Language Fixation in Dryden's *All for Love*

MARCUS NORDLUND

In his preface to *All for Love* (1677), John Dryden made the following remark on the relationship between his new play and its Shakespearean source: "In my Stile I have profess'd to imitate the Divine *Shakespeare* . . . . I hope I need not explain my self, that I have not Copy'd my Author servilely: Words and Phrases must of necessity receive a change in succeeding Ages: but 'tis almost a Miracle that much of his Language remains so pure..." (18). What is particularly interesting about this passage is how a standard invocation of the Renaissance ideal of *imitatio*—that is, a balance between respectful imitation and individual innovation—immediately turns into a divided remark on language change. While Dryden seems to accept that language change is inevitable, his characterisation of Shakespeare's language as remarkably 'pure' also suggests that mutability is ultimately synonymous with corruption.

This negative perception of linguistic change and the resulting desire for purity and stability is entirely in keeping with Dryden's well-known commitment to language reform: the idea that it might be possible to "fix" the English tongue and thus render it more stable and dependable.[1] The question I want to raise here is whether the slippage from dramatic imitation to language change in the passage above is an isolated event, or whether similar concerns also rubbed off on the very play to which he affixed this preface. Perhaps *All for Love* itself contains traces of this self-conscious attitude to language, and particularly the dream of a more stable correspondence between words and things?

Before I define my argument more closely I want to examine and integrate two important critical insights about *All for Love,* the first of which concerns its overriding theme. In 1970, Derek Hughes argued that the play "portrays man in an environment of inner and outer instability....the ideals which he formulates and the roles which he tries to

---

[1] For a broad and accessible account of English language reform from 1580 to the eighteenth century, see Part Two of Howatt (1984): 75-110.

assume are constantly divorced from the realities of human and external nature" (Hughes 563). Writing five years later, Douglas Canfield objected that Hughes had exaggerated the element of mutability at the expense of its dichotomous counterpart, the absolute ideal of constancy. He also pointed out that "the motif of mutability versus constancy remains ever-present in dramatic treatments of Antony and Cleopatra up to the time of Dryden . . . . No Renaissance play on the subject that I have examined – and that includes every one known to be extant – treats it in any other terms" (Canfield 44, 47). While all readings are necessarily provisional and rarely exhaust all dimensions of any given work, I will assume that Canfield was right about the centrality of mutability and constancy to Dryden's play (for further perspectives, see Fisher 1977 and Vance 1986). More recently, Steven Zwicker has also identified Lucretius as a longstanding philosophical influence "that allowed Dryden to acknowledge – and then to embrace – in the very structures and gestures of his writing, the casual and inevitable drift of all things towards dissolution" (Zwicker 309).

The second critical contribution I will draw upon concerns Dryden's attitude towards language. In 1987, Robert King published an article that drew important connections between Dryden's activities as dramatist and language reformer:

> John Dryden's name appears frequently in scholarly accounts of language reform in the seventeenth century in England for several good reasons: he belonged to the Royal Society committee on language; his essays frequently deal with language as such; and he has long been regarded as an early master of a mature prose style. In 1930, R. F. Jones implied that a causal chain connects Dryden's prose to the influence of the Royal Society and to John Wilkin's [sic] attempt to forge a language of signs with universal, common significance; thirty-eight years later, Philip Harth saw Wilkins's influence reaching Dryden though Cambridge. Two recent critical comments indicate that scholarship has generally accepted Dryden's association with the Royal Society as evidence of abiding convictions that disposed him toward a plain, unornamented style.
>
> (King 45)

The dream nourished by several illustrious members of the Royal Society was a direct correspondence between *res et verba,* words and things. The

most extravagant example, touched upon by King above, was Bishop George Wilkins's awe-inspiringly ambitious *Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668): a massive tome where he proposed an intricate artificial language that would provide a dependable taxonomy of all conceivable things and notions. Other society members such as Thomas Sprat were more concerned with the eradication of figurative language and other equivocal embellishments from the existing English tongue in order to increase its economy and precision.

These somewhat Quixotic attempts at language reform were soon to be immortalised satirically in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* in spite of the author's own manifest desire to fix the English language once and for all.[2] In the academy of Lagado, the venerable language professors are engaged in two ambitious projects: one is to remove all polysyllabic words, verbs, and participles from language, "because in reality all things imaginable are but Nouns." The other is "a Scheme for entirely abolishing all Words whatsoever....since Words are only Names for *Things,* it would be more convenient for all Men to carry about them, such Things as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on" (Swift 2002: 157-58). What Robert King finds in Dryden's play, by contrast, is a "more complex response to the *res et verba* question than the satiric ones of Marvell and Swift." While the language reformers were suspicious of all forms of abstraction and figurative expressions, *All for Love* employs "highly wrought sound patterns and bodies forth a qualified endorsement of terms rooted in things" (King 49, 46).

