Challenging Change

Challenging Change:
Literary and Linguistic Responses

Edited by

Vesna Lopičić and Biljana Mišić Ilić

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Challenging Change: Literary and Linguistic Responses,
Edited by Vesna Lopičić and Biljana Mišić Ilić

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-3900-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3900-6

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: CHANGE AND ITS CHALLENGES

VESNA LOPIČIĆ, BILJANA MIŠIĆ ILIĆ

In his introduction to the book *Intervention Architecture: Building for Change* published in 2007, Homi Bhabha stresses the omnipresent need to change:

> "We live in the midst of difficult transitions in custom and belief, and complicated translations of value and identity. *Transition* and *translation* are complex states of being that constitute the culture of everyday life in a global world. In a state of transition – or translation – you are caught *ambivalently* between identifying with an *establishing community* of 'origins' and 'traditions', while, *at the same time*, relating to an *empowering community* of revisionary values. 'Establishing' and 'Empowering' are only approximate, unfixed, terms of personal and social reference. I have named them thus, in order to reflect the commonly held view that, for instance, 'tradition' imparts a sense of the continuity of identity, while 'empowerment' is an invitation to experiment with newer self-identifications and emergent experimental beliefs and collective values. This dynamic is as true of diasporic condition as it is of the transformations in the indigenous lives of those who stay at home" (Bhabha 2007, 9).

It would be difficult to find another excerpt where so many terms relevant for the concept of change co-exist: transitions, custom, belief, translations, value, identity, culture, origins, traditions, revision, establishing, empowering, continuity, dynamic, diaspora, transformations. It would be even more difficult to differentiate between social change driven by a variety of factors and individual change seen as personal development in a variety of manifestations, since the two aspects of change largely overlap. Where these two sets of values, social and individual, public and private, experientially and experimentally intersect most transparently, literature is created giving language its most authentic and original form. Ezra Pound phrased it beautifully when he said in his *ABC of Reading* that literature is language charged with meaning. The concept of meaning is a challenge of its own to which many have responded with wisdom and advice. Stepping out of the world of language and literature, one comes across similar

insights into the meaning of life. Suffice it to mention a famous theoretical physicist and populariser of science, Michio Kaku, who claims following Freud that beyond work and love, what gives meaning to our life is, first, to fulfil whatever talents we are born with, and second, "we should try to leave the world a better place than when we entered it. As individuals, we can make a difference, whether it is to probe the secrets of Nature, to clean up the environment and work for peace and social justice, or to nurture the inquisitive, vibrant spirit of the young by being a mentor and a guide" (Kaku 2005, 358).

Going back to the world of words, Pound rounds off his metaphor saying that great literature is simply charged with meaning to the utmost degree. If there is any room to develop this idea, then one may suggest that the greatest literature is the one that induces change, changing the community through the agency of the changing individual. Change in this sense equals meaning. To quote John Steinbeck from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature." Perfectibility naturally implies the ability to change and the purpose of literature is to offer alternative models of existence for the individual stuck in an impasse that manifests itself as lack of options.

The contradictory nature of modern society seemingly opens the door to opportunity, allowing the individual free choice and conditions for improvement, but showing all signs of maladjustment, alienation and unhappiness. The optimistic attitude of Michio Kaku that we can make a difference in our small part of the world is worth considering. He is a person who received guidance and help as a child to reach the pinnacles of science which proves his belief that one can cause change in different ways. The co-founders of Challenge Day hold the same ideal dear to their hearts: "To inspire people to be the change they wish to see in the world, starting with ourselves, through compassion and service using the formula for change – notice, choose, and act." Their vision is that every child lives in a world where they feel safe, loved and celebrated. Using the slogan 'Be the change' they have been empowering the young in schools since 1987 to deal with their personal, family and communal problems through interaction with their peers. In a short leap this takes us to theoreticians like Homi Bhabha and the idea of an *empowering community* of revisionary values which is not closed to tradition but is at the same time wide open to 'empowerment' as an invitation to experiment with newer self-identifications. Change has its challenges and these are some of the ways our time responds to them.

