

Some notes on the inflection of 'lobster'¹

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translated by L. Cosconi

All studies of the notoriously thorny question of sixth declension nouns in NPE have thus far been fraught with difficulties and as such ultimately inconclusive. To a large extent the problem has centered on the question of whether in fact there is such a distinct and novel family of nouns that can be said to have existed from the past right up to the present,² or to be hypothetically in the current process of formation,³ or to have never existed in either the past of NPE or in its future.⁴ The present article offers only a modest contribution to the problem, in no way a definitive solution. Tentatively, we will argue for the first possibility- that a sixth declension of nouns exists in New Poetic English, and has for some time. This will be demonstrated by the case of the word 'lobster.' It will be argued that in its morphological history this noun showed, from at least seventy years ago, clear signs of divergence from nouns of the fourth declension, where it had traditionally been classified, and that this divergence, though by itself insufficient evidence to defend

¹ It is a great honour for me to be able to translate the work of Dr. Crockett, one of a very few acknowledged experts in the linguistic history of New Poetic English. Although the present article first appeared in print four years ago (in Vol. 124 of *NPE Renaissance Quarterly*), until now no Common English translation has been published. Lamentably, it has proved impossible to capture all of the nuances of Crockett's argument, as so much of his exposition depends on the peculiarly fluid New Poetic English idiom, and thus inevitably gets lost in translation. It is hoped, however, that the gist of his argument may be preserved, and that Crockett's pioneering study may receive the attention it merits among Common scholars.

² Among those who uphold this argument, most enthusiastic has been G. Taylor, *Declensional disparities in New Poetic English* (Cambridge, 2354). Taylor's most persuasive argument, that the oral tradition of nouns such as 'lobster' can be observed since at least 2228 in relatively homogenous linguistic regions such as the islands of Massachusetts and Vermont, is taken into consideration below. The critics of Taylor's work have been many, and I have taken aboard many of their critiques here, especially L. Gladstone's objection ("Review of G. Taylor, *Declensional Disparities in New Poetic English*," *NPE Attacks and Broadides* 32 (2355), 119-24), that would restrict the meanings of the adjective 'staraiere!' to 'the feeling one gets when he stands atop a wind-blown cliff and exults at the marvelous fullness of things,' and not, as Taylor has it, 'an unclassifiable colour, approaching that of tarnished silver, that seems to emit light feebly from afar, but on closer inspection is nothing more than a lackluster collection of colourless gases.' Gladstone's similar restriction of the definitional possibilities of 'lobster' will be mentioned again below.

³ See D. Stockmore, "Eleven nouns without a home: the current situation," *NPE Register* 22 (2360), 345-63. While Stockmore is to be praised for his apt appraisal of current trends in morphological formation, his study suffers, in my view, from an insufficient examination of the past seventy years of declensional changes, some institutionally-driven, some not, in nouns of the first and fourth declension. In addition, Stockmore's glib citations of J. Walters' recent novel *Proez sloyen* (Alberta, 2366) and D. Newton's new collection of poetry *Thi'deeper dedescenden I futiler'tan* (W. Brookfield, 2365) in support of his argument strikes one as facile, and seems to smack of dilettantism, the uncritical acceptance of what is currently fashionable among patrons of NPE, but which may prove, in the long run, ephemeral, fleeting, and useful only in terms of its historical significance. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the authors whom Stockmore cites will retain for long the privileged position they currently hold. As always with NPE research, it is a gamble, and the result may change several times over the next century.

