stevens’ ‘Bantams in Pine-Woods’ (1923), but it is here deemed original to Crane because, given the way he built *The Bridge* over time, he may well have written the word without having seen Stevens’ coinage. In any case, Stevens uses it as a noun with a more or less literal meaning, whereas Crane conjures it as a descriptor in a far more

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46 The remarkable thing about *inchling* is that no one appears to have thought of it earlier: it has the feeling of a word hundreds of years old.
arresting image. The early stanzas of section VIII, ‘Atlantis’, return the poem cycle to Crane’s cherished Brooklyn Bridge, its construction and its relationships with the water and vessels below it. They are rich in synaesthesia: “Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate / The whispered rush”; “Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream”; “that cordage, threading with its call”; and these lines:

Their labyrinthine mouths of history
Pouring reply as though all ships at sea
Complighted in one vibrant breath made cry, – 47

Complighted is Crane’s coinage, straightforward in its signification but also nicely echoing the mentions of light in earlier lines. A little further on, though, is this arresting image:

... up planet-sequined heights
Some trillion whispering hammers glimmer Tyre:
Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry
Of inchling aeons silence rivets Troy. 48

In another synaesthetic effect the stars, “whispering hammers”, bring Tyre back into a flickering existence, yet it is the hard (“anvil”) silence that brings back Troy in a more solid way. While I do not want to delve deeply into relativity theory, the interrelation of time and distance in physics might be considered an analogy of synaesthesia. In that way, the compression of time between those ancient cities and the present is expressed as “inchling aeons”, another dualism, between the minute and the huge. It is a kind of companion to Crane’s greatly-admired Emily

48 Crane, Complete Poems, p. 115.
Dickinson’s conclusion to ‘A clock stopped’ (Fr259), discussed in Chapter IV, which also stretches a short distance into a long time: “Decades of Arrogance between / The Dial life / And Him – ”.

3. Crystal-fine amalgamation: compounding

The widespread modernist use of compound neologisms, hyphenated and otherwise, will enable us to range widely across poets in this section. Clearly the influence of Emily Dickinson, who used so remarkably few of them, is not in play, but it must be suspected that their prominence in the poetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins encouraged his successors and admirers. One can easily imagine that Hart Crane’s interspersed “Perennial-Cutty-trophied-Sark!” in an exuberant section of The Bridge (III: ‘Cutty Sark’) might have been inspired by Hopkins’ wind-lilylocks-laced. Edith Sitwell compounded freely, sometimes clustering them in groups of similar form, as in ‘The Sleeping Beauty’, where within cantos 18 to 20 can be found “water-flowing beauty”, “water-rustling silks”, “The day drew water-pale” and “water-rippling leaves”. Hugh MacDiarmid, once past his synthetic-Scots period, was occasionally creative in words such as “the sun-assailing hill” (‘Behind the Symbols’) and “lip-serve the Cross (‘After Two Thousand Years’). He was especially prolific in his translation of a ship-blessing from Scots Gaelic, ‘The Birlinn of Clanranald’, as in these lines:

Set another stalwart fellow

For shrouds-grasping;

With finger-VICES, great hand-span,

For such clasping;

...
Wind-wise, and aptly adjusting
With shrouds-manning
The sheet’s-man’s slackings and t’assist
In all ways scanning.49

Wallace Stevens is not conspicuous in this matter, but I will note a little cluster in star- that is not so odd when one considers the number of similar compounds in common use in English – star-crossed, star-gazing, star-studded and so on. The stars as a backdrop or roof to outdoor scenes, or in more lyrically imagined roles such as witnesses or oracles, have been a perpetual trope in poetry, not least for the modernists, and I will conduct a small survey of star-prefixed compounds here. Stevens’ predilection for them is as strong as any: star-furred (‘Snow and Stars’), star-yplaited (‘Stanzas for “Examination of the Hero in a Time of War”’), star-humped (‘Owl’s Clover’, 1936 version), star-impaled (‘Academic Discourse at Havana’). Each of them is a singular variation on “decorated or studded with stars”, and in each case we can postulate reasons for Stevens to have chosen the participle he did as a stronger option than a conventional alternative. For example, “White and star-furred” adds a descriptive reprise to an earlier line, “This robe of snow and winter stars,” with an allusion to a fur coat-collar.50 In star-yplaited the addition of the Old English y- prefix, which vaguely implies aptness or suitability, is probably a nod to Milton’s coinage “star-ypointing pyramid”, quoted in Chapter III.

Crane in *The Bridge* gives us for the heavens “that *star-glistered salver of infinity*”, which is orthodox enough; but also *star-triggered* in these striking lines, in which the stars play into the action:

And when the caribou slant down for salt
Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine
Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault
Of dusk?  

As is typical of Crane’s most memorable passages, there is so much going on in these few lines: the alliterative, personifying, opposed metonymies of arrows for the hunt and antlers for the hunted, and further personification in the listening dusk. The stars, which we commonly see as easing gradually into view, are here a trigger, an instantaneous spark to cause the caribou that “slant down” – such a slow, passive movement – to spring into the alertness of prey.

Only the ever-present sea surpasses sun, moon and stars as a recurring element in Dylan Thomas’s set designs. He was a prolific compounder, and he participates in the present cavalcade of stars with three examples from early poems. In ‘Especially when the October Wind’, the sea and sky are prominent, but it is still daytime, so “the *star-gestured* children in the park” are entirely a terrestrial sight. The descriptor evokes the points of outstretched arms and legs, and perhaps their smallness and a twinkling quality to their random movements. The third part of the highly allusive and obscure ‘I, in my Intricate Image’ imagines the speaker’s addressees pierced by “a stick of folly / *Star-set* at Jacob’s angle”. The reference is clearly to any or all of the several meanings of a “Jacob’s staff”, including a

51 Crane, *The Bridge* (‘II: Powhatan’s Daughter: The Dance’), *Complete Poems*, p. 70.
pilgrim’s walking staff and a surveyor’s instrument, which could be used to measure the elevation of heavenly bodies. Like much of the poem, the allusion is vague, made more so by the huge range of meanings carried by the word set, as mentioned in Chapter I. Another obscure poem, ‘The Seed-at-Zero’ is an odd creation, including many compounds that are central to its interpretation. It comprises eight seven-line stanzas in pairs, with the second stanza in each pair differing from the first in only a handful of words, which sometimes are replaced in one line only to reappear in another. This is a device that might have been more effective if the imagery were not so opaque. To give an idea of what is going on, here are the first four lines of the seventh and eighth stanzas:

Man-in-seed, in seed-at-zero,
From the foreign fields of space,
Shall not thunder on the town
With a star-flanked garrison,

...52

Man-in-seed, in seed-at-zero,
From the star-flanked fields of space,
Thunders on the foreign town
With a sand-bagged garrison,

...52

The general impression of the poem is of a succession of images that combine notions of conception and creation, along with battle and personal heroism, on the earthly and the celestial stage. The latter is signalled on four occasions by star-

flanked, which serves as an indicator of the cosmic setting, but in flank also carries senses of bodily flesh and of a military wing, which help to coalesce the elements of sexual generation and warlike incursion. Also supporting that conjoining are two broad compounds in the first stanza-pair, where “The seed-at-zero shall not” attempt a storming conquest “Over the manwaging (first stanza)/warbearing (second stanza) line.” The two halves of each recombined give war-waging and man-bearing, two combinations that are more natural, less broad and respectively echo the military and reproductive strands of the poem.