The collection of papers *Challenging Change: Literary and Linguistic Responses* aims at illustrating different changes the authors found significant primarily in the spheres of literary and linguistic studies. The volume opens with the provocatively-titled essay "Why Making Love Isn't What It Used To Be" in which Fraser Sutherland examines the phenomenon of semantic change by revisiting the work of Anthony Trollope and some other Victorian men of letters. Reading literature, he follows the semantic drift through which a word or a phrase slowly and subtly evolves from one sense to another. The examples chosen are amusing and instructive, and especially the one about the phrase from the title is worth quoting fully:

> The curious thing about *make love* is that in English the phrase early on both referred to wooing and to sexual intercourse. The 2009 online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the initial date of 1567, the citation taken from *Certaine Tragicall Discourses of Bandello*, translated from the French by Geoffrey Fenton: "The attire of a Cortisan, or woman makynge loue." Yet euphemistic usage was firmly entrenched by the early seventeenth century, and remained so into the early twentieth. As early as 1927, the language commentator Michael Quinion notes, the *OED* defined *make love* as "To engage in sexual intercourse, esp. considered as an act of love." Quinion observes, "By the 1940s, it was common to find it in novels in the sense we now know it. It's in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of 1949, for example: "When you make love you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything.'"

Similar semantic shift characterises many other language segments so Sutherland points out that the history of a word does not occur in isolation. The processes of semantic change occur within language, while language itself exists within a social and cultural context, meaning that language changes indicate the change of social climate and values.

The next two articles of this volume challenge the notion of gender dynamics examining it in the genres of the novel and the play coming from different cultures and different periods but having in common the narrative strategies related to gender representations. Vladislava Gordić Petković reads a novel by Serbian writer Mirjana Novaković, *Fear and its Servant* in full awareness that the rise of gender studies brought a substantial change to the treatment of male and female characters reflecting the changing priorities of the literature and its altered role in a changing world. She claims that contemporary Serbian fiction has established itself as a hybrid of three narrative strategies: postmodern textual play, the rewriting of history, and obsessive confession, to which the novel in question bears testimony, dealing with a fascinating account of the hunt for vampires in the 18th century Belgrade. Through the

interplay of two narratives, his-story and her-story, Mirjana Novaković subverts the gender roles. The "he" who tells his story is the Devil himself, the false count Otto von Hausburg, whereas "herstory" comes from Maria Augusta, Princess of Thurn und Taxis, wife to the regent of Serbia. The paper "Gender as the Force of Character Change: When the Princess Met the Devil in Disguise" questions the ontology of fictional characters and also shows that "the seemingly frail and fragile Princess is a shrewd observer and a skillful conspirator who uses the paradigm of feminine traits as a disguise for her political concerns while the Devil in disguise is exposed in his inability to solve the mystery on which his life largely depends." Vladislava Gordić Petković concludes that this Gothic novel exposes political manipulation and struggle for power through unexpected gender representations.

The article "Transmutations of Gender in Tennessee Williams' Plays" centres on the analysis of transgressive gendering of characters, where they are rendered wanting in prototypical cultural assumptions and stereotypes. Aleksandra Žeželj shows that in Williams' hovering distribution of gender, men and women alike are heroic and anti-heroic, virile and effeminate, subverting conventional dominance-subordination relations. Williams deconstructs the system of binary oppositions and forever alters and reconfigures the American 20th-century drama scene by transforming gender roles where patriarchal normativities change into more complex asymmetrical interdependencies. Žeželj contends that the deconstruction is portrayed through the characters' inability to come to terms with their sexuality which is often rendered through the images of mutilation, dismemberment, fragmentation, dislocation, and even devouring.

These two articles prove the prominence of gender oriented criticism characteristic of the second half of 20th century, erasing clear boundaries between masculinity and femininity, and proving gender a cultural construct. The four texts that follow them have in common a concept of the Other marking the last few decades of critical thought. Beginning with Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807) and especially with Edward Said, (*Orientalism*, 1978), the Other emerges as an inevitable ingredient of critical discourse, from gender studies to analyses of imperialism and post-colonialism. Especially in Diaspora studies does the Other assume the central place, as shown in the papers "Inglan is a bitch – Voices of the Silenced in Linton Kwesi Johnson's Poetry," "From Great Expectations to Harsh Reality: Immigrant Experience in Himani Bannerji's *On A Cold Day"* and "The Bitterness of the Promised Land: Cultural Changes as Seen by Milosavljević." Faruk Bajraktarević points out that diverse 'imported' forms of artistic expression have played a crucial role in voicing the