⁴ These naysayers, although their arguments are for the most part specious and circumstantial, deserve at least a mention here. One coursebook, G. Philips' *Classical NPE Grammar* (Andover, 2358), seems blissfully unaware of the entire history of the language, that is, of the quite substantial body of work in NPE over the past 150 years that has not received official Committee sanction. How Philips can conjecture on the future of the language without an adequate assessment of its past escapes the present writer. Sharing Philips' stubbornly pedantic advocacy of the traditional four declensions is B.R. Holden, "The noun in New Poetic English," *Oxford Studies in Comparative Linguistics* 981 (2350), 122-68. The blanket conservatism of scholars such as Philips and Holden in attempting to deny and restrain the growth of NPE is diametrically opposed to the enthusiastic but ultimately ephemeral work of the school of Stockmore. The present author hopes to find some sort of middle ground between the two approaches and so facilitate a compromise that will be tolerable to both sides.

the idea of an entire separate declension, bears enough similarities with certain other nouns (i.e., 'artichoke,' 'respite,' 'slanstyalein'), that we can confidently postulate the previous existence of a sixth declension, which, though it appears to have fallen into disuse, already shows signs of having returned to popular usage. Whether or not this trend will be continued by future shapers of NPE remains, of course, to be seen; for now we will be content to make an exposition of the evidence in defense of the sixth declension, with the example of 'lobster.'

Prehistory: 'Lobster' before the institution of New Poetic English

In texts of the ancient period that predate the first popular trends towards New Poetic English, the noun 'lobster' is found frequently, and, of course, in uninflected form. Although the meaning of the word in this period is obscure to us now, we can say with some confidence that a 'lobster' was apparently some kind of large marine animal, capable of temporarily rusting when frightened, reddish in hue, and also capable of destroying large vessels, even container ships, with its vice-like claws.⁵ Another slightly later source seems to anticipate the tendency of NPE authors away from figurative speech in its definition of 'lobster' as 'any human who can transform himself into a seething red crustacean with the ingestion of beer, given that humidity, longitude, the presence of oversized foam-rubber hands, and other determining factors are correct.'⁶ Finally, in a usage closer to our current one, we have, from a curious article of 2130, the definition of 'lobster' as 'the unfortunate but all too common quality of being stirred to anger at individuals who have in no way wronged you.'⁷ This apparent confusion of meanings shows that even before the institution of NPE the word 'lobster' had a rich variety of different usages and meanings, which was certainly not coincidental with the subsequent bewildering array of declensional variants of the first two periods of NPE.

The first inflections of 'lobster': the Conciliar period (2190-2230)

⁵ The sources for this definition are too numerous to be cited. Some of the more important are the following. J.Q. Grant, *Tommy goes a-sailing, and other stories for children* (New York, 2130); B. Reykman, *Sea Dog: my life at sea* (San Francisco 2106); S. Van der Hooef, *Oceanographic Studies, 2118-19* (New York, 2120).

⁶ Citation from B. Alderman's newspaper column on a baseball game, "Will they ever win?" *Boston Globe*, July 11, 2166. (At this point I must insert a caveat. Dr. Crockett appears to ignore that English of the 22nd century was still far from being New Poetic English, and that, although some sociologists and cultural historians have tried to read modern ways of thinking about language into the words of the ancients, we do better to remain skeptical about such possibilities. Hence the idea that the ancients bore a similar hatred of figurative language as do the doyens of modern NPE cannot be supported without qualification. Although this is obviously not the place to make criticisms of Dr. Crockett's argument, we must say that it is not necessary that the word 'lobster' in this case must refer to an actual physical transformation from human to crustacean; it is well-known that the ancients believed, in an amusingly religious manner, that a person could be said to be merely *like* a lobster. This sort of thinking does of course not stand up to the definitional exactitude of NPE practitioners. This seems to be one of the rare cases where Dr. Crockett's ignorance of Common English has affected the logic of his argument. — Translator).

⁷ Citation from M.M. Lane, *A pamphlet proposing a new method in the moral education of indigents and idlers* (Glasgow, 2130). It is remarkable that an ancient writer of the uninflected period preceding NPE should show such a tendency towards precise abstract nouns of the kind which have come to characterize New Poetic English. The evolving orientation of writers of the 2130's towards abstraction and away from superfluous and imprecise speech is a complex and fascinating area; the reader is referred above all to the study of F. Clairmont, *The intellectual origins of New Poetic English: cultural politics in the age of Perrera* (Los Angeles, 2358).

