
LA SYLLEPSE

ÉTUDE D'UNE FIGURE DE RHÉTORIQUE DANS L'ŒUVRE DE FRANCIS PONGE

fil.lic. Andreas Romeborn
Institutionen för språk och litteraturer

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ABSTRACT

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Author: Andreas Romeborn

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Department: Department of Languages and Literatures, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, SE 405 30 Göteborg

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This doctoral dissertation deals with the figure of speech called “syllepsis” and, more particularly, with the way it is used in the work of the French poet Francis Ponge (1899-1988). The aim of the study is to highlight and describe features characteristic of his use of syllepsis, by means of a qualitative approach, to begin with, and then through quantitative analyses, based on a corpus consisting of 90 texts. These texts were selected from three collections of poems (*Douze petits écrits*, *Le parti pris des choses*, and *Pièces*) and represent a period of three decades (1921-1950), so as to allow examining the evolution of this phenomenon in Ponge’s writing. The present study may be considered as stylistic, insofar as it considers the language of one specific writer, and contributes to an understanding of an important element of his style. Its object being a figure of speech, it may also be characterized as a rhetorical analysis.

The definition of the concept of syllepsis proposed in this dissertation implies the use of one word token used in two different senses at the same time, and foregrounds the way in which this figure of speech is made to exploit the polysemy or the homonymy of lexical units (chapter 2). Chapter 3 is devoted to a detailed presentation of a method for identifying words being used sylleptically in a text. The chosen method is then illustrated by an in-depth analysis of a text from the corpus (chapter 4).

In chapter 5 attention is turned to various grammatical, lexico-semantic, and functional aspects of the use of syllepses, as they appear from the point of view of the entire corpus. An important conclusion to be drawn from these analyses is that Pongean syllepses typically exploit the polysemy of a noun, a verb, or an adjective in order to achieve an effect of some kind, the function of which is usually either ludic or aesthetic. The study also discusses various deviations from “typical” usage that must be taken into account for the characterization of the specifically Pongean use of syllepsis to be complete. Particular attention is being paid to a kind of syllepsis where the meaning of a fixed expression is diverted through a word play on one of its component elements. Moreover, another characteristic form of syllepsis used by Ponge relies on playing with the etymology of words. Considering the period 1921-1950 as a whole, a general tendency to be observed is the gradual increase in the writer’s shorter poems of the total number of syllepses. In conclusion, this study suggests that syllepsis is quite a significant element of the style of Ponge.

Keywords: syllepsis, Francis Ponge, figures of speech, stylistics, polysemy, homonymy, ambiguity, antanaclasis, zeugma, metaphor, word-play, fixed expressions, etymology, linguistic approaches to poetry