If we accept these two claims—that Dryden's *All for Love* is steeped in mutability, and that it also involves a response to seventeenth-century language reform—then it also seems reasonable to perceive a logical connection between them. For as Robert Stillman points out with specific reference to George Wilkins, the attempt to reform language was ultimately a war against time: "Linguistic change is corruption; corruption is the work of time; and time's most nefarious manifestation . . . is 'general custom,' the mutability of history itself" (Stillman 241). In the preface to *Troilus and Cressida* Dryden expresses some nostalgia about the age of Aeschylus, when the Greek language supposedly reached its perfection, and

---

[2] Unlike Dryden, Swift did not regard language change as inevitable. He saw no "absolute Necessity why any Language should be perpetually changing" and therefore recommended "that some Method should be thought on for *Ascertaining* and *Fixing* our Language for ever, after such Alterations are made in it as shall be thought requisite" (Swift 1712/1957: 9, 14).

remarks dejectedly that "The English language is not capable of such a certainty..." (225). In the dedicatory letter to the Earl of Sunderland, he also describes his native tongue as a "composition of the dead and living tongues" that makes people speak "barbarously." As a result, he is often forced to translate his thoughts into Latin, "thereby trying what sence the words will bear in a more stable language" (222). This is, of course, the motif of constancy and mutability in a nutshell, translated into the realm of language.

But for anyone who dreams of a better world, language, or literature, time cannot only be a source of corruption or post-lapsarian nostalgia: it will also be a great redeemer. "Only through time time is conquered," as Eliot puts it so memorably in *The Four Quartets,* and Dryden's *Essay of Dramatick Poesy* (1668) takes as its principal subject the question of literary progress versus decay. Indeed, his recognition of linguistic corruption in the preface to *Troilus* soon gives way to a more optimistic view of language change: "Yet it must be allow'd to the present Age, that the tongue in general is so much more refin'd since Shakespeare's time, that many of his words, and more of his Phrases, are scarce intelligible..." (225). What distinguishes linguistic 'corruption' from 'progress' or 'refinement' is the presence of deliberate human agency: the systematic attempt to tame the gargantuan beast called "language change" and strap it to the plough. At the heart of language reform in the late seventeenth century lies the dream of restoring language to its former Edenic state, so that words and things might once again become true to one another. In such a world, language would become a tremendously efficient and powerful tool since the acts of naming, defining, and determining would really amount to the same thing.

In one respect, the language reformers were responding to a timeless exigency for those who seek knowledge and understanding. Whenever modern academics or pre-Socratic philosophers seek to define their terms they pay similar homage to the inescapable link between meaning and conceptual-linguistic precision. But as Swift's hilarious parody suggests, one need not be a deconstructionist[3] to be struck by the vanity of the

---

[3] In fact, Derrida's attitude towards language—which is still surprisingly influential among literary scholars—is best described as an equally misguided reversal of the seventeenth-century position. In both cases language is conceived reductively as a *system of signs,* quite apart from its rather obvious roots in the governing intentions of its users and their real-world contexts. The chief difference between the language philosophy of the language reformers and Derrida lies in the response generated by the initial perception of an inevitable slippage between words and things: while the language reformers respond

proposed seventeenth-century match between the individual *res et verbum.*
This is what the language historian Charles Barber has to say on Wilkins's
Essay towards a Real Character:

> To the modern reader, perhaps the most staggering thing is the
> assumption that the number of possible 'notions' in the universe is
> finite. To do Wilkins justice, he does say that there are some things
> that his philosophical tables cannot cover. They include things
> peculiar to one place or nation, such as titles of honour or of office,
> and legal terms, and also things which are continually changing,
> like fashions in clothes, games, foods, the tools of trades, and
> political and religious sects. But in spite of this qualification, he
> seems to think in terms of a universe in which there are certain
> fixed categories of objects and of notions, which are independent of
> the classificatory process carried out by language itself.
>
> (Barber 101-102)

Once again the chief and fatal wedge between words and things turns out
to be Father Time, and the problem is exacerbated by the rootedness of
language in particular places and contexts. But there is also a third
common denominator between the things that Wilkins has no dependable
signs for, and that will be particularly important in the pages that follow:
most of them are concerned with *conventions that human beings establish
between themselves, and by which they define their identities as well as their
relationships to one another.*

