Pure Fires: A Bilingual Pun in Augustan Poetics

The symbolism and imagery surrounding fire has long been a subject of study in Augustan poetry. Articles by Knox (1950), and Kaufhold (1997), along with numerous commentaries, have noted its connection to thematic concerns in poems such as the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*. One manifestation of this study is the bilingual wordplay between the Latin adjectives *purus* (pure) and *purpureus* (purple) and the Greek noun πύρ (fire/ pyre). While scholars such as Ahl (1985) and O'Hara (2017) have touched upon this link, mainly as related to etymology, I offer here an expanded view of the pun, including its role in shaping and reinforcing context.

My analysis begins by establishing the meaning of the terms in Republican and Augustan prose. By examining authors such as Cicero and Livy, I demonstrate that the adjectives are adapted by the Augustan poets in ways which contrast with their traditional use and which highlight their connection to fire. I then turn the analysis to specific examples in Augustan poetry, wherein I identify and discuss three main types of such wordplay

The first encompasses *purus* and *purpureus* as glosses for the different meanings of πύρ. To this end, I point to examples such as *purior ignis* (purer fire) at *Metamorphoses* 15.243 and *puros… focos* (pure hearths) at *Fasti* 1.630 as adjectives functioning as synonyms for the nouns they modify. Additionally, this category also includes etymological uses of the adjectives. Relying primarily on Maltby (1991) and Ernout (2001) I suggest that the appearance of *purpureus* with the gods Aurora and Apollo in Book 2 of the *Metamorphoses*, along with words such as *lumen* (light) and *sol* (sun) in the *Aeneid*, serves to highlight the etymological connection of *purpureus* to fire.

I then consider the pun in relation to words of water. Here, the adjectives are employed as virtual antonyms in a manner that is often ironic. Instances of this include Ovid's description of

purum laticem (pure fluid) being placed under a fire at *Metamorphoses* 7.325 and Vergil's use of *pura… unda* (pure water) at *Aeneid* 6.229 during the funeral of Palinurus. I also point to the unique phrase *nudo puraque* at *Aeneid* 11.711 as an example of bilingual play between both ὕδωρ (water) and πῦρ to represent the locked struggle of battle (*paribus… armis*).

Finally, the adjectives can subtly underscore narrative elements within the poem. Notable instances include *pura … luce* (pure light) at *Aeneid* 2.590 and *purpurea… picta*, of Priam's regalia at 7.252, as hinting at the fire which engulfed Troy. Similarly, following suggestions by Brenk (1999) I argue that *purum…sensum…ignem* at *Aeneid* 6.746-7 is possibly a play on Stoic conceptions of the afterlife.

Considering these different uses of *purus* and *purpureus*, I propose a more nuanced view of bilingual wordplay in the Augustan poets. Looking to Quinn (1974) and Fontaine (2010), I contend that these examples of puns suggest a strong connection between wordplay and the vocalized manifestation of the poem. Therefore, future analyses of wordplay would benefit from greater consideration of the text as an auditory experience. Finally, while concurring with Ahl (1985) and Snyder (1980) that puns are highly adaptable to context, I also contend that the frequent use of certain puns indicates a shared culture of wordplay among the Augustan poets.

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