As is well known, the rapid popularity of NPE, unchecked by any institutional control, was the primary reason behind the first General Council for the Advancement of New Poetic English in March 2196. Here there was much discussion and indeed dissension over the precise form that new declensional systems would take and how many there would be. The Council's decree that three declensions were sufficient was merrily ignored by various authors and other troublemakers, who generated an unknown number of new declensions and sub-declensions.⁸ The cataloging of so many variants become increasingly tiresome and costly, and in any case only thirty or so declensions were actually found in more than two or three different works. This number swiftly fell to three, under the forceable intervention of the Committee. Although speculation is futile as to the shape NPE might have taken had it not been for the Committee's strong-arm tactics, the continuing volume of studies being published on the germinal period of NPE attests to the significance of these early years.⁹

Although the sources are few and far between as regards 'lobster' in the period 2196-2230, there are clear signs that a process of inflection, however tentative, had begun by the first decade of the 23rd century.¹⁰ At the same time, the meaning of the word in this period remains ambiguous.¹¹ Shelley's discovery of a genitive of place

⁸ The chief reason why the number of declensions generated in the years immediately following the council of 2196 is unknown is that scholars have simply not had time to pore over all of the extant literature. Progress has been for the most part slow; J. Lampley's *Published works of the years 2196-99* (27 volumes; Toronto, 2356), a magisterial contribution to the field, has scarcely been digested by researchers, although it was published over ten years ago.

⁹ The question of how and why certain declensions vanished and why others were kept alive among circles of aficionados driven underground by the Council's mandate is a fascinating one. L.M. Hurley's *The pioneers of our language* (Stockholm, 2340), is a helpful guide, although slightly outdated and romanticized. In this matter it is perhaps better to stay at the level of the general picture, for as soon as one descends into the morass of sifting out the evidence, one is left clutching not even sand, but only air. Take for example R.S. Shackleton's "Some unknown declensions of the Eastern Palatial school," *NPE Studies and Reviews* 19 (2351), 389-560. Here the issue of several declensions created by the obscure spiritualist Thaddeus Knouse is raised. Knouse was a delegate at the first council and immediately afterward began to spend the greater part of his day, and sometimes even whole weeks, in 'mystic' trances during which he would spout declensions under the apparent inspiration of his god. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, 'Lord Thaddeus' declensions were scrawled down by his devoted disciples, thus preserving them for posterity. While many of these declensions possess an admirable organic unity and are not all that far off from recorded NPE of the period, others have no apparent homogeneity and are best classified as the illogical ramblings of a would-be prophet. Shackleton's work concerns the latter group, primarily one declension he has christened the 'chaotic declension.' This so-called 'declension' consists of nominative, genitive, locative, dative, ablative and vocative forms entirely dissimilar from one another; for example, the nominative 'lesyarnye' has a genitive singular 'szehlen,' a genitive plural, 'endive,' a dative singular 'atsalae,' an accusative plural tel'yanndanveilu,' and so on. Further, the nouns which Knouse had intended to comprise this declension, for example, 'rabbit,' 'turncoat,' 'brennyiduvén,' bear absolutely no similarity with either 'lesyarnye' or with their own oblique cases. Against Shackleton's idea of the 'chaotic declension' comes the quite pertinent objection of M. Sanders, "The Conciliar period reconsidered," *NPE Studies and Reviews* 21 (2353), 219-45, that argues that were this declension to be maintained, it would be little more than a clearing-house into which could be swept the ever-increasing number of orphan nouns of the Conciliar period.

¹⁰ See G. Hopkins, *Sixth Declension Nouns in the Early Period of NPE* (New York, 2360), 430, for the presence of a genitive of place in a newspaper of 2201. M. Shelley, *Early noun structure* (Brisbane, 2364), 232, has found evidence for both the genitive of place and of possession in texts of 2204 and 2220.