presence of the Other in the UK, highlighting the necessity of redefining the idea of Britishness by opening up new spaces for the inclusion of 'peripheral' constituents. Milena Kostić focuses on the position of women in the contemporary Canadian society, showing how Bannerji's story exposes multiple forms of oppression and silencing on the grounds of class, race, and gender. Vesna Lopičić suggests that the immigrant author's own ambivalence concerning his new homeland is shared by many who have to negotiate the relationship between two cultures from the position of the Other. Whether a Jamaican Creole in London, an Indian in Toronto, or a Serbian in Canada, they all have to negotiate the difference, visible or not, developing different forms of cultural hybridity and thus fighting against racial/ethnic marginalization. Managing diversity proves to be the problem not only of the immigrant Other but also of the host culture, officially embracing multiculturalism. In the case of Canada that becomes even more complex since the Acadians (French-speaking Canadians from the Maritime Provinces, east of Quebec) have for centuries been faced with the cultural crisis of being linguistically and economically dominated by the English-speaking majority, thus becoming the symbolic Other in their own country. Christina Keppie in her paper "Tradition or Empowerment? The Battle of the Acadian Capital(s)" shows the desire of the Acadians to remain culturally distinct by maintaining their traditional values and ways of living which is juxtaposed by their concurrent desire to grow alongside globalization as a modern and urban community.

David Almond's young adult novel *Clay*, Conrad's seminal work *Lord Jim*, and Ronan Bennett's historical novel *Havoc, in Its Third Year*, are the three novels explored by Danijela Petković, Nataša Tučev, and Lejla Mulalić respectively. The theme of change is identified and pursued in different ways in their illuminating articles. The first one, "The Metamorphosis of an Altar Boy, the Genesis of a Monster: David Almond's *Clay*," questions the romanticized/Romantic views of children, artists, outcasts and Promethean overreachers exposing them as problematic, while following the genesis of a monster in this magical realist adaptation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The second one explores what it means to be the 'keeper' of a guilty man, discussing Marlow's psychological motivation for such commitment and the way he manages to interact with Jim without losing his moral compass. At the same time, the author demonstrates that Marlow's behaviour in this respect represents a positive change when compared to the dominant cultural attitudes. The third article discusses the ways in which Bennett represents the otherness of the past, set in a time of severe Puritan oppression and anti-Catholic hysteria in 17th century England. The focus is on the author's use of the language of corporeality, sexuality,

madness and poverty in representing marginalized groups within an utterly unstable and insecure moment of political change in England.

The next segment explores the world of modern Romanian, Bosnian, and Moldavian poetry within the discourse of change, as seen by Alina Ţenescu, Tatjana Bijelić and Mihaela Albu. As indicated by the title, "Space, Body and Change in the Architecture of Postmodern Poetry," the body is related to the architecture of place and space so that postmodern poetry relies on the changes of spatial relations and conceptual metaphors related to the body. Alina Ţenescu analyses Elena Vlădăreanu's collection *Private Space* organizing conceptualizations of the body into several categories of cognitive metaphors related to the body, using a model inspired by the research of Lakoff and Johnson. Putting moral responsibility at the forefront of the contemporary agenda as stressed by the title "'It's a shame to be without an attitude': a view on cutting-edge poetry from Bosnia", Tatjana Bijelić illustrates recent changes in the way certain poets converse with and challenge patriarchal values and status quo. The four poets in question respond to the 1990s war proving that the new voices are socially aware, disruptive and keen on voicing the Other at the same time producing freshness and new directions in the literature and culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also cutting-edge Moldavian polemic poetry is discussed in the essay "The *2000 Generation* of Moldavian (Bessarabian) Poets and their New Discourse." Mihaela Albu contends that their hybrid poems adopt the "fracturist" style and break the limits looking for the identity of the subject and for an active, participative receptor, reinventing a literary ideology of authenticity. The specific characteristic of the *2000 Generation* poetry is the denying of the conventional textualism of the '80s postmodern generation, the predilection of an aggressive position towards the common language, and also of the colloquial-argotic speech (frequently pornographic).

These are some of the approaches through which poetry, and literature in general, engages in a dialogue with the community via an active reader who becomes the object and the agent of change. The language as an instrument for articulating alternative models of existence often imperceptibly permeates the pores of the emerging system of values.

The second section of this volume, *Linguistic responses*, contains ten articles which deal with the notion of change and variation in language taken both as the formal system and the usage system. The authors trace diachronic changes and examine historical, sociolinguistic, discourse, syntactic and lexical variations, mostly in the English language, but also

cross-linguistically, as well as compared and contrasted with some other languages, such as Serbian and Romanian.

Since language does not exist *per se*, despite sometimes being studied only as the abstract system, most authors recognize the significance of social factors and culture which serve both as the background and facilitators for the development and spreading of changes and variations of various features of a language, aspects of its use, and the attitudes towards not only language varieties but also to the study of language in general. Exploring changes in language, the authors deal both with internal and external sources of these changes, and address the issues such as the complexity of the language system as well as the social and cultural context of language communication, conventionalization of changes in the language use at the lexical level, contacts with other languages and cultures, and social differentiation.