If Thomas is the quintessential Welsh modernist, then his Irish counterpart is W. B. Yeats. Neologism in his poetry as affixation or conversion is relatively rare, but throughout his works there are hundreds of compounds. They are more common in his early work, before the modernist period, in which his more lyrical or neo-Romantic poems are concentrated; but Yeats’ exceptional position as a transitional poet between the Victorian era and the modernists sways me to range over his entire oeuvre here. Most of these compounds are poetic though not original, but scores of others are either verifiably or possibly of Yeats’ own devising. There are a few in star-, but they are not notable except for star-laden, which he first gave us in ‘The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland’, a place “Where people love beside star-laden seas”. That was in its 1891 publication, and sadly by the time of its revised version in 1933 we had lost it for “the ravelled seas”.53 I wonder whether the Hibernophile Wallace Stevens owned an early printing, because the image of stars on the sea, as distinct from above it, recalls that ocean from which Stevens’ observer in “Our Stars Come from Ireland” sees the stars

rising “Wet out of the sea”. Yeats reprised the word in “the star-laden sky” in early versions of ‘The Sorrow of Love’, but again later dispensed with it.\textsuperscript{54} 

Those early copies of ‘The Sorrow of Love’ also speak of “the curd-pale moon”, a telling colour association that recalls the age-old notion of the moon as being made of cheese, but also has connotations of the effect of curdling, which when not intentional (induced by the likes of cooks and cheesemakers) is usually associated with things turning bad. Compounds such as curd-pale that indicate a colour are most effective when the association is surprising, or when it speaks both of the colour and of another evocation that enriches the poem. Such combinations have a long and sometimes famous history, from Homer’s wine-dark sea to Thomas’s sloeblack one.\textsuperscript{55} The widespread use of compounds within modernism – including by some writers who otherwise eschewed neologism – was largely devoted to creating fresh adjectives, many of them devoted to colour; the imperative “make it new” caused poets to seek out innovative alternatives to blood- and ruby- for red, or to snow- and milk- for white. Yeats’ curd-pale was only one instance, perhaps the most creative one, of his devotion to nuance in the matter of paleness, as witness the lines that follow:

And those that fled, and that followed, from the foam-pale distance
broke; (‘The Wanderings of Oisin’, Book III)\textsuperscript{56}

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand, (‘He gives his Beloved certain Rhymes’),\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} Yeats, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{55} I momentarily allow the opening to Under Milk Wood poetical status.
\textsuperscript{56} Yeats, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{57} Yeats, p. 158.
and in ‘The Wanderings of Oisin’, Niamh is repeatedly referred to as “pearl-pale Niamh”.

With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes: (‘He tells of a Valley full of Lovers’)\textsuperscript{58}

O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes, (‘He tells of the Perfect Beauty’)\textsuperscript{59}

Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream. (‘The Travail of Passion’)\textsuperscript{60}

The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill, (‘The Withering of the Boughs’)\textsuperscript{61}

... his great eyes without thought

Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks, (‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’, VI)\textsuperscript{62}

These compounds evince various associations such as those of clouds with sleep and dreams, of lilies with death, of honey with the deeper colouring of a moon near the horizon, or of straw with a country bumpkin, as well as adding sonic complexity. Yeats’ usage is antedated in each case, but except for death-pale so infrequently as to make it likely he coined them independently. The first two lines are clearly related, in two contemporaneous early poems that share some content; but many of Yeats’ neologisms fall into clusters, related to a small number of his favourite words, that are scattered throughout his works. The poet who wrote “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams” referenced dreams over 200 times

\textsuperscript{58} Yeats, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{59} Yeats, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{60} Yeats, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{61} Yeats, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{62} Yeats, p. 433.
in his poems. In a *dream-* group of compounds can be found *dream-dimmed,*
which appears in those same two lines, along with *dream-awakened* (‘The Valley
of the Black Pig’), *dream-fed* (‘The Island of Statues’, II, 3), *dream-led* (‘The
Seeker’) and *dream-heavy* (‘He Remembers Forgotten Beauty’). In this last poem
we also find *dew-cold,* which in turn reminds us that Yeats was fond of dew
images, referring to dew dozens of times. On investigation we find *dew-blanced,*
*dew-cumbered,* *dew-dabbled,* *dew-drench’d,* *dew-drowned* (and *dew-bedrowned*),
and *dewy-tongued.* The point of this game is not to amass word lists (*foam-*
would provide another), but to illustrate how this pattern of coinages contributes to the
stylization peculiar to Yeats’ poetic canvas. These variations on a theme may not
all be of themselves striking or especially original, but they form a lexical palette
that is distinctively Yeats’. Thus, if we are familiar with his work, we are
reminded of the poet’s affinity for honey and for the sound of leaves when we
read in ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’,

Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.⁶³

* Bee-loud, which is broad in the sense that loudness is decidedly not a property of
a single bee and thus evokes the collective hum in the most arresting way,⁶⁴ is all
the more outstanding, and the poem the more successful, because of those
linkages. And at the end of the myth and metaphor of ‘Byzantium’, the reader
encounters a pair of extraordinarily broad compounds in “That dolphin-torn, that
gong-tormented sea”.⁶⁵ Those stand out from most adjectival compounds in that

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⁶³ Yeats, p. 117.
⁶⁴ Stevens is equally original but less subtle in ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’ (‘It Must
Change’, I): “The bees came booming as if they had never gone” (Stevens, *Collected Poetry and
Prose*, p. 337).
⁶⁵ Yeats, p. 498.
the surprise is in the second part, not the first: commonly it is the creative qualifier (such as curd-) attached to the common descriptor (pale) that engages our attention. Here the dolphins and gong are already part of the poem’s landscape, and it is the two disruptive, alliterative participles torn and tormented that give the ending its power. They would be remarkable and thought-provoking enough for any reader, but they beget particularly fresh images for the reader who already knows Yeats and whose reading is enriched by the knowledge of their forerunners.