¹¹ Morrison's belief that 'lobster' at this point meant 'a sort of aperiodic storm signalled by a furious reddening of the western horizon as day succumbs to dusk' just because the NPE committee had decreed as much is an unfortunately simplistic solution. There is good reason to suppose that the dissident council set up in protest against the Committee's original banning of perfect reduplication at the same time advocated alternative definitions for almost every noun of the 'common nouns' class, some of which proved more popular and long-lasting than those selected by the 'orthodox' Committee (i.e., 'lozenge' and 'coriandemer'). Besides their success in the well-known case of perfect reduplication, the dissidents succeeded in replacing all phrasal verbs with ones conjoined to various suffixes, a point borne out by the sources but sometimes overlooked by scholars. There is a strong possibility that 'lobster' was one of the words whose meaning was altered by the dissidents, but unfortunately our chief source, the *Alternative Dictionary of NPE* published by this party, was destroyed by the intractable Chancellor Wilson, head of the 'orthodox' Committee, whose other indiscretions included banning the publication of any novel which did not contain an accompanying lexicon, as well as ending the favorite practice of

in a text of 2220 shows that even in this early period the declension was taking shape. The relevant phrase runs: "theruponim bebecomen ytha'nger lobstrim.." ("At that moment, a great and unsubduable rage gripped him" –Trans.). The genitive ending 'lobstrim' apparently survived the series of phonetic shifts ordered by the Committee in the middle years of the 2250's, as it is still found in this form thirty years later, in a Canadian military treatise.¹²

As for the genitive plural, the ending –erim was apparently in continuous use throughout, and its striking similarity to the spelling of modern first declension nouns suggests that some conscious patterning took place.¹³ As for the dative, no forms of 'lobster' are found in early NPE.¹⁴ Accusatives of the early period do not show yet the sharp similarity with nouns of the fifth declension that will later mark them conspicuously. The vocative also is not found.¹⁵

Declensional Disparities: the Middle Period of NPE (2230-2330)

The sources continue to offer only meager testimony for 'lobster' in the middle period of NPE. This situation is not improved by the fact that certain overzealous authors, bucking the system of restrictions and checks forced upon them by the NPE Committee, generated new forms and words with gleeful abandon, and after having used them in one text had already forgotten them by the next. Thus the intriguing case of J. Richardson's *Scattering Leaves* (London, 2291), where we find the genitive singular forms 'blehenna' and 'saisyeir,'¹⁶ which were at that time quite respectable, well-known examples of what was then called the 'second declension.' Many writers previous to and contemporary with Richardson had used these forms for

mercenary readers, that is, the scrawling of explanatory marginalia in a text, and subsequent republication of the 'improved' work as their own. The lamentable destruction of the *Alternative Dictionary* has obscured our knowledge of the intriguing work of the Dissidents, and as a result the precise character of their influence is hard to assess.

¹² "Paratroopers' instructions for the Alaska Campaign," (Ottawa, 2282).

¹³ Compare with the gen. pl. of first declension nouns: 'lettal': 'letteris'; dat. pl. 'letterib'; gen. pl. of 'effluvial': 'effleris,' dat. pl. 'efflerib.' Against Margot's thesis in support of conscious patterning (F. Margot, "Conscious patterning in NPE early period nouns," *NPE Journal* 5 (2355), 87-99), we must raise the quite pertinent objection that the first inflected uses of 'lobster' (and other sixth declension nouns) postdates the great period of conscious patterning. Indeed, even the first acknowledged master of NPE prose, Marcus Drayman, in his one recorded use of the word 'lobster', did not use inflected forms, although they were certainly current by the time he was writing. Drayman, a throwback to be sure, writes: "lobster, givtheeme strong'nd sustainens, asainan, venyi'v llost?" ("O Lobster, will you protect me in my hour of need?" –Trans.). Here we would expect the vocative form, but no sign of inflection appears. Citation from M. Drayman, *Voyagen sen starma* (Buenes Aires, 2219).