In a pre-Darwinian and post-Aristotelian universe, composed of a
limited number of divinely ordained essences, it is one thing for Wilkins to
establish a taxonomic list of all the kinds of *frogs* or *quadrupeds* or *minerals*
there are in the world. But it is quite another to establish taxonomic
ground rules for the manifold, shifting roles and identities that human
beings attribute to themselves and to others, and that often come into
conflict with one another. If the chief problem for any essentialist
conception of language (like that of Wilkins) is to "accommodate the
everyday observation that an individual object can be classified and

---

constructively by defining their terms and seeking a closer correspondence between words
and essential things, the *deconstructive* response is to increase the gap between words from
things and to deny the very possibility of words ever having a determinate, dependable
meaning. For lucid critiques of Derrida and his literary-critical disciples, see Ellis 1980,
Tallis 1988, Vickers 1993, and Carroll 1995.

reclassified under a multitude of different names" (Tallis 103), then this problem is obviously exacerbated when we consider the exceedingly complex realm of human relationships. Things become even more complicated when we consider those ambiguous socio-political compounds of things and people we call 'nations' or 'countries'— composed, as they are, of carefully demarcated territories, measurable material goods, but also of the abstract values, ideals, beliefs, and identities of their inhabitants.

After these preliminaries I would now like to piece together my exact thesis concerning Dryden's *All for Love*. My overriding claim will be that this play gives voice to a historically specific disquiet about the capacity of words such as proper names, titles, and epithets to correspond to their human referents. This gap between words and people, between linguistic conventions and a lived reality, has two distinct symptoms in Dryden's play. On the one hand, the play seems complicitous with the seventeenth-century awareness of language fixation as a means of control—not only of nature, but also of other people. Dryden's characters repeatedly attempt to define and thereby determine each other as human beings, and they are also conscious about the way that other people define them. But these attempts to determine reality by means of language are rarely successful, and the play reminds us of the inescapable tension between the mutability of individual selves and the relative constancy of the words used to describe them. Throughout my discussion of these phenomena I will assume that Dryden's description of the English tongue as a vehicle for 'dead and living languages' is equally applicable to the relationship between his own play and the literary tradition it draws upon. To understand more fully what is special and what is merely mundane about Dryden's treatment of language and identity, we must explore it in relation to the Shakespearean source it imitates.

*

In the opening line of *All for Love,* the prophet Serapion informs us of a cosmic slippage between words and things: "Portents, and Prodigies, are grown so frequent, / That they have lost their Name" (1. 1-2). The idea is, of course, that extravagant events are only deemed so on account of their relative scarcity; what counts as a 'prodigy' cannot be understood in terms of a fixed, vertical relation between individual words and things since the aptness of the term is always established horizontally by means of

comparison. Compared with the line that may have inspired it, Dryden's formulation also has a specifically linguistic dimension that seems absent in his source. In his legendary soliloquy, Hamlet observes that "enterprises of great pitch and moment...lose the name of action" whenever those who originally planned to perform them think too much (3. 1. 86-88). By contrast, Dryden's Serapion is not dissecting the relationship between action and reflection: he is commenting on the discrepancy between language and the mutable reality it presumes to represent.

If the entire first act of Dryden's play describes a world that is at variance with its former self, then this development is particularly noticeable in the male protagonist. When Ventidius arrives in Egypt he finds an Antony who is "alter'd from the Lord of half Mankind" and now finds himself "crampt within a corner of the World" (1. 176, 179). When they meet, Ventidius immediately reminds Antony of the current discrepancy between his proper name and its human referent:

> *Ant. starting up. Art thou Ventidius?*
> *Ven. Are you Antony?*
> *I'm liker what I was, than you to him*
> *I left you last.* (1. 245-47)

While Antony is merely seeking to identify Ventidius as an individual person, the latter throws back his question in a format that is at once existential and linguistic. A little later in the same act we find Antony accepting his general's diagnosis of a rift between personal identity and language: "I have lost my Reason, have disgrac'd / The name of Soldier, with inglorious ease" (293-94).