Finally, to prove that the seeming determination of the Imagists to eschew neologism was at least occasionally overcome, I will note a couple of exceptional cases. Hilda Doolittle (‘H. D.’) and Richard Aldington shared a penchant for classical myth, and compounds can be found in occasional nominal descriptions, the structure of which frequently derive from Greek compounds, as in this roll-call by Doolittle in ‘Sea-Heroes’:

Akroneos, Oknolos, Elatreus,  
helm-of-boat, loosener-of-helm, dweller-by-sea,  
Nauteus, sea-man,  
Prumneos, stern-of-ship,  
Agchilalos, sea-girt,  
Elatreus, oar-shaft:  
lover-of-the-sea, lover-of-the-sea-ebb,  
lover-of-the-swift-sea,  
Ponteus, Proreus, Oöos:66

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An example from Aldington is the opening to ‘The Faun Sees Snow for the First Time’:

Zeus,
Brazen-thunder-hurler,
Cloud-whirler, son-of-Kronos ... 67

The compounds in this kind of declamation are of limited poetic interest other than as a means to create a classical mood (“make it old”). But the Imagists have one star attraction, secreted in the minimal oeuvre of T.E. Hulme: a marvellously suggestive adjective in ‘The Embankment’, which is a short prayer of (in Hulme’s note) “a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.” One imagines that Oscar Wilde’s Lady Windermere’s Fan, around fifteen years old at the time, had by then popularized the quotation “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.” The poem ends:

Oh, God, make small
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie. 68

Just as Eliot’s foresuffer recalls foresee, or deft-handed echoes left-handed in Hopkins’ ‘The Candle Indoors’, star-eaten, a compound notable for breadth, is enriched by its immediate and defamiliarizing association with an existing similar word, moth-eaten, a common (and not at all broad) compound describing ageing woollens that have, like the poem’s speaker and no doubt his clothes, come upon

hard times. The image of the night sky holed in the same way and furled around the “fallen gentleman” is made the more beautiful by the elegance of the allusion in that single word.

4. Any how: conversion and othering

Modernism saw an increase in poetic neologisms formed by conversion and, as with earlier examples in this chapter, there are some classes that we have encountered before in the work of nineteenth-century poets. I will limit myself in this chapter to exhibiting some similarities, as the nature and extent of influence from poet to poet and era to era is a matter for debate that will be discussed in Chapter VIII.

Mina Loy’s poetry is moderately spiced with neologisms, an unusually high proportion of which comprises conversions. Chapter IV gave an example of Emily Dickinson making an adjective from an -ate verb (or, if you prefer to see it that way, removing the “d” from a past participle), in “How Complicate / The Discipline of Man – ” (Fr899). She had previously used the same technique at least once, in the opening lines of Fr279, “Of all the Souls that stand create – / I have elected – One – ”. While this may sound like a regional idiom, I have found no other New England examples of it, and Loy in England adopted the same practice. Some examples are “evacuate craters” (‘Lunar Baedeker’), “the levitate channels / of its will” (‘Religious Instruction’) and “your / Etiolate body” (‘Songs to Joannes’, XXVIII). Neither Dickinson’s nor Loy’s words have an OED (nor

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69 Wallace Stevens used the same conversion in ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’, ‘It Must give Pleasure’, VI: “the whole / The complicate, the amassing harmony” (Stevens, Collected Poetry and Prose, p. 348), and its antonym in ‘The Comedian as the Letter C’, I: ‘The World Without Imagination’: “Triton incomplicate with that / Which made him Triton,” (Stevens, Collected Poetry and Prose, p. 23).
Webster, in Dickinson’s case) entry as an adjective. Verb–adjective pairs of this kind (articulate, precipitate) are moderately common in standard English, so Loy’s inventions do not involve strangeness. Of the three above only levitate is not immediately specific in its signification, carrying in context a general sense of lightness or floating.

Loy is also one of many poets who have made conversions out of what might be called “little words”, such as relative pronouns, prepositions and auxiliary verbs. There are examples of these, which are usually but not always rendered as plurals, in common English usage: “the haves and the have nots”, “a run of outs”, “whys and wherefores”. Instances of neologism in this form have been noted in previous chapters. Dickinson’s “heres” were mentioned in Chapter IV, and in fact Dickinson in different poems addressed both the here and now:

   “Here!” There are typic “Heres” –
   Foretold Locations –
   The Spirit does not stand –

   (Fr1564)

   Forever – is composed of Nowss –
   ’Tis not a different time –
   Except for Infiniteness –

   (Fr690)

Intended as a parody of Freudian philosophical jargon, the anonymous verses quoted in Chapter VI beginning “Across the moorlands of the Not” include the line “The Isness of the Was”. Loy’s ‘Parturition’ contains a kind of compound conversion that works in a similar way, but with her own more serious purpose.
The poem transmits – indeed, seems at times to model – subjective impressions of childbirth trauma that culminate with an insistence on woman’s procreative supremacy:

Mother I am
Identical
With infinite Maternity
Indivisible
Acutely
I am absorbed
Into
The was—is—ever—shall—be
Of cosmic reproductivity

After noting in passing that *reproductivity* was so rare at the time as to be a near-neologism, we can appreciate how “The was—is—ever—shall—be” is a remarkably effective device here. It reifies the most abstract of word-sequences into a containing vessel so that, in the moment of her baby emerging, the mother herself is being taken into a kind of cosmic womb. In a comparable way to Hopkins’ *beam-blind*, unpacked in Chapter V, Loy’s word is an ellipsis for a

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70 M Loy, ‘Parturition’, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. RL Conover, Farrar Straus & Giroux, New York, NY, 1996, p. 7. Loy deploys in some poems, such as this one, a continuous-flow sentence structure with little or no punctuation, in which words and phrases may be a part of two or even more overlapping sentences. Finding a quotation that fully represents the role of a given word or line can be difficult. I might equally have quoted from a different starting point:

The was—is—ever—shall—be
Of cosmic reproductivity

Rises from the subconscious
Impression of a cat
With blind kittens
Among her legs
phrase which most of her contemporary readers would recognize, familiar from Christian ritual and present in various wordings in the doxology ‘Gloria Patri’ and hymns. Because of its source – one such hymn is ‘Now thank we all our God’ – it prefigures the first line of the ironic ending of the poem:

I once heard in a church
—Man and woman God made them—

              Thank God.72

And, in a poem mostly in free verse with occasional end-rhyme, it is foregrounded as the centre of an unexpected rhyming tetrameter triplet, once four intervening indented lines are excluded. The defamiliarizing presence of the coopted “was—is—ever—shall—be” in a woman-centred manifesto is thus essential to the power of what Steve Pinkerton describes as “a dramatically feminist re-enactment of the biblical” that “turns the gendered dynamics of Genesis and the gospels on their head”.73

Ontological conversions of this kind can also be found in Wallace Stevens’ poetry, including instances in three of his most illustrious passages. In ‘The Emperor of Ice-Cream’ there is “Let be be finale of seem”,74 an early example of Stevens’ concern with the reality/unreality dualism noted previously. The meaning of that imperative has been widely contested: is it “Do not linger in make-believe, get real”? Or “Life is an illusion, only death is actuality”? Or

71 In two trimeters: “For thus it was, is now, / And shall be evermore” (M Rinkart, ‘Now Thank We All Our God’, tr. C Winkworth, in WH Monk (ed.), Hymns Ancient and Modern, Pott, Young & Co., New York, NY, 1876, p. 164.)
72 Loy, p. 8.
“Dream and you will achieve”? It all depends, it seems, on what you believe ice-cream symbolizes. The other three examples are in ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’, a long poem with neologisms in many forms, of which canto XII is a statement about the need for immediacy in poetry, one that might well have been added to the rules in ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’. The canto begins:

The poem is the cry of its occasion,
Part of the res itself and not about it.
The poet speaks the poem as it is,
Not as it was.75

It continues adamantly for the importance of poetry being in and of the moment: “as it is” and “as they are”. And “There is no / Tomorrow”: so, not “as it will be”, either. Then Stevens, like Loy but without the religious connotation, converts the is and was – in this case to places:

The mobile and immobile flickering
In the area between is and was are leaves,
Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees
And leaves in whirlings in the gutters, whirlings
Around and away, resembling the presence of thought,...76

Stevens insists here on is, not even the close-enough option of “between is and was”, because that place is like autumn, the not-summer. There, leaves, like thoughts, pass beyond their alive greenness and become whirlings (a typical Stevens plural participle, though not his coinage, of a type noted earlier):

detached, repetitive and disordered. Of course, Stevens, like Loy in the previous example, might instead have spoken of the past, present and future; but, apart from being prosaic, those words would not have conveyed the same sense. We have seen before in Chapter V this insistence that poetry should capture the present moment, in Hopkins’ passion for inscape. He would have seen the symbolic importance of using *was* and *is* here, because they are more alive than *past* and *present*. His priestly view of Creation as springing from the Word of God, and all that this meant for his poetry, is not far from that expressed by Stevens in the final line of the canto: “Together, said words of the world are the life of the world.” Later, in canto XV, Professor Eucalyptus is pondering:

The instinct for earth, for New Haven, for his room,

The gay tournamonde as of a single world

In which he is and as and is are one.77

The words *as* and *is* are significant at various times in ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’, and this is the point at which the two are brought together in their objectified forms. Stevens wrote of the mock-French portmanteau *tournamonde* that “it creates an image of a world in which things revolve and the word is therefore appropriate in the collocation of *is* and *as*.“78 In the poem he refers later (canto XXVIII) to “the intricate evasions of *as*”. Just how intricate is canvassed at length by David Letzler, who refers to “the importance of *as* toward consolidating the imaginative attitude of Stevens’ creation of word, world, and self, both in this

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78 Stevens, *Letters*, p. 699n. The page text and note contain a more detailed description of how the word was constructed.
poem and his poetry generally”, citing commentaries from Harold Bloom, Karen Helgeson and James Lindroth.\(^7\)

One last “little-word” conversion of note in ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’ is in its very first triplet:

> The eye’s plain version is a thing apart,
> The vulgate of experience. Of this,
> A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet – \(^8\)

Stevens gestures towards the plain, common and concise in his first two-and-a-bit lines; and then wryly, in view of the character of the long poem to come, gives us the compound conversion “an and yet” and its repetitions. It engenders a reflexive complexity that both confesses and embodies an immediate lapse from those three descriptors.

Before moving on to one more group of neologisms in the category “other”, I will take a brief look at the lexical ways of two poets mentioned in section 1 of this chapter. They are best treated here because conversions are their chief stock in neologistic trade, although E. E. Cummings’ poetry is awash with all kinds of invented words. Indeed, it took me only a minute or so of scanning to find a five-word line that includes one of each of the three main categories of neologism: “grim yessing childflesh perpetually acruise”, exhibiting conversion, compound and affixation respectively, in the poem ‘serene immediate silliest and whose’

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Chapter I of this thesis advances defamiliarization as the inherent poetic effect of all neologism, but it is reduced by a kind of law of diminishing returns where the poetry becomes saturated with neologism. In the case of Cummings, other consistent eccentricities such as deviant syntax, unspaced punctuation marks and lower-case text contribute to further interpretational puzzles to be solved by the reader, so that instead of foregrounding, neologisms simply become a part of the canvas. Cummings’ poem ‘anyone lived in a pretty how town’ (poem 29, 50 Poems) has historically been the subject of many studies by linguists. In his introduction to one such article, which sets out to synthesize and extend the linguistic scholarship around the poem as it then stood (1979), Richard Cureton opines: “Without question, ‘he danced his did’ has been more closely scrutinized and extensively analysed than any other single phrase in English literature.” The study of Cummings’ poetic language is a massive enterprise, and neologism is so closely intertwined with its other eccentricities that it would be futile for this thesis to try to separate it out. I will comment on just the first two lines of the poem in question in order to demonstrate a handful of the kinds of questions they raise that are typical of Cummings’ work:

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)

82 R Cureton, “He Danced His Did”: An Analysis, Journal of Linguistics, vol. 16, 1980, p. 245. As well as its specific analysis of the poem, the article serves as a readable primer in formal linguistic approaches to deviant syntax and lexis, and the reference list contains some landmark works in the field.
The two puzzle elements of the first line appear to be “who is ‘anyone’” and “what does ‘pretty how’ mean?” The first is solved, more or less, as the reader progresses through subsequent stanzas. The second is processed in the mind of the reader as many of Cummings’ phrases are, as an impressionistic mix. For a Cummings sentence, the first line resembles an utterly conventional one, with a mysterious but conventional subject, *anyone*, a simple past-tense intransitive verb, *lived*, and a predicate, *in a pretty how town*, with that odd descriptor, *pretty how*. How to process it? If one maintains a base model of a grammatical sentence, then *how* must be processed as an adjective, perhaps carrying a sense of a kind of practical, can-do attitude. From there, one can take *pretty* in its colloquial, rather vague modifying sense of *very* or *somewhat*; or perhaps it is an additional adjective, to be read as in “a pretty, how town”, which is entirely possible given Cummings’ often minimalist approach to punctuation. Additionally, in the back of the mind, there is an echo of the exclamation “how pretty!”.

For a Cummings line, that was relatively simple, but the second line is a different matter. Probably only *with*, in its common prepositional sense, has a fixed and clear role in the line. Just to canvass a few possibilities, *up* (or perhaps *up so*) might be read as a noun conversion rather than any of its normal roles as adverb, preposition or adjective. *Floating*, while not a conversion, may be read as an adjective or as a participial verb; if the latter, it may be intransitive, modified by *many bells down*, or transitive, with *many bells* its object – or maybe even just *many* its object, with *bells down* a phrasal modifier … and so on. The trouble with this kind of analysis, if the reader begins to think too hard about it, is that one risks losing touch with the musicality of the internal rhymes and jaunty rhythms.
But conversely, an intellectual opportunity is lost if the reader just gives up on structures like this and lets the sonic “vibe” take over.

Compared with the deviance of Cummings’ syntax, Gertrude Stein’s is much nearer to standard English. Take the opening of the prose-poem ‘A Piece of Coffee’, in the chapter ‘Objects’ in Tender Buttons:

More of double.
A place in no new table.
A single image is not splendor. Dirty is yellow. A sign of more in not mentioned.84

The first two lines are sentence fragments, but they are orthodox in their syntax and there is no doubt about the usage category of any word. The first two sentences of the third line are conventional in structure, but the remainder is a fragment. This time it is difficult to see it as an orthodox construction, unless, say, not mentioned is construed as a noun phrase (and therefore a conversion). To take another example, there is no clearly preferable orthodox parsing, even after one or more conversions is postulated, of this sentence from ‘Christian Bérard’: “If a letter with mine how are hear in all.”85 Stein’s syntactical unorthodoxies are not as radical as Cummings’, her frequent opacity stemming most often from nonsense or non sequitur semantics. But as with Cummings’ ceaseless neologisms, her occasional conversions are hard to isolate from, and made harder to describe by, the uncertain syntax that generates them.