¹⁴ Although it has been argued that certain variant forms of the genitive may have actually been datives, there is no basis grammatically for the conjecture made by L. Chesterton, "Some overlooked datives in early NPE," *NPE Philological Register* 9 (2357), 14-29. Chesterton's thesis is based on his reading of the text according to the rather unusual rules governing datives propounded in Goldman's *True grammatical rules and revelations of the one fiery and god-blessed tongue* (Chipping Camden, 2229), which, as Cassidy has astutely pointed out (B. Cassidy, "The Conciliar period revisited: a hoax and a suicide," *NPE Renaissance Quarterly* 82 (2360), was nothing more than an extremely malicious and pernicious joke circulated by a former Committee member who was forced to resign his post as a result of circumstances which are only murky known, though lurid, if we are to believe an unpublished contemporary source (S. Enteryela, *Letter 126 to Atherton*). As can be judged by the syntax of Atherton's response (which makes equally ominous although ultimately opaque allusions to the Goldman affair), he was among the many NPE authors of the time who were taken in for a time by the *True grammatical rules and revelations*. That a scholar of Chesterton's ability was fooled by Goldman's grammar mystifies the present writer.

¹⁵ To this day the vocative form of 'lobster' has only been found twice, and in both cases, spelled differently, so that it remains unclear as to which is correct. In any case, the general preference for well-defined abstract nouns in NPE eliminates much of the heady conditions needed for the truly proper use of a vocative, in the classical sense.

¹⁶ In Common English, spiderweb' and 'cranberry,' respectively. –Trans.

the same words, and in other examples, such as 'chaira' and 'time.'¹⁷ Yet somehow, after the publication of Richardson's following work, *Leisyemna da ivor* (Bombay, 2298) these forms are nowhere to be found, and in fact never occur again in any NPE text, at least, they have not yet.¹⁸ In their place Richardson introduced his own 'second declension' which also failed to outlive its creator. The so-called 'second declension' of Richardson is just one example of middle NPE innovation, the bulk of which, though interesting, turned out to be ultimately ephemeral. Other examples of this trend were Gustave Fletcher's use of the locative, which led to Tanner Jackson's aggressive attempt to eliminate prepositions entirely.¹⁹

The first uses of 'lobster' after 2230, in the same spirit of discontinuous and unstable usage, are not helpful in reconstructing the linguistic history of the word.²⁰ At some point after 2254 the word seems to fall into a declensional freeze and then remains stable for about sixty years. The sources in this period, about two-hundred in all, are too many to be cited individually, but we can sum up the general declensional picture as follows:²¹

¹⁷ 'Chair' and 'a sort of dagger having neither weight nor mass, whose handle is fashioned from optimism, whose blade is hewn from regret,' respectively. —Trans.

¹⁸ This strange disparity is what is known as 'the Richardson problem' to scholars of NPE. The so-called 'second declension,' which did not survive Richardson's time, has caused no little confusion among scholars who have mistaken it for our current second declension. In *Leisyemna da ivor* Richardson has moved on to different forms for the same words, such as 'arevn' and 'cranberry.' ('Spider' and 'cranberry,' respectively. —Trans.). Why Richardson had the influence he seems to have had—that is, to single-handedly consign an entire declension to oblivion—is hard to explain, especially in light of the fact that he was an obscure author whose work sold poorly and was rarely read. Indeed, a recent survey of NPE judges showed that only four out of one-hundred could even associate the man with one of his works, although he wrote more than 260, and perhaps more, if we are to believe the somewhat suspect testimony of his one enthusiastic apologist, the literary critic Owen Smith (O. Smith, "A writer for our times," *The New Yorker*, July 28, 2301). Yet there remains the daunting problem of how Richardson's discontinuation of 'second declension' forms somehow influenced his peers to stop using these forms as well. It is true, there is no necessary causal connection between Richardson's actions and the actions of the literary world at large; however, I suspect that some influence, hardly traceable at this stage, did occur. I am well aware that by raising the topic of Richardson's forgotten 'second declension,' some adventurous eccentric may attempt to bring them back into popular use, rendering our entire discussion moot.