In large part, Dryden's concern with Antony's name and identity is attributable to the literary tradition he drew upon, especially the Shakespearean source he set out to imitate. In Shakespeare's version of the play the protagonist's name is described as a magical "word of war" (2. 2. 49), and we are frequently reminded of the contrast between past and present selves. Shakespeare's Antony complains that Octavius Caesar is constantly "harping on what I am, not what he knew I was" (3. 13. 147-48), and his Cleopatra patches up an argument by observing that "since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (3. 13. 191-92). In the play's most touching meditation on personal transience, Antony likens himself to a figure in a cloud that is destined to lose its temporary form:

"Here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (4. 14. 13). The Shakespearean self, like that in Montaigne, is constantly in flux and therefore stands in constant tension with description. But Shakespeare's characters never seem overly worried by this inescapable gap between the sign and its concrete referent: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (*Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2. 43-44). This relatively untroubled attitude towards the arbitrariness of individual words is also reflected in Shakespeare's linguistic practice whenever he felt constrained by the existing English vocabulary: *Can't think of the right word? Well, make up a new one!* Such a penchant for individual neologisms is enough to give any language reformer grey hairs, and it would simply have been unthinkable for Dryden some seventy years later.

Indeed, a principal difference between Shakespeare and Dryden's versions of the Antony and Cleopatra story is that the latter consistently turns the problem of identity into a problem of language. In *All for Love,* much is at stake when a particular word is applied to a particular person. When Alexas suggests that Cleopatra's heart is not "wholly alter'd," Antony responds vehemently—not to the idea itself, but to its potential formulation: "No, dare not for thy life, I charge thee dare not, / Pronounce that fatal word" (4. 372-74). Once more the overriding theme of constancy and mutability takes on a distinctly linguistic dimension as Antony acknowledges the power of language to define and thereby determine its human referent. Ventidius voices an even stronger recognition of the same phenomenon when Antony rashly accuses him of treason: "You may kill me; / You have done more already, call'd me Traitor" (1. 383-84). Again and again, Dryden's play returns us to these contrary attitudes towards language, where a belief in the capacity of words to determine their human referents coexists uneasily with a recognition that words simply cannot keep up with people.

In the passages from Shakespeare and Dryden I have cited so far, the problem of language and identity is still fairly straightforward. Antony is no longer the Antony that everyone knew, and this failure to live up to a previously well-defined self engenders existential and linguistic confusion. But in *All for Love* the relationship between naming and being is more complicated than this. As we saw above, an important obstacle to any faithful wedding between words and people is that people have different roles and functions in different contexts. The first complication in Dryden's play is that Antony is torn between two versions of himself—the Roman emperor and the Egyptian lover—and that attempts are made to

establish the correct one. The moment when Ventidius thinks that Antony has been restored to his real self—that is, when he resumes his role as emperor and soldier—must be interpreted in opposite terms by Cleopatra: "I know him well. / Ah, no, I know him not; I knew him once, / But now 'tis past" (2. 26-28).

When Charmian brings word from Antony that "He knew himself so well, / He could deny you nothing, if he saw you" (72-73), Cleopatra's version of Antony appears to be vindicated. But the Egyptian queen actually draws a rigorous distinction between different versions of herself and her lover, suggesting that their words will have very different meanings depending on the roles they assume: "If as a friend you ask my Judgement, go; / If as a Lover, stay" (382-83). When Antony finally decides to leave, Cleopatra sees this choice as an act of self-determination where he assumes a specific identity and discards another: "Go; leave me, Soldier; / (For you're no more a Lover:) leave me dying" (410-11). This exchange also illustrates the irony that surrounds Canfield's view of constancy as an "absolute value" in Dryden's play (Canfield 49); it is not that the characters do not seek to be constant, but that it is difficult to be constant when you are several conflicting things at once. Cleopatra's response to this problem is a primarily linguistic one, since she defines herself and Antony in mutually exclusive terms (friend/lover, soldier/lover) and thus imposes a measure of order upon her experience.

It is useful to bear in mind here that the ideal of constancy is not an idle creation; it is both socially and existentially motivated. First of all, there is considerable personal satisfaction to be derived from the *integer vitae* celebrated by Renaissance poets like Robert Campion. No matter what theories are advanced in favour of the intrinsically fractured self— from neural networks theory to various postmodern vilifications of individual unity or coherence—it still cannot be denied that some sense of personal wholeness and coherence is indispensable for human happiness. What is more, since human beings are social animals who are mutually dependent upon one another, it is also natural for us to appreciate a measure of constancy in people around us, and especially in those that matter most. A truly 'decentred' self of the kind celebrated by postmodernists, with no sense of a stable core, will usually inspire either repulsion or pity in other people (and for good reason). It is in this light that Antony's reunion with his family in Act Three is best understood—as an unusually graphic expression of the dream that all our potentially

conflicting roles and expectations might one day coalesce into a single and exhaustive definition:

> *Ven.* Was ever sight so moving! Emperor!
> *Dolla.* Friend!
> *Octav.* Husband!
> *Both Childr.* Father!
> *Ant.* I am vanquish'd: take me,
> *Octavia;* take me, Children; share me all. *(Embracing them.)*
> (3. 361-63)

The idea is not merely that there will be enough of Antony to go around, but also that there will be no leftovers. Of course, the audience knows that this dream is impossible since Antony has not been defined completely or exhaustively here: he is not just emperor, friend, husband, and father, but also Cleopatra's lover. It is interesting to note in this context that George Wilkins made a valiant attempt in his *Essay towards a Real Character* to cover various universal, "oeconomical" relationships such as consanguinity, master-servant relations, parenthood, and so forth (249-53), but that he never included *lovers* or *mistresses* in his well-ordered system of signs.

Antony's reunion scene is perhaps the most lucid example in Dryden's play of the contrary impulses that arise from a perception of mutability and the desire to control it by means of language. As Cleopatra has predicted, there can be no commerce between the friend, the soldier, and the lover, and hence no unambiguous Antony. That the Egyptian queen should structure her world by means of such rigid linguistic categories is especially noteworthy in comparison with Shakespeare's protagonist. It is, of course, a critical commonplace that much of Dryden's revisionary energy was devoted to cleaning up her act and rendering her morally acceptable to his Restoration audience. But it is still remarkable that the voracious and loquacious fountain of sensuousness described by Shakespeare came to be painted in such different colours on the Restoration stage. While Shakespeare's Cleopatra simply cannot stop talking and so constantly prevents her messengers from delivering their urgent messages, Dryden's Cleopatra sounds more like a sombre member of the Royal Society committee on language when she admonishes Serapion to "be more plain" (5. 75).

If the relationship between "Antony" and its human referent is called into question repeatedly in *All for Love*, the same is also true of "Cleopatra." Other characters seek to define the meaning of her name in the hope of either controlling its connotations or disconnecting it from them. In Act Four, the strategically talented Ventidius even manages to perform both actions in the course of a single statement:

> *Ant.* My Cleopatra?
> *Ven.* Your *Cleopatra,*
> *Dollabella's Cleopatra:*
> Every Man's *Cleopatra.*
> (4. 295-98)

This is not bad, as mixed messages go. One the one hand, Ventidius wants to convince Antony that it was indeed Cleopatra who was seen flirting with Dollabella, and so he narrows down the semantic contents of "Cleopatra" to a sign with an unambiguous referent. The word becomes nothing more than the formal designation of a particular human being, quite apart from the desires or perceptions of other people (or her relationship to them). On the other hand, the notion of a Cleopatra who is the same for all men clearly constitutes a sexual innuendo, an indictment of the Egyptian queen as a common strumpet who is universally available. In this way, Ventidius both restricts the associations surrounding her name—excluding, for example, the amorous bond that Antony invokes with his possessive pronoun—and then channels them in a very specific direction. In his view, there can be little doubt about what sort of person the name "Cleopatra" refers to.

At this point it can be useful to take a step back and consider the deeper linguistic mechanisms that are at work in Dryden's play. As John Searle points out, it has often been assumed by philosophers that proper names are special cases because they do not have *senses* in the Fregean sense of the word: that is, they are empty marks that only refer to individual objects without telling us anything about them or presenting them in a particular way. The most obvious problem with this common-sense dissociation of reference and description is that it leads to a metaphysical distinction between objects and their properties (as if we could somehow separate an empty, ethereal husk called "John Dryden" from all the characteristics and properties we associate with this person: that he was a

man, that he had arms and legs, that he lived in the seventeenth century, and so forth). On the other hand, Searle also notes that the inverse attempt to turn proper names into a kind of condensed, shorthand descriptions fares equally badly since any change in the object that is described would have strange consequences. As he puts it, "the meaning of the name (and perhaps the identity of the object) would change every time there was any change at all in the object, the name would have different meanings for different people, etc." (Searle 166).

