



But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse

By John Lennard

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For three centuries grammarians have argued about the necessity of parentheses. While some consider them subordinate, additional, irrelevant, and even damaging to the clarity of argument, Lennard's history explores how writers such as Marlowe, Swift, Coleridge, Browning, Derek Walcott, and e.e. cummings used them in their work as vehicles for pointing dramatic gesture, controlling tone, adding humor, and intensifying satire, in addition to contributing to the clarity of argument. Lennard offers both a new history of the poetic use of parentheses from their first appearance in England in 1494 to the present day, and detailed case-studies of five major poets who exploited them. He reveals how in each period the patterns of literary use have reflected, and continue to reflect, technological, philosophical, and political developments.

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Review

"Lennard's scholarship is formidable and extensive, his talent for 'close reading' of poetry is duly sensitive, and his argument against the neglect of punctuation in the analysis of verse is convincing."--*Times Literary Supplement*

"[A] fine contribution to our sense for parentheses....Lennard's finely studied analysis is an impressive contribution to the literary scholarship which can enable us to understand this history."--*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*

About the Author

John Lennard is at Trinity Hall, Cambridge.

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