Before proceeding to a Wallace Stevens coda, I will give a handful of examples of the use by poets of three marginal categories of words: “nonsense” (which they

sometimes are not) syllables or words; words that are not nonsense yet coined primarily for their sonic value; and words from specialist vocabularies, which, while not nonsense, are deliberately selected so as to make little or no sense to the average reader. These borderline neologisms deserve mention here as modernism brought an escalation in their poetic use. The “nonsense” words, some examples of which have already been discussed in Chapter VI, fall into three broad classes, although there is some overlap among them. They are: classical nonsense words, which may sometimes be portmanteaux, and may either be meaningless, such as Lear’s runcible, or carry some uncertain signification, such as Carroll’s slithy; nonsense syllables, usually designed as aural “filler”, especially in choruses of songs or metred verse; and echoic words and syllables, which are attempts to mimic external sounds. Eliot engaged repeatedly in all three classes: for example, in light verse he wrote of “pollicle dogs and jellicle cats”, two descriptors worthy of (and no doubt in homage to) Lear himself. The Waste Land, part III (‘The Fire Sermon’) contains the chorus Weialala leia / Wallala leialala, and part V (‘What the Thunder said’) the echoic cock’s cry, Co co rico co co rico. Stevens likewise ranges across the three classes: nincompated, seemingly at the intersection of syncopated, addle-pated and nincompoop (‘The Comedian as the Letter C’, I: The World Without Imagination); Tum-ti-tum / Ti-tum-tum-tum (‘Ploughing on Sunday’); and (one out of dozens of bird and animal noises scattered through his poetry) ki-ki-ri-ki (‘Depression before Spring’).

Vachel Lindsay’s partiality to sonically rich verse, combined with his commitment to performance as a vehicle for poetry, resulted in passages in his work that depend for their effect on neologistic strings, often in the form of assonant compounds. This can be seen in lines in ‘The Santa-Fe Trail’ such as
“Hark to the calm-horn, balm-horn, psalm-horn”\(^{86}\) (and note the repeated horn-like vowel sounds). His use of ersatz African chant is epitomized in ‘The Congo’. It is proper to acknowledge the egregious cultural appropriation (as we now recognize it) inherent in this and some other works by Lindsay. Even in his own time, though he saw himself as anti-racist and was no doubt well intentioned, Lindsay was widely (though far from universally) condemned by both African American and white observers. More recent commentary has largely dismissed the defence of intentionality, but still varies in the degree to which it allows the poet some credit for his political stance vis-à-vis the mores of his time.\(^{87}\)

Neologizing such as that below, from ‘The Congo’, is perhaps in a special category of its own, where the sound is everything and the meaning hardly seems to matter:

Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you.
Beware, beware, walk with care,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, Boom.\(^{88}\)


\(^{88}\) Lindsay, ‘The Congo’, The Daniel Jazz and Other Poems, p. 46.
Though the signification of this kind of material may appear slight, its racist burden persists. The single syllable “hoo” is chanted repeatedly in an earlier line. Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes that it also appears in poems by Stevens and Eliot, arguing that “the phoneme presents a cornucopia of racialized materials in order to create a powerful position for [male] whiteness; it makes a vibrant, aggressive sound of threat and promise that thrills and jolts its users.”89 ‘The Congo’ is one of the most prominent examples of the popularity of primitivism among modernists. I would argue that Lindsay’s evocations of Kansas in ‘The Santa-Fe Trail’, though not racially charged, fall into the same primitivist category, as they would have been similarly strange to his coastal audiences. The classically-inspired compounds of Aldington and Doolittle, such as those cited earlier, which are similarly fit for oral performance, form a further set of examples where neologism or near-neologism is integral to the primitivist expression. We have already seen lexical creativity in the poetry of Dickinson and Lear associated in different ways with exotic places and objects; the above kinds of primitivism exemplify one respect in which the modernists not only accepted, but built on, a practice of their immediate predecessors.

Rather like Lear turning Indian words into nonsense, but with a more serious purpose, some modernists adopted scientific or technical terminology into their poetry. The result involves neither neologism nor nonsense; but, unless one has a geological dictionary at hand, this example from the opening of ‘On a Raised Beach’ by MacDiarmid contains something that is close to both:

\[
\text{All is lithogenesis – or lochia,}
\]

Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree,
Stones blacker than any in the Caaba,
Cream-coloured caen-stone, chatoyant pieces,
Celadon and corbeau, bistre and beige,
Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform ...90

This technique of borrowing from specialist scientific vocabulary has been practised occasionally over the centuries. In this thesis we last encountered it in Chapter III, from Robert Herrick, about three hundred years before modernism. “Make it old”, indeed.

5. ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’

In this coda I will make an exception to the approach pursued in this chapter of analysing neologism by type, in order to focus on one poem that exemplifies the significance of neologism in the poetics of Wallace Stevens. Although ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’ is not Stevens’ most neologically dense (thirty to forty instances in its 270 three-line stanzas), it is especially fit for this purpose because of its subject matter. Not that the matter is easy to identify: in short, it is a discursive philosophy of poetry, although I like Roy Harvey Pearce’s framing of it as “Stevens’ major statement of what can be believed in, his mapping-out of the area in which reality and the imagination are conjoined.”91

Stevens’ coinages are evenly scattered throughout ‘Notes’. Having already discussed the prologue in section 2, I will shortly focus on two further passages where neologism plays a significant role, taken from ‘It Must Be Abstract’ and ‘It

90 MacDiarmid, ‘On a Raised Beach’, Complete Poems, p. 422.
Must Give Pleasure’. However, I first want to touch on two individual words, *bethou* and *jocundissima*, of special interest in two prominent cantos, VI and IX, of ‘It Must Change’. Canto VI opens with “Bethou me, said sparrow,”92 and *bethou*, as a kind of heavily invested birdcall, is repeated at intervals throughout, along with the contrasting call, *ké-ké*. As has been widely noted,93 it is a glorious and ingenious triple pun: an onomatopoeic bird call, an invitation to familiarity (an English rendition of the French *tutoyer*, to address by the familiar *tu*), and an echo of Shelley’s plea in ‘Ode to the West Wind’, “Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!” Canto IX is concerned with the question that has arisen intermittently in this thesis, in various eras and for various poets: how the everyday and the more recondite or high-flown forms of the language relate to the language of poetry in English. The canto concludes with the speaker’s poet trying “To compound the imagination’s Latin with / The lingua franca et *jocundissima*”,94 that is, to mix the higher poetic register with language that is common and perhaps fun. The charm-rich Latin borrowing *jocundissima*, in augmenting *lingua franca*, draws attention (because Stevens won’t italicize it!) to the fact that *lingua franca* is a Latinism, and that – referring to the imperative that heads this section of the longer poem – foreign borrowings have historically been a major agency for change in the language of poetry. I suspect that Stevens may also have in mind that because it is not a commonplace phrase among the general populace, *lingua franca* is utterly non-reflexive, in that it is not a part of the *lingua franca* that English was becoming by Stevens’ time. Here, as well as exemplifying his own poetic liking for the exotic word, *jocundissima* is very

much reflexive, one of Stevens’ many good jokes, which reminds us of what poetry, especially his own, is often about.