In linguistics, traditionally, examining language change primarily refers to the study of diachronic changes of certain language categories and features, viewed either as purely linguistic phenomena or as induced by socio-historical factors. The first four papers in the linguistic section primarily adopt this historical approach.

In the opening article "On change in the concept of time: future tense and language contact" Junichi Toyota examines the phenomenon of the absence of a specific future tense in a number of world languages. This does not, however, mean that speakers do not understand the concept of future. They indeed understand it, but they simply do not have a means to express this specific concept of time. Toyota argues that the emergence of the future tense is related to various socio-historical factors, such as an idea of afterlife/reincarnation, i.e. those cultures without reincarnation fear death due to uncertainty after death and fear and uncertainty can be considered necessary elements in creating a specific future tense. This may explain the distribution of overtly-marked future tense in different languages. However, what is interesting is that in contact-induced changes, the future tense is often copied. This fact also reinforces the idea that human beings can comprehend the concept of future, but due to socio-historical factors, this tense may not be necessarily overtly expressed. There is a wide diversity of future tense forms in different languages, but the concept of the future tense seems to have always been present in our conceptualisation of time. Thus, something in grammar has changed, but the underlying concept may remain as it has been.

Vladan Pavlović, on the other hand, adopts a strictly linguistic viewpoint to analyze two pseudo-passive constructions in English from the perspective of diachronic change, exemplified in a) *The vase is broken*, *That is*

forgotten, (cf. *(*Everyone*) *forgets that* / (*Everyone*) *has forgotten that*), and b) *He is come to town, He is gone to London*, *I'm finished with boxing* (cf. *(*Somebody*) *comes him to town* / *He has come to town*). The author notices various synchronic similarities and differences between these two constructions in English, on the one hand, and comparable constructions in German – the construction *sein/werden* + *Partizip Perfekt* (eg. *Das ist vergessen* / *Das wurde vergessen*) and the construction *sein/haben* + *Partizip Perfekt* (eg. *Er ist in die Stadt gekommen* / *Ich habe das nicht gesehen*), respectively, on the other hand. The synchronic similarities and differences within each of the pairs of constructions are, in turn, explored from the diachronic point of view in greater detail.

In the article "Arising adverbs" Pernilla Hallonsten examines a complex category of adverbs, which are often considered too diverse to group together as one coherent category, in spite of numerous attempts to retain this traditional division. The author examines them against the background of their different developmental paths and notices that cross-linguistically adverbs can be observed to arise in remarkably different ways. Studying these changes over time, Hallonsten claims that at least a partial explanation can be given regarding the ambiguous character of this lexical category.

Finally, the paper by Ana Halas "The Change in the Form of the Present Perfect in Middle English" investigates the development of the present perfect in ME and its change into the present-day form. Perfect-like structures have their roots in OE as complex structures consisting of an auxiliary verb which was either *wesan/bēon* (to be) or *habban* (have) and a past participle form. It is presupposed that it was in the ME period when the early traces of the future loss of the verb *wesan/bēon* as the auxiliary of the present perfect can be noticed. The author examined the corpus consisting of two collections of letters (the Paston and the Stonor families) and revealed general characteristics of the language change in question. Furthermore, since the two families occupy different positions in the social hierarchy, the comparison of the two collections regarding the form of the present perfect provided an insight into the influence of social class as a factor in the change of the present perfect structures.

Another way of exploring language change is to examine variations and changes manifested in various types of discourses, focusing on the complexity of social, historical and cultural contexts where language communication takes place, and this is the approach of the next three articles in the linguistic section. In the article "Inaugural Speeches from George Washington to Barack Obama: a Change Caught in Action – From a Speech to a Convention" Aleksandar Kavgić presents a linguistic analysis of US presidents' inaugural addresses from a sociohistorical and syntactic

perspective. Using the methodology of corpus linguistics (annotating verb phrases with tense and time-reference tags, together with a set of sub-tags for aspect, voice, mood and modality), Kavgić performed a statistical analysis of the corpus focusing on the frequency of particular verb constructions and time-references in each of the analyzed speeches. Statistical data revealed that inaugural speeches have undergone a diachronic sociolinguistic change, since they have transformed from relatively spontaneous political speeches into a highly rigid, conventionalized form of addressing the US public.

Jovana Dimitrijević Savić in her paper "Tracking Language Variation across the Teens: Some Sociolinguistic Aspects of Slang in Serbia" examines the social distribution of certain slang items in the creation and display of youth identity. Unlike most of the research on youth slang in Serbia, which has been restricted to the lexicographic documentation, semantic classification, and etymological description of slang terms, in this study teenage slang is approached from a variationist point of view. Starting from the assumption that youth language, and especially youth slang as its integral part, is a prime source of information about linguistic change, the author presents a corpus-based quantitative analysis of patterns of age- and gender-based variations, concluding that youth slang plays a significant role not only in language change but also in creating social and interactional youth identities.