According to Searle, the solution to this crux lies in a somewhat messy compromise where proper names, in order to be used successfully, must satisfy a sufficient but unspecified number of descriptions of their objects. But this imprecision is very far from a weakness or flaw:

> ...the uniqueness and immense pragmatic convenience of proper names in our language lies precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to an agreement as to which descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the identity of the object. They function not as descriptions, but as pegs on which to hang descriptions. Thus the looseness of the criteria for proper names is a necessary condition for isolating the referring function from the describing function of language.
>
> (Searle 172)

What Dryden's play demonstrates is that such a functional imprecision works both ways, since the freedom from the need to define can just as well be the freedom to define reductively. In their use of proper names, the characters in Dryden's play seek to *fuse* the 'describing function' and the 'referring function' of language and so establish an unambiguous and exhaustive relationship between the proper name and the properties of its referent. In this way, proper names are used not only to refer to other people but also to define them aggressively and reductively by *calling names*. Once this has been achieved, the next strategic step is to sever the reference to a particular person and allow the proper name to take on a generic function. It now refers to all persons with similar properties in a perfectly reductive wedding between proper names and people.

Further on in Act Four, Antony's wife Octavia employs a similar tactic when she confronts her husband:

> Wherein have I offended you, my Lord,
> That I am bid to leave you? Am I false,
> Or infamous? Am I a *Cleopatra?*
> (4. 394-96)

Once more we witness how a character moves with lightning speed from a reductive definition of the particular to a generalised assertion. The conceptual leap that underlies Octavia's sarcasm can be fleshed out as follows: she first defines the nature of the referent sharply so that "Cleopatra" comes to stand for nothing else than a false and infamous woman. Once the exact relationship between the sign and its human referent has been stabilised in this way, the sign can be broadened into a generic term for all false women. It is interesting to note that Antony immediately picks up on this strategy and uses it to question the integrity of his own general: "Are you my Friend, *Ventidius?* / Or are you turned a *Dollabella* too, / And let this fury loose?" (410-12).

A final and slightly different example of identity fixation by means of reductive exclusion occurs when Antony greets his wife upon her arrival in Egypt:

> *Octav.* Thus long have I attended for my welcome;
> Which, as a stranger, sure I might expect.
> Who am I?
>   *Ant.* Caesar's sister.
>   *Octav.*   That's unkind!
> (3. 253-55)

In the other examples above, the referent of a proper name is first nailed down with clinical (and somewhat callous) precision, at which point the name is free to take on an almost emblematic capacity to account for similar objects. In this specific case, Antony attempts to dissociate himself from his marital union with Octavia by generating a false dichotomy on the basis of a partial truth: if she is Caesar's sister, then she is not Antony's wife. Once more the manifold roles and functions people play—as lovers, friends, husbands and wives, soldiers, and so forth—are opposed to each other in the attempt to define and determine another person.

So far, we have considered the relationship between language fixation and identity on two levels of complexity. The first was fairly straightforward and concerned the incapacity of language to keep up with the mutable self it claims to represent: when Antony no longer has the characteristics traditionally associated with him, the question arises whether he is still "Antony" in any meaningful sense. The response to this problem is equally simple, since one can either realign the present self with its former nature or redefine the name in accordance with the changing referent. The second and more complex phenomenon occurs when an opposition arises in the present tense between different social roles and conceptions of personal identity. Cleopatra cannot be Antony's friend and lover at the same time, and Antony finds it impossible to reconcile his different roles as emperor, father, husband, and lover. The solution to this problem lies in acts of linguistic exclusion by which the characters define themselves and other people in a manifestly reductive ways. In this way, they seek not only to order their own experience but also to define and thereby control other people. I want to end my discussion of Dryden's play by considering a phenomenon that is even more complex: the perception that even a single term like "friend" or "lover" proves too imprecise and undependable to generate stability by means of language.

There is no room here for a more extended discussion of the subtle and complex ways in which specific words like *Roman, lover, mistress, Emperor,* and *Queen* are employed by Dryden's characters as means of "fixing" other people. But one word that becomes sufficiently important towards the end of the play to warrant special attention is "friend." When Cleopatra regards the roles of lover and friend as incommensurable in Act Two—"If as a friend you ask my Judgement, go; If as a Lover, stay"—we can surmise that her sharp distinction is predicated on something like the following assumption: the foremost quality of a *friend* is concern for the other person's well-being, while a passionate *lover* tends to be more egotistic because he or she cannot stand back from the personal desire for closeness and proximity. Unlike the friend, the lover simply cannot *let go.*

The whole point of Cleopatra's opposition is, of course, that these identities or relationships are relatively well defined so that they can be contrasted clearly with one another. That this is not always the case in Dryden's play is evidenced by Antony's reaction to Dollabella's arrival, which draws heavily on Plato's discourse of love in the *Symposium:*