Section 2 of this chapter included a dissection of the affixation *enflashings* that demonstrated the large number of its possible significations, and voiced a hope that in context it might become more constrained in meaning. Here it is in its contextual passage, the opening of canto IX of ‘It Must Be Abstract’:

The romantic intoning, the declaimed clairvoyance
Are parts of apotheosis, appropriate
And of its nature, the idiom thereof.

They differ from reason’s click-clack, its applied
Enflashings. But apotheosis is not
The origin of the major man. He comes,
Compact in invincible foils, from reason ... 95

The prospects for clarity from the context are not encouraging. It is not even apparent whether reason is the object or subject, whether it has enflashings applied to it or whether it is applying them. The passage is concerned with the imaginative and the concrete reasoning parts of the nature of what Stevens calls “man”. The compound *click-clack* is worth observing here as an example of Stevens’ fondness for a specific form of onomatopoeia, where meaning is conveyed primarily through the sound of one or more syllables (here, the sounds happen to be words, but, as we noted in section 4, he also made prolific use of non-lexical vocables such as *hoobla-hoo* and *tink-tonk*). In this case the suggestion is of a quantitative precision, the practical “left-brain” side of nature.

95 Stevens, ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 335.
Stevens reiterates this connotation with “its applied / Enflashings”, perhaps striving with the associations of “flash” for a visual equivalent of the aural staccato functionality evoked by *click-clack*. The seemingly innocuous *en-* also deserves a little more attention. It was shown in section 2 that the prefix makes available a range of possible interpretations, and it is likely that is exactly Stevens’ aim here, an intentional vagueness of signification that is increased by the plural -ings, as with the examples in -nesses given in section 2. When one looks over all Stevens’ neologisms, not only his affixations, the apparently trivial extra syllable is a frequent component, either at the beginning or end of words (or, as in *enflashings*, both); or even in the middle, as in *closelier*, to be discussed shortly. Indeed, the concept of the syllable itself is one to which Stevens repeatedly returns in his poetry. He endows it with significances ranging from nothing (‘a man lured on by a syllable without any meaning”, ‘Prologues to What Is Possible’, I) to everything (“she that in the syllable between life // And death”, ‘The Owl in the Sarcophagus’, I). The individual sounds of syllables were important to him, as evidenced in these lines from ‘The Comedian as the Letter C’, I:

> What word split up in clickering syllables
> And storming under multitudinous tones
> Was name for this short-shanks in all that brunt?96

Stevens gives us a sly allusion to Shakespeare’s original trick in *Macbeth*, in the second line’s polysyllabic Latinate “multitudinous” contrasting with the plain blunt English (including the coined play on the Old English *longshanks*) English

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of the third line. But even cleverer is *clickering*, a neologism bidirectionally reflexive in both describing itself and being described by the line in which it sits, and illustrating the musicality that such an extra syllable can add.

A final illustration of the sonic importance of Stevens’ word choices in ‘Notes’ is in this excerpt from Canto V of ‘It Must Give Pleasure’:

We drank Meursault, ate lobster Bombay with mango
Chutney. Then the Canon Aspirin declaimed
Of his sister, in what a sensible ecstasy

She lived in her house. She had two daughters, one
Of four, and one of seven, whom she dressed
The way a painter of pauvred color paints.

But still she painted them, appropriate to
Their poverty, a gray-blue yellowed out
With ribbon, a rigid statement of them, white,

With Sunday pearls, her widow’s gayety.
She hid them under simple names. She held
Them closelier to her by rejecting dreams.

The words they spoke were voices that she heard.
She looked at them and saw them as they were
And what she felt fought off the barest phrase.97

Stevens’ technique is highlighted by Marjorie Perloff in a commentary critical of Harold Bloom’s approach to the poem, with rhetorical questions about the coinages in this passage:

The poem’s sound structure, for example, is treated [by Bloom] as a mere irrelevancy, as is the syntax of Stevens’s cantos and even, to a large extent, their diction. Would it matter, say, if we substituted “poor” or “paler” for “pauvred”...? If “closelier” in line 12 of the same canto became “closer”?98 Perloff does not mention that the example she selected included two neologisms, but that is significant to us; so, let us answer her rhetorical questions.

Canon Aspirin’s sister dressed her daughters simply in plain hues, “The way a painter of pauvred color paints.” The sister, who lives in a “sensible ecstasy” – as opposed to, or at least distinct from, sensuous – for her loved daughters, protects them from the dangers of their imagination by holding them “closelier to her by rejecting dreams.” The language used to describe the sister’s life is plain, like herself. It seems that the Canon, while unable to explicitly disapprove her viewpoint, distances himself from her twice. He throws in a splash of Stevens’ own characteristic linguistic colour in pauvred, a French adjective-to-noun conversion; to have used poor or paler would have been to impoverish the line in a way the sister would have approved. And whereas the sister “fought off the barest phrase”, the poet in closelier inserts his own playful, musical syllable into closer (or adds one to closely), which for metre and sense would have done just as well. Perhaps it is this attention to the building-blocks of words, as he makes

explicit in ‘The Creations of Sound’, that led to so many of Stevens’ created words:

We do not say ourselves like that in poems.
We say ourselves in syllables that rise
From the floor, rising in speech we do not speak.99

CHAPTER VIII: PLAY, DURATION, CONCLUSION

I want to remark on one or two things.


1. Miscellany

Before summarizing and concluding this thesis, I will present short discussions of two issues that received some attention in previous chapters. They appear here at last because, while the relevance of each has been cited for several individual poets, an overall review with a little theoretical context will serve to tie together the strands that have appeared thus far.

Play and playfulness

Of the poets studied in this thesis, concordance and text search reveal that three, William Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson and Edward Lear, made unusually frequent use of the word play. Notably, each uses it preponderantly in a different way, and each of those ways reflects a crucial aspect of the poet and their work. Shakespeare’s usages, when he writes as a dramatist, mainly relate to senses around performance or assumed personae, of playing a part. These peak in Hamlet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream for obvious reasons, but the same sense predominates even in plays without a play within. Lear’s many usages are mostly concerned with musicians, such as the “Old Man with a flute”, and the “Young Lady of Bute” on the same instrument. The polymath Lear was a musician himself, and critics such as Anne Stillman have commented on the strange
musicality of his verse – perhaps his own “meloobious”1 is a good word for it – and its influence on modernism, particularly on T. S. Eliot.2 Of the three, Dickinson is the one who deploys the word in what the OED suggests is its earliest sense, of activity engaged in for fun. There is a sense in which every neologism is the result of a form of this kind of play.3 This might be seen merely as an example of the commonplace observation, made in different ways by countless psychologists of all schools, that all creative acts arise from play.4 In the case of poetry, Johan Huizinga in his influential Homo Ludens presents a definition of play that he argues “might serve as a definition of poetry”, agreeing with Valéry that poetry literally is “a playing with words and language”.5 But in poetic neologism there is a more specific kind of play at work. It is a constructive mode akin to the way in which a child with a supply of Lego pieces or plasticine can form shapes that are suggestive of, but different from, existing real-world objects; or – most significantly – to how the sing-song babbling of infants developing their language skills throws together scraps of sound heard or invented to create strings of neologism. Over time the resultant words gradually increase in

3 I refrain from using the term wordplay, because its history makes it inapt. Surprisingly, the OED has no earlier entry for it than 1794, and the Google Ngram server indicates it did not come into significant usage until the late nineteenth century, beginning to increase popularity only from the mid-twentieth. Early citations suggest that it began life as signifying a practice that detracts from meaning rather than enhances it, which is exactly the kind of pejorative that one might have imagined having been self-reflexively coined in the Renaissance as a descriptor for the activity that was chronicled in Chapter II. But that never happened, and as far as I can discover, the term is absent from any contemporary commentaries on the pre-twentieth-century poets under study here.
semantic content, often providing listening adults (who also join the play with their own infantilized “motherese/fatherese” speech) with the added entertainment of childish catachresis. Dickinson, wise in matters of childhood and a frequent writer on writing, must surely have had this process in mind as she coined the broad compound in the seventh line:

We play at Paste –
Till qualified, for Pearl –
Then, drop the Paste –
And deem ourself a fool –

The Shapes – though – were similar –
And our new Hands
Learned Gem-Tactics –
Practicing Sands –

‘We play at paste’ (Fr282)

I want here to distinguish play from playfulness. The latter may be characterized as a heightened emphasis on the light-hearted, sportive or droll, and in neologism I distinguish two forms. In the first, technical playfulness, the word is valued at least in part as an objet d’art in its own right, evoking admiration in the reader for the (often humorous) stylization and craft in its creation. The second form is conceptual playfulness, notably present in puns and unexpected allusions, where its signification, or multiples thereof, evokes intellectual enjoyment in the reader. Instances of technical playfulness already mentioned include Dickinson’s New Englandly and Lear’s battlecock and shuttledore; conceptual playfulness is exemplified in Shakespeare’s punning unseminar’d and the multiple conversions in Cummings’ ‘anyone lived in a pretty how town’. Playfulness can be found in
the work of every one of the writers featured here. This may be an unsurprising statement, true for most poets, but the exceptional force of its presence in a group distinguished for their commitment to neologism is no coincidence. Commentary abounds on playfulness in the poetry of all of them: for example, Corns writes at length on its presence in Milton⁶ (“Milton can be as grimly playful as his God is grimly humorous”).⁷ Joseph Feeney wrote an entire book on its importance to the work of Hopkins,⁸ and its presence on almost every page of Cummings is reflected in the body of criticism on his work. The scope for study of the relationship between play(fulness) and poetic neologism is too great for the bounds of this thesis, presenting opportunities for further research, perhaps from Huizinga’s aesthetic-historical standpoint or from that of the psychoanalytic school descended from the work of D. W. Winnicott.

\textit{The duration of neologistic effects}

In the Introduction it was noted that a word coined by a poet that finds its way into standard English loses its neologistic power for present-day readers, for whom it is just a word. It arrives in this state after a process that may have taken decades or centuries, the endpoint of which while it is unfolding is difficult to predict. Michael Riffaterre, in an essay addressing this issue, calls this interval “la période d’assimilation du néologisme [the period of assimilation of the neologism]”\textsuperscript{9}. To take an example from Shakespeare (as always, allowing the possibility of future antedating): in 1594 in ‘The Rape of Lucrece’ he formed the

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\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{6} Corns, pp. 65–69, 82–83, 105–111.
  \item\textsuperscript{7} Corns, p. 65.
  \item\textsuperscript{9} Riffaterre, ‘La Durée de la Valeur Stylistique du Néologisme’, p. 283.
\end{itemize}
word *sympathize[d]* from the existing *sympathy*. During its period of assimilation, sixteenth-century writers will have felt some anxiety as to the acceptability of *sympathize*, and readers some surprise on encountering it; and it will have maintained a (gradually declining) defamiliarizing power.\(^{10}\) More recently, Lewis Carroll’s *slithy* and *chortle(d)* both provoked other writers to use them in the years after their appearance, but only the second has graduated into common usage.\(^{11}\) As a result, *chortle* no longer disrupts a reader’s flow, whereas *slithy* still retains its neologic power to defamiliarize, though a reduced one according to a reader’s previous engagement with its origin poem. Though the survival or otherwise of any neologism in that respect may seem as random as that of a turtle’s egg, there are identifiable influences at work that affect the outcome, and the path of a given word from coinage to either acceptability or abandonment may be traced by a linguistic historian with access to a sufficient corpus. Riffaterre, whose analysis relates to French but is applicable in principle to English, treats the issues around this process thoroughly.\(^{12}\)

There is a related form of diminution, occurring on rereading a poem, that may begin in just minutes. (By “rereading” I do not mean the more formal major reevaluative process engaged in by literary critics, but simply one reader reading a

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\(^{10}\) Riffaterre expresses the process this way: “[A] mesure que le néologisme se répand dans l’usage, il se déprécie stylistiquement: de rare devenu courant, il ne provoque plus de surprise et perd sa valeur expressive *en tant que néologisme*… *A l’assimilation sur le plan linguistique correspond l’usure sur le plan stylistique.* [As the neologism spreads into use, it depreciates stylistically: as the rare becomes current, it no longer causes surprise and loses its expressive value *as a neologism*… *Linguistic assimilation corresponds to stylistic deterioration.*]” (‘La durée de la valeur stylistique du néologisme’, p. 282.)

\(^{11}\) The historical usage frequency as indicated by the Google Ngram server can be inspected by entering *slithy,chortle_INF* on the webpage. Modern usages of *slithy* prove to be almost entirely in quotation from ‘Jabberwocky’. Though now seemingly a little old-fashioned, *chortle* still appears in a range of contexts; in the last century it was a favourite with English children’s authors, notably Enid Blyton.

\(^{12}\) Riffaterre, ‘La Durée de la Valeur Stylistique du Néologisme’. 
poem again, either immediately or some time later while some memory of the first reading remains.) The impact of any poetic effect on first reading can never be repeated in exactly the same way for that reader, a truism that applies especially strongly in the case of neologism. If one reads a poem containing neologism a second time, the primary poetic effect of defamiliarization is blunted a little, because the word loses a degree of strangeness and so is no longer totally unfamiliar. But in noting this it is necessary to differentiate two aspects of what gives a neologism its defamiliarizing jolt: it is new, in that the reader has not seen it before; and it is different, in that the reader registers it as not orthodox English. With subsequent rereadings, the first aspect falls away, but the second remains no matter how many times we read the word, and so the defamiliarization effect is not wholly lost but certainly reduced.