Madalina Cerban in the article "Lexical Changes in Romanian political discourse after 1989" analyzes borrowings and calques from English, paying special attention to the semantic changes they undergo when used in the Romanian language as well as pointing out the difficulties of translating, rephrasing or writing them. After explaining the linguistic and non-linguistic causes that have led to this phenomenon and classifying the lexical items formally, including an important class of lexical figures of speech represented by metonymies, clichés and lexicalized metaphors, Cerban discusses the changes in meaning of these new terms. To a large extent the meanings are extended, being used with both their original meanings, as well as with new meanings in a particular Romanian context, but there are also some items that have lost some of their original meanings and are used restrictively in Romanian.

The final three papers depart from the dominant historical or sociolinguistic discourse approaches to language change and focus on changes and variations in language structure and language system in the domains of syntax and the lexicon. In the paper "Word Order (Seemingly) out of Order" Biljana Mišić Ilić deals with word order changes, which have always been an interesting and diverse area of study, both diachronically and

synchronically, and views them as the variations in sentence word order, more specifically, as non-canonical word order constructions in particular languages. After a brief overview of several approaches to the study of word order variations, the paper illustrates a combination of a syntactic and pragmatic approach, which is primarily based on the notion of information structure but takes into consideration other discourse aspects as well. This approach is illustrated by analyzing several non-canonical preposing constructions in English declarative sentences. Mišić Ilić argues that word order variations are not simply a matter of stylistic idiosyncratic choices but an issue that opens many questions relevant for the linguistically significant notions and links between linearity, hierarchy, iconicity, propositional meaning and discourse functions. The author hopes to show that discourse-related approaches offer a promising path for the study of word order variations, both in particular languages and cross-linguistically.

In the theoretical model of cognitive linguistics, the two final articles deal with the semantic changes due to conventionalization processes such as metaphor and metonymy. In the article "Meaning Shifts in Interpreting Visuo-Spatial Bodily Idioms", Dušan Stamenković analyzes various changes in interpretations of idiomatic meaning based on the error analyses of the corpus of student translations of English idioms into Serbian. Although there was a high level of understanding, the noted misinterpretations and altered meanings are extremely valuable clues, because they can reveal the steps in the understanding, including various visuo-spatial configurations, common beliefs linked to body parts, metonymy, pronoun usage, and the like. The author believes that in turn, all this might reveal some facets of the conceptualization of visuo-spatial metaphorical expressions, regardless of the language they originate from. Stefania Alina Cherata starts from a well-established fact in linguistic theory that words designating concrete entities are often used figuratively to convey more abstract meanings and explores metonymy as a source of linguistic change in the formation of English colour terms. Cherata provides a classification of the contiguity relations at work in metonymic colour naming on the basis of an etymological analysis, for instance from the names of animals, plants, dyes, textiles or precious stones. The etymological discussion is complemented by the use of cognitive frames to shed light on the cultural nature of many of the associations leading to the formation of colour metonyms, thus emphasising, as many times in this volume of papers, the interplay of culture and change.

In our times of great changes, when the only constant seems to be the change itself, the authors of the articles collected in the volume *Challenging Change: Literary and Linguistic Response* responded to the

challenge and approached the notion of change from the perspectives of literary criticism and linguistics, examining change understood in the broadest sense as the need of the modern man to redefine, revise, deconstruct and reconstruct previous theories, histories, moralities, social relationships, forms of language and language use. Owing to its wide scope, both regarding the covered topics and the theoretical approaches, we hope that the book can be a challenge for the readers as well.

Bibliography

Bhabha, Homi. 2007. "Introduction." *Intervention Architecture: Building for Change*. London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kaku, Michio. 2005. *Parallel Worlds*. New York: Doubleday.

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Steinbeck, John. "Banquet Speech," Nobel Foundation, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck-speech.html

"The Challenge Day Vision & Mission." http://www.challengeday.org/

PART ONE:

CHALLENGING CHANGE – LITERARY RESPONSES

CHAPTER ONE

WHY MAKING LOVE ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

FRASER SUTHERLAND

No one has ever accused the great Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope of being sex-obsessed. Yet consider this sentence. Referring to Mary in his novel *Is He Popinjay?* (1878), he writes, "She was so nice that middle-aged men wished themselves younger that they might make love to her, or older that they might be privileged to kiss her."[1] In *Barchester Towers* (1857), speaking of Mr. Slope, the author comments, "If he had come there with any formed plan at all, his intention was to make love to the lady without uttering any such declaration."[2] In *Doctor Thorne* (1858), Trollope observes, "'But,' would say his enemies, 'children must be controlled.' 'And so must men also,' would say the doctor. "I must not steal your peaches, nor make love to your wife, nor libel your character. Much as I might wish through my natural depravity to indulge in such vices, I am debarred from them without pain, and I may almost say without unhappiness."[3]