Ant. 'Tis he himself, by holy Friendship!
[*Runs to embrace him.*
Art thou return'd at last, my better half?
Come, give me all my self.
(3. 118-20)

Some seventy years earlier, when Shakespeare was still active as a dramatist, the lexical distinction between lover and friend also appears to have been more fluid than it is in Dryden's play. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus argues that he has killed his "best lover for the good of Rome" (3. 2. 45), and Ulysses departs from Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida* with the following words: "Farewell, my lord: I as your lover speak" (3. 3. 213). In yet another Shakespearean play, Menenius describes his own quasi-paternal friendship with the young Coriolanus in the following terms: "I tell you, fellow, / Thy general is my lover" (5. 2. 13-14). In *All for Love*, by contrast, the words "lover" and "friend" are not easily confused, lexically speaking, even though their referents share important characteristics. Antony appears to love his friend Dollabella with the same fervour that is typically associated with romantic attachments, but they are definitely 'friends' and not 'lovers.'

Though the question is an interesting one, this is not the place to investigate how representative Dryden's and Shakespeare's word usage may be of larger historical developments in seventeenth-century English. It does, however, seems clear that the definition of 'friend' and 'lover' developed over time in a direction that Dryden would have appreciated; that is, towards increasing precision and stability. As we all know, the modern English word "lover" has been purged of its early modern vagueness and is now usually reserved for sexual relationships: 'if we can't be lovers, then we can at least be friends.' The problem with the word "friend" in Dryden's play is rather its problematic relationship to the reality it purports to describe. Indeed, the fate of this word in *All for Love* reads like a miniature portrait of the mechanisms of language change, by which the meanings of words are twisted, redefined, and—in Dryden's view—*corrupted* through eclectic and improper usage.

We have seen that at the beginning of *All for Love*, friendship is a fairly unambiguous affair that involves affection and a desire to promote the happiness of another person. But when Antony grows convinced Dollabella has double-crossed him, Dryden once more lets his hero conflate uncertainties about identity with qualms about language: "See,

where he comes ... / Who has prophan'd the Sacred Name of Friend, / And worn it into vileness!" (4. 440-42). Dollabella's supposed betrayal has generated a crisis of language where a word that was once pregnant with meaning has now been worn down and emptied of its content. The problem is not simply that Dolabella has ceased to be a "friend," but that the word itself has become contaminated. This idea is similar to the opening line of the play, where we saw that "portents" and "prodigies" lost their name because they became too frequent. In the dedicatory letter to the Earl of Sunderland, cited earlier in this text, Dryden also shows acute awareness of how the repetition of words can produce an inflation that renders professions of friendship or fondness suspect. After praising the Earl for his no-nonsense attitude, Dryden suddenly interrupts himself:

> But the eminence of your condition...is my unhappiness: for it renders whatever I would say suspected. Professions of Service, submissions, and attendance, are the practise of all men to the great: and commonly they who have the least sincerity, perform them best...
>
> (220)

As a result, Dryden's manifest attempt to be "plain" in his praise of the Earl proves impossible. Since other tongues have 'worn' the name of friend or admirer 'into vileness,' he can only profess sincerity but never hope for a direct correspondence between the tongue and the heart. This recognition has nothing to do with the determinacy or indeterminacy of language: on the contrary, it once more demonstrates the fundamental weakness of all language philosophies that treat language only as a system of signs, forgetting that it is also an intentional phenomenon involving rule-governed speech acts.

Since the names of 'friend' and 'mistress' have now been debased through improper usage, Antony is suddenly at a loss for words. He turns to Dolabella and Cleopatra and stutters,

> Two, two such,
> Oh there's no farther name, two such---------to me,
> To me, who lock'd my Soul within your breasts...
> (4. 480-82)

This is obviously an impossible situation, and when Antony resorts once again to the familiar words—"a Friend and Mistress was what the World could give" (496-97)—it seems clear that they no longer have the same meaning for him. This impression is given further reinforcement when Dollabella—who enters with the singularly ironic and unfortunate greeting "O, my friend!" (447)—seeks to acquit himself of the unfair accusation by distinguishing clearly between the roles of 'friend' and 'lover.' His profession to love Cleopatra "[n]o more than Friendship will allow" is immediately cut down to size by Antony: "No more? / Friendship allows thee nothing: thou art perjured" (496-97). Not surprisingly, Dolabella and Cleopatra find it difficult to vindicate the words that have been called into question— "Forgive your mistress…Forgive your friend" (523-24)—since Antony thinks he "can forgive / A Foe; but not a Mistress, and a Friend" (543-44).