Yet the literature on rereading tells us that second and subsequent readings of a poem enhance its richness for the reader in diverse ways, and so it need not happen that the power of neologism overall is diminished on rereading if the reader is able to uncover further meaning within the parts of the poem that contextualize it. Further, in rereading there may also be the effect of anticipation. David Galef comments on this in the context of rereading in general, but the principle is applicable on a small scale to poetic neologism. Galef calls it “a kind of titillation once removed”13 and quotes Roland Barthes: “I take pleasure in hearing myself tell a story whose end I know. I know and I don’t know. I act toward myself as if I did not know …”14 In the same way, the reader of a poem

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containing a neologism knows that it is coming and may be waiting for it to swim into vision, perhaps wanting to experience again the poetic effects of the charm or strangeness of the new word.

2. Conclusion

Research in poetics has studied aspects of composition common to all practitioners of poetry, such as metre, rhyme, lexis, aural effects and so on, to achieve a better understanding of the workings of poetry; the results of that research in turn contribute towards a sound theoretical foundation for poetic criticism. This thesis has been written to make a substantial contribution to that endeavour as it relates to poetic neologism.

Such research typically employs techniques that resemble the inductive scientific method, whereby it is one of the primary aims of scientists to discern, among a haphazard mass of data, patterns that enable them and their successors to better comprehend the workings of the universe from which the data emerge. I have selected the data for this thesis from a sub-lexis of perhaps tens of thousands of words coined by thousands of published poets in English across the surveyed period. Less than one per cent of the words and their authors have been studied here, but that has been enough to identify or theorize three such patterns, described in detail in the Introduction and Chapter I: a taxonomy, a set of attributes and a set of poetic effects. The first is simply an adoption of the work of others: I have employed a first-level taxonomy (affixation, compound, conversion, other) based on classifications previously put forward by linguists, and occasionally broken them down into subgroups where that has been helpful. Four attributes (strangeness, charm, polysemy, breadth) have been isolated that
enable neologisms to be grouped in another way, according to their intrinsic qualities rather than their formal structure. And nine poetic effects have been found to recur as results of poetic neologism: one (defamiliarization) that is always present in a newly coined word, and eight others that are realized directly by the word itself, or indirectly by how the word interacts with its context, or a combination of the two. While the poetic effects are a nominated subset of effects already identified in critical literature, and the taxonomy was based on existing scholarship, the set of four attributes provides a new terminology to describe the inherent qualities of neologisms.

All of these patterns can be traced across poets and across time, despite the many differences in how and why the poets themselves coined words. We have seen how the various impulses that informed or affected their work – Renaissance language change, Hopkins’ religious dedication, the modernist project and so on – and their individual poetical styles were differently served by the deployment of neologism, and the nature of their coinages varied each from each. Thus, Dickinson made scores of nonstandard affixations, as if to thumb her nose at convention in yet another small way, but only a handful of compounds; her contemporary Hopkins, inspired by and rejoicing in the Word of his God, the reverse. But despite these variations, the types and patterns identified here enable links to be made between widely separated instances of neologism. A few examples follow, most of them linking neologisms previously cited in this thesis. Some likenesses are easily spotted without the support of this kind of theory: we have already mentioned Hopkins’ echo of Milton’s cold-kind in kindcold and the association between Milton’s star-y-pointed and Stevens’ star-y-plaited. The general form of these last two compounds is of course commonplace, but they
gain power in similar ways from their breadth in linking celestial vastness with earthly smallness. With this pattern in mind, one can identify the additional close kinship in Crane’s “planet-sequined heights”. Shakespeare’s opposeless, from Gloucester’s appeal to the gods quoted in Chapter II, a suffixation with a degree of structural strangeness in its use of the -less suffix with a verb root, effects an ellipsis of “unable to be opposed” at a time when unopposable was not recorded. It is echoed closely across space and time by his admirer Dickinson in “God can summon every face / Of his Repealless – List.” Or take the two conversions, discernings and lethargied, in King Lear’s self-assessment:

Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied – Ha! Waking? ’Tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am?15

The first, making a count noun from a gerund, is just a little unorthodox, but the second carries decided strangeness and even Lear himself is immediately struck (“Ha!”) by its catachresis.16 Stevens, over three hundred years later, employs a number of neologisms on the patterns of these two, and indeed “his discernings / Are lethargied” would not be out of place in a Stevens poem. A pair of similar coinages, almost as close together (but separated by a third neologism!) can be

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15 King Lear, 1.4.203–05 (Conflated Text).
16 Although it is Lear who utters the “Ha!”, one imagines that Shakespeare was putting into the King’s mouth his own editorial comment on his surprising word. Stevens in ‘Snow and Stars’ makes a more explicit play of his reaction to his own neologism in the act of writing it:
The grackles sing avant the spring
Most spiss – oh! Yes, most spissantly.
They sing right puissantly.

(Stevens, ‘Snow and Stars’, Collected Poetry and Prose, p. 208.)
found in Stevens’ ‘Two Illustrations that the World Is What You Make of It’, II
(‘The World Is Larger in Summer’):

And blue broke on him from the sun,

A bullioned blue, a blue abulge,

Like daylight, with time’s bellishings, ...

The significations of Stevens’ two coinages are exactly analogous to those of
Shakespeare, and the effects are similar. Each of discernings and bellishings adds
a faintly portentous air (with differing purposes) to its speaker’s discourse.

Orthodox adjectival alternatives to lethargied and bullioned were available, but in
each case the poet has elected to use a participial form of a noun-verb conversion
that offers strangeness and sonic heft; and, in Stevens’ case, alliteration and
assonance with its surrounds. Note that lethargied and bullioned are instances of a
loose association, established through the frequency with which it is encountered,
between their neologism type (conversion), attribute (strangeness) and poetic
effect (catachresis). There are other two- and three-way linkages that can be
observed: two obvious ones are polysemy with ambiguity and strangeness with
defamiliarization; other examples are charm with onomatopoeia and broad
compounds with ellipsis.

The nature of such associations is one of several theoretical aspects of poetic
neologism raised in this thesis that I envisage will lend themselves to further
investigation. Others include the patterns reviewed in this section, eras and
languages outside the present range, other theoretical lenses (cognitive linguistics

17 Stevens, ‘Two Illustrations That the World Is What You Make of It’, Collected Poetry and
Prose, p. 437.
is an obvious possibility), and the matters raised in section 1 above. Links could be explored among impulses to neologism that are generated by different forms of inexpressibility, as exemplified in reactions to the “inadequacy” of English to convey new ideas in the Renaissance and the communication of philosophical concerns by poets such as Dickinson. I have mentioned previously that various critics have presented surveys of neologism in the works of individual poets who are prominent in this thesis, but in most cases they have not accompanied them with a great deal of theoretical consideration. Fashioning a coherent theoretical framework around neologism in poetry has been a central aim of my work. I trust that this thesis, with its historical narrative and concomitant provision of a wide-ranging, curated collection of examples, has in achieving that aim demonstrated the enduring power of neologism in English poetry.
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