A hint of Trollope's true meaning comes in *He Knew He Was Right* (1869): "It is not pleasant to make love in the presence of a third person, even when that love is all fair and above board; but it is quite impracticable to do so to a married lady, when that married lady's sister is present."[4] Trollope here is not writing about troilism, nor about unbridled physical passion. Rather, he is describing the codes and rituals of romantic courtship, and romantic courtship was also what his contemporaries meant. Even a decade after Trollope's death, A.E. Somerville and Martin Ross (1995, 232), could write in *The Real Charlotte* (1894), "Christopher, in lovemaking, as in most things, would pursue methods unknown to her." Trollope and his contemporaries certainly didn't mean that paying amorous attention would entail throwing a leg over some alarmed Victorian maiden.

---

[1] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29828/29828-h/29828-h.htm
[2] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3409/3409-h/3409-h.htm
[3] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3166/3166-h/3166-h.htm
[4] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5140/5140-h/5140-h.htm

The same caveat applies to the root word, *love*, which through the ages has remained polysemic, denoting or connoting the bond between parent and child, sexual interest (*eros*), deep Christian affection (*agape*), or kindness toward all humanity (*caritas*.)

Sometimes these senses overlapped or were fraught with ambiguity. But the derivative *lover* underwent the same fate as *making love.* To be your lover is no longer held to be someone romantically preoccupied or obsessed with you, but to be your sexual partner, not necessarily the same thing, and regardless of whether either of you happen to be married to someone else. Thus, in the novel *The Human Factor* (1978) Graham Greene (1995, 229), who knew about such matters, says, "In a marriage, if the lover begins to be bored by the complaisant husband, he can always provoke a scandal."

In the case of *lover*, as in *making love*, Trollope is again a good starting point. In *Is He Popinjay?* "Mary received notice that her lover was coming."[5] In *Phineas Finn: the Irish Member* (1869), Phineas "had more than once asked himself how he would feel when somebody else came to be really in love with Lady Laura,—for she was by no means a woman to lack lovers,—when some one else should be in love with her, and be received by her as a lover; but this question he had never been able to answer."[6] Mrs. Prime in *Rachel Ray* (1863) remarks, "It may be very pleasant for Rachel to have this young man as her lover, very pleasant while it lasts."[7]

Trollope says in *The Warden* (1855), "Had Bold been judging of another lover and of another lady, he might have understood all this as well as we do; but in matters of love men do not see clearly in their own affairs."[8] A modern reader will perhaps detect a pun here, interpreting *affair* as *love affair,* which the *New Oxford American Dictionary* (2005) defines as "a romantic or sexual relationship between two people, esp. one that is outside marriage."

Examples of the contemporary sense of *make love* are legion. Here is one found on the website www.relationship-buddy.com:

> Foreplay Tips
> 500 Ways to Make Love Better
> Foreplay (noun): sexual stimulation before making love.
> Foreplay tips are important to making love successfully, but making love successfully is vital to a healthy and sustainable relationship.

[5] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29828/29828-h/29828-h.htm
[6] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18000/18000-h/18000-h.htm
[7] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34000/34000-h/34000-h.htm
[8] http://www.gutenberg.org/files/619/619-h/619-h.htm

> Without a passionate sex life with your partner, you have a regular old "friendship" not a romantic union.

We can see that *sex* in the sense of sexual activity has superseded its traditional biological sense of a male or female category into which humans and most living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions. As so often in Trollope, a passage in Kenneth Grahame's classic children's book *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), can jar the modern reader. In the chapter describing Toad's adventures after he escapes a dungeon disguised as a washerwoman, we find this:

> With a quaking heart, but as firm a footstep as he could command, Toad set forth cautiously on what seemed to be a most hare-brained and hazardous undertaking; but he was soon agreeably surprised to find how easy everything was made for him, and a little humbled at the thought that both his popularity, and the sex that seemed to inspire it, were really another's. (Graham 1954, 150–151)

In finding transvestitism or like prurient content in this passage, one might do further violence to Grahame's innocent intentions, and infer that the domestic arrangements of Mole and Rat in the same book imply a gay household. But such speculations are best left to Queer Studies scholars. As it happens, *gay* itself has undergone a radical change in meaning change. To the resentment of many, the centuries-old senses of "carefree" ("Our hearts were young and gay") or "bright and showy" have been replaced by "homosexual."