In this way, Dryden once more turns a disillusionment with *people* into a disillusionment with *language*. This is a fitting response from a dramatist who was keenly aware that language must change because reality changes, but who nevertheless shared the contemporary dream of counteracting this process of corruption by means of deliberate human effort. As a result, the characters in *All for Love* give voice to two contrary but intimately connected attitudes to words and people. Since they employ language deliberately as a means of determinining and thereby defining other people, the failure to control their surroundings in this way quite naturally generates a disenchantment with language as much as with its human referent.

But is there no way out of this linguistic quandary? In fact, the ending of *All for Love* does open an escape hatch from the conflicting self-definitions and distorting linguistic attributions that flesh is heir to, but it is patently *not* the kind of solution that one could turn into a programme for language reform. When Ventidius—who spent the entire first act seeking to convince Antony that he was still Emperor—is about to take his own life, he suddenly addresses his superior in unfamiliar ways:

> Now, Farewel, Emperor. *(Embrace.)*
> Methinks that word's too cold to be my last;
> Since Death sweeps all distinctions, Farewel, Friend.
> That's all…
> (5. 321-23)

Significantly, Cleopatra makes a very similar volte-face as she prepares to die. In her bitter and scornful exchange with Octavia earlier in the play, she accused the latter of bearing "the specious Title of a Wife, / To guild your Cause" while she herself was doomed to "bear the branded Name of Mistress" (3. 399-400, 404). But now that her life is drawing to an end, Cleopatra is finally prepared to define herself in a manner that corresponds more fully with her experience:

> I have not lov'd a *Roman* not to know
> What should become his Wife; his Wife, my *Charmion;*
> For 'tis to that high Title I aspire,
> And now I'll not die less. Let dull *Octavia*
> Survive, to mourn him dead; my Nobler Fate
> Shall knit our Spousals with a tie too strong
> For *Roman* laws to break.
> (5. 412-18)

This is the specifically linguistic nature of Dryden's *Liebestod:* since death 'sweeps all distinctions' it also promises to end all ambiguities and conflicting definitions of who we really are. Death carries with it the right to self-determination, conceived more specifically as a capacity for self-definition where words can finally do justice to one's own reality and experience. Those who are left alive must live out their days in the shadow of the Tower of Babel, constantly struggling to overcome the painful breach between words and things, words and people.

Uppsala University

References

Barber, Charles. *Early Modern English*. 1976. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

Canfield, J. Douglas. "The Jewel of Great Price: Mutability and Constancy in Dryden's *All for Love*." *ELH* 42 (1975): 38-61.

Carroll, Joseph. *Evolution and Literary Theory*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995.

Dryden, John. *All for Love, or the World Well Lost. The Works*, vol. 13. Ed. Maximillian E. Novak. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

-----. "An Essay of Dramatick Poesie." *The Works*, vol. 7. Ed. Samuel Holt Monk. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

-----. *Troilus and Cressida. The Works*, vol. 13. Ed. Maximillian E. Novak. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Eliot, T. S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1947.

Ellis, John M. *Against Deconstruction*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Fisher, Alan S. "Necessity and the Winter: The Tragedy of *All for Love*." *PQ* 56 (1977): 183-203.

Harth, Philip. *Contexts of Dryden's Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Howatt, A. P. R. *A History of English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Hughes, Derek W. "The Significance of *All for Love*." *ELH* 37 (1970): 540-63.

King, Robert L. "*Res et Verba:* The Reform of Language in Dryden's *All for Love*." *ELH* 54 (1987): 45-61.

Searle. John R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Shakespeare, William. *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998.

Stillman, Robert E. *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth Century England*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995.

Swift, Jonathan. "A Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue." *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, vol. 4. Ed. Herbert Davies and Louis Landa. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957. 1-22.

-----. *Gulliver's Travels*. 1726. Ed. Albert J. Rivero. New York: Norton, 2002.

Tallis, Raymond. *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory.* London: Macmillan, 1988.

Vance, John A. "Antony Bound: Fragmentation and Insecurity in *All for Love.*" *SEL* 26 (1986): 421-38.

Vickers, Brian. *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels.* Hew Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Wilkins, George. *An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language.* London, 1668. Rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1968.

Zwicker, Steven N. "Dryden and the Dissolution of Things: The Decay of Structures in Dryden's Later Writings." *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays.* Ed. Paul Hammond and David Hopkins. Oxford: Clarendon, 2001. 308-29.