¹⁹ The locative never caught on; Jackson, one of the most hard-line purists of his time, went overboard in his desire to make NPE an absolutely inflected language by substituting cases- 217 in all- for prepositions. His mad, exhausting scheme may even have won acceptance, had he not carried the project to its logical conclusion, by tripling cases according to whether a sentence expressed past, present or future time, and also by creating unique cases not only for singular, plural and dual forms, but for all numbers as well. In defending the former requirement, Jackson took recourse to Heraclitus and argued that no object was in fact exactly the same after it had passed through the defacing rigours of time; and to support the second, Jackson came out with the brash assertion that all numbers are really adjectives that can be substantivized for the purposes of engineering. Jackson's adversaries (of whom there were many), faced with the somewhat menacing prospect that no noun, and thus that no thing or abstract idea, would be intrinsically the same during successive utterances, not to mention the dangerous idea of an infinity of cases, rebuked him sharply. As is well known, Jackson's chief opponent, D. Davies, published a scandalous broadside, which met with a rancorous reply from the pen of Jackson; and when the two met a year later during the Carnival season in Rio de Janeiro, Jackson was shot dead in the duel that ensued. See V. Prestwick, *Tanner Jackson and the fury of numbers* (Princeton, 2359).

²⁰ There are seven attested uses between 2230-54. Of these, four are inflected, one is partially inflected, and two are uninflected. Of the fully inflected examples, two attain to the primitive case endings found above, while the other two bear no resemblance to any other usage of the word or indeed to any known declensional pattern from any period of NPE (i.e., 'llobstraxen,' and 'esentubur'). The partially-inflected forms attain to the correct modern accusative singular, 'lobstri.' See J. Connelly, *Sixth-declension noun evolution, 2230-54* (Louvain, 2349).

²¹ Note variants: nom. s. 'lobstres' (2290), 'lobsang' (2288), 'lobsse' (2287,98); gen. s. 'lobstrin,' 'elobsunen,' (both 2299); 'lobstaers' (2264; maybe a typo); 'lobstarmen' (2300). Dat. s. 'lobstrim' (2271,87); acc. s. 'lobstre' (2256,67); 'lobstirma' (2290, 96), 'elebden' (2279, 88). N. pl. 'lobstera' (2308), 'lobstra' (2302, 12), 'lobstroglar' (2299); gen. pl. 'lobsteren' (2266), 'elobulur' (2252, 76, 98); dat. pl. 'lobbses' (2266); 'lobsren' (2274, 76, 79); acc. pl. 'lobstrentes' (2288), 'lobosnei' (2285). For the relevant texts, see vol. 3 of J. Whipple's *NPE Sources for the middle period* (Oxford, 2365). Although 'lobster' obeys some declensional discipline in this period, it appears to have had many different meanings: thus we hear of 'lobstirma en schoolbyeg ki den o ne'eibhavun' ('put a lobster in the children's schoolbag if they don't behave' —trans.), and 'sileny chorye, stlaset-y'elobsunen onlas ri ucem' ('long hair, with the colour and taste of a freshly-powdered lobster' —trans.). We must reject S. Moore's argument that the disparate definitions recorded here might indicate that scholars have

Nom.	lobeseter
Gen.	lobsters
Dat.	lobstrimnu
Acc.	lobstyrin
Voc.?	lobs

Nom.	lobstentes
Gen.	labelei
Dat.	lobesetir
Acc.	lobesentes
Voc.?	lobstentes

'Lobster': the last fifty years

The evolution of declensional forms regarding the nominative and genitive forms of 'lobster' between the middle period and the modern is now clearly known.²² The dative and accusative still present some trouble, and the vocative, as has been said, is not to be attempted. To trace the last century of linguistic shifts in fifth and sixth declension nouns is largely impossible, due to the linguistic instability of the 'revolutionary' period of 2315-2325.