Students of language call this kind of phenomenon *semantic change*, sometimes *semantic shift* or *semantic drift.* It is not that on a specified day, month, and year a word suddenly changes its meaning, but that it slowly and subtly evolves from one sense to another. Sometimes this gradual process is quite explicable. *Holiday* once meant a day of religious celebration on which no work was done. Over time, the religious aspect shrank, until it was simply a day on which, happily, no work is done. The word then extended itself to acquire more general, figurative, or metaphorical applications ("Smile and give yourself a holiday.") "To make love" begins as a verb phrase denoting romantic courtship, then becomes a polite or euphemistic synonym for the versatile *fuck* that, as well as a verb, can serve as a noun, adjective, adverb, or interjection.

On occasion, a word can travel in the opposite direction, moving from the formal to the explicit, even clinical. This happened to *ejaculate*, to eject semen at the moment of sexual climax, which would prompt guffaws if used in the former sense of "to say something quickly and suddenly."

Etymology also can yield surprises, because a word may have travelled far from its visceral origins. The common verb *to fascinate* comes from the past participle of the Latin verb *fascināre*, a derivative of *fascinum*, witchcraft. We might be less, or perhaps more, inclined to use "fascinate" if we knew that a Roman phallic deity was named *Fascinus*, ubiquitously worn in the shape of a penis as an amulet to ward off evil spells, or displayed as an object of public worship. Folk etymology, the process by which an unfamiliar or foreign word is adapted by popular usage, obscures matters even more: the "pent" in *penthouse* ultimately derives from Latin *appendere*, "hang on," but got mixed up in the sixteenth century with the French *pente,* "slope," and, from Germanic sources, "house." One part of a word can drop away and be replaced by another. *Bridegroom* comes from Old English *bryd-guma*, "bride-man. After *guma*, "man," fell out of use, Middle English substituted *groom*, "boy," later "male servant."

For every word that falls, another rises. Every year, indeed every day, science and technology, war, youth culture, every conceivable social or political trend or movement generates new words. They constantly migrate from narrower to wider spheres, from, for example, Black to standard English, or from the vocabulary of fashions, music, and street life into mainstream speech. Words that are not transparent derivatives are the glamour girls and glitter boys of language, and are much loved by the media, for example, *bling*, ostentatious jewellery or clothing. Most new words have a very short shelf life, and are doomed to extinction, or at least to datedness, or are retained only in a narrow and technical sense rather than moving into the great body of ordinary speech. However, the great majority of ostensibly new words are simply combinations or derivatives of existing words.

The distinction between a new word and a new use of an old word can disappear. An example, at the time of writing, involves *plank.* A plank is a long, flat, narrow, thick piece of lumber often used in building or flooring. Up to now, the primary verb sense of *plank* was to make, provide, or cover with planks, less commonly, to cook or serve meat or fish on a plank. A little-used vulgar sense, said of a male, is to engage in sexual intercourse. *Planking* is planks collectively, such as when used for flooring or as part of a boat. *Planking* has gained a new sense: the attention-seeking practice of lying prone on some untypical horizontal surface, for example, across the top of a postal collection box or, more scarily, on a high, narrow window ledge. So far at least, planking has been a solitary activity. After all, it is physically impossible for two people to parallel park on a narrow extension of a tall building, though it might be feasible for a person to lie on top of another, an even more perilous procedure.

Language scholars and commentators have usefully outlined types of semantic change. As David Crystal (1995, 138) points out, a word may widen its scope: such religious terms as *office, doctrine,* and *novice* took on broader application. Tom McArthur (1992, 913) uses the example of *pigeon,* once meaning a young dove but now any member of the large family Columbidae. *Broadcast* no longer means to sow seeds in a field. A specific capitalized brand name like *Hoover* can become a generic lower-case verb meaning to use a vacuum cleaner. A word may narrow its meaning: *engine* originally meant "mechanical contrivance"; following the Industrial Revolution it usually meant a "mechanical source of power." *Corn* first meant grain, then in British English, "wheat" and, in American English, "maize." McArthur uses the example of *deer,* once meaning any quadruped, but now only a member of the family Cervidae. The negative can become positive: *lean* no longer refers to emaciation but to a healthy thinness. *Knight* was elevated from "boy." The positive can become negative: *lewd* originally meant "of the laity." A *knave* degenerated from "boy" to "servant" to "deceitful or despicable man." *Egregious* originally denoted something that was remarkably good, but now means remarkably bad or flagrant. This is what Andreas Blank (1999, 61–90) calls *auto-antonymy:* the change of a word's sense to that of its antonym, as in the slang sense of *bad* to mean "good."