It has been argued that the brief and chaotic explosion of new forms from roughly 2315-25 had to do mainly with the discontinuation of NPE from official government use.²³ The enforced institutional control had proved a failure, as it was too taxing for those charged with its implementation. Thus NPE in this period, released from institutional control, appears to have proliferated wildly among authors from all across the linguistic spectrum. So much disparity is recorded in this period that it is futile to try and unearth any casual links between the stable period that preceded 2315 and our modern period after 2325. It is interesting to note in passing that following the period of institutional control NPE did not degenerate into a simpler and less varied vernacular, but rather expanded still further and indeed became marked by an almost endless morphological variegation. For example the verse²⁴

Tach vesan bu'sarun,
Enthethrallnen moons

mistakenly lumped together two or more words that are really not the same word at all, on grounds of alleged declensional similarity. Moore fails to appreciate that NPE is purposefully a rich language in which the meaning of any given word can change, depending both on its context and on the assonance or dissonance of the following word. The best recent critique of Moore's thesis (S. Moore, "Some Contradictions in NPE Poetics," *NPE Renaissance Quarterly* 76 (2354), 109-22) is L. Kronstadt, "Assonance and meter in NPE texts of the early 24th century," *NPE Yearbook* (2359), 324-54, which supercedes a previous refutation (L.N. Carr, "On Moore's contradictions," *NPE Renaissance Quarterly* 83 (2356), 35-49), which based its argument on a hypothetical declension since decided to be unlikely at best. See C.M. Kirby, "On the first four sub-declensions of Carr's hypothetical 18th declension," *NPE Renaissance Quarterly* 99 (2360).

²² See R.N. Hunter, "'Lobster' and other athematic nouns," *NPE Research Annual* 12 (2364), 23-45.

²³ D. Wilkinson, *The Civil Administration under Anaxites*, 2308-21 (Montreal, 2352).

²⁴ The following anonymous poems which Dr. Crockett cites cannot be translated successfully into Common English. I apologize to the reader. -Trans.

in which infixed preposition, article and genitive case endings combine to make a simple noun, 'thrall,' a complex word of superior flexibility and style; yet during this period the same verse was also rendered, without loss of meaning,

enmoonen bu'sarun tach, thethrallomei ve

in which the noun 'thrall' has been changed to an impersonal verb with passive meaning; similar also

xaxaxagoras tan vlenulen za

and, most simply,

slestu

This brief chaos of 2315-25 was marked by just such an endless variety of alternative expressions, but necessity required that it implode under the weight of so much variety; it was simply more than could be supported by the language.²⁵

The future of 'lobster'

That the foregoing has often fallen into digression is lamentable, though unavoidable, given the fact that New Poetic English is by nature protean and tangential, and above all, unfinished. Not only are our sources for earlier periods of NPE incomplete and often contradictory, the language itself is continually evolving and our understanding of the significance of past linguistic forms is to some extent contingent on the future evolution of the language.

Nevertheless, the behaviour of the word 'lobster' in the last thirty years, since c. 2335, has shown a remarkable homogeneity, which tentatively allows us to assert

²⁵ Particularly difficult was the whole class of nouns, like 'slestu,' that expressed entire states of being, abstractions, situations, and sometimes, whole historical episodes, to such extremes as the famous

aelvtval
which can be rendered (space does not permit to supply the NPE translation of the following; only my Common English translation is supplied -trans.) as

"in the year of sea-foam, moon-stones, and undulent, swaying anemones, in a land far from the cracked center of the sweltering capital, it rained for thirty-seven straight days and nights, nights and days, and thereupon ceased on the thirty-eighth, at which point were detected in the astronomical observatories a faint series of intermittent signals of an unknown frequency, emitted from the south node of the eleventh moon from ours; and when these signals were deciphered they were found to be the ancient prophecy of a forgotten theologian from an ancient, dust-strewn galaxy; and our priests, finding that the gods these prophecies referred to had long before had their licenses revoked, disregarded the signals and gave the matter no further thought. Yet after one year, when the signals had grown stronger, less aperiodic, and entirely more ferocious, so was born below the red cliffs to the