Such examples fall under Crystal's categories of *extension* or *generalization, narrowing* or *specialization, amelioration,* and *pejoration* or *deterioration.* These categories are far from exhaustive. Andreas Blank and Leonard Bloomfield (1933) have added others. *Metaphor*: change based on similarity. A computer *mouse* is not, except figuratively, a rodent. *Synecdoche*: change based on whole-part relation, as in the use of a national capital to signify a country or its government: "*Washington* expressed sympathy for the hurricane victims. *"Ellipsis*: change based on contiguity of terms: in late Middle English, a *car* was simply a wheeled vehicle. After all, the automobile had not been invented.

Let us return to making love. The curious thing about *make love* is that in English the phrase early on both referred to wooing and to sexual intercourse. The 2009 online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the initial date of 1567, the citation taken from *Certaine Tragicall Discourses of Bandello*, translated from the French by Geoffrey Fenton: "The attire of a Cortisan, or woman makynge loue." Yet euphemistic usage was firmly entrenched by the early seventeenth century, and remained so into the early twentieth. As early as 1927, the language commentator Michael Quinion notes, the *OED* defined *make love* as "To engage in sexual intercourse, esp. considered as an act of love." Quinion observes, "By the 1940s, it was common to find it in novels in the sense we now know it. It's

in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of 1949, for example: When you make love you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything.'"[9]

But euphemistic use continued to have an afterlife. In 1962, the great blues singer Ray Charles recorded his wrenchingly poignant hit, "You Don't Know Me," written in 1956 by the singer and songwriter Eddy Arnold. This is the song's refrain:

> I never knew the art of making love
> Though my heart aches with love for you
> Afraid and shy, I let my chance go by
> The chance that you might love me too[10]

It's interesting that the huge audience Ray Charles enjoyed in the early 1960s likely didn't infer sexual activity from the lyrics he sang, despite the well-known fact that Charles, who sired at least 12 children, certainly knew about the physical act of making love. His use of *making love* reminds us that giving print dates for the appearances of words only roughly approximate usage. A word may well have been used in a new sense in speech before the first cited date, or the old sense may have persisted in speech or song some time after it became seemingly archaic.

As well, we should remember that the history of a word does not occur in isolation. The processes of semantic change occur within language, but language itself exists within a social and cultural context. Within a few decades of Anthony Trollope's death, a vast social and cultural revolution was well advanced. In every sense of the word, relations between men and women decisively changed in the Western world. Women were freed, at least potentially, from the tyranny of their reproductive systems. They began to explore the divide between biologically determined sex and socially determined gender. In education, politics, and employment, they found all manner of doors opening into rooms that had been closed to them. More profoundly, the passive shifted to the active. Women were no longer made love *to*; they made love. In literature and everyday speech, the language of physical love itself moved from the implicit to the explicit. Not only did the use of *fuck* increase, the word often dwindled from taboo use to the merely impolite. At the same time, there remained the ongoing human desire to dignify and honour what might otherwise have been considered the bestial. But, if you want to make love, in language as in life, it helps to know what you are doing.

---

[9] http://www.worldwidewords.org/topicalwords/tw-mak1.htm
[10] www.lyricsdepot.com/ray-charles/you-dont-know-me.html

Bibliography

Blank, Andreas. 1999. Why do new meanings occur? A cognitive typology of the motivations for lexical Semantic change. In *Historical Semantics and Cognition*, eds., Blank, A. and P. Koch, 61–90. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Bloomfield, Leonard. 1933. *Language.* New York: Allen & Unwin.

Crystal, David. 1995. *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language.* Cambridge: CUP.

Grahame, Kenneth. 1954. *The Wind in the Willows,* New York: Scribner's.

Greene, Graham. 1995. *The Human Factor.* Oxford: OUP.

Holder, R.W. 1995. *A Dictionary of Euphemism.* Oxford: OUP.

McArthur, Tom. 1992. *Oxford Companion to the English Language,* Oxford: OUP.

Somerville, A.E. and M. Ross. 1995. *The Real Charlotte.* Oxford: OUP.

Internet references:

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18000/18000-h/18000-h.htm
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34000/34000-h/34000-h.htm
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/619/619-h/619-h.htm
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29828/29828-h/29828-h.htm
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3409/3409-h/3409-h.htm
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3166/3166-h/3166-h.htm
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5140/5140-h/5140-h.htm
http://www.worldwidewords.org/topicalwords/tw-mak1.htm
www.lyricsdepot.com/ray-charles/you-dont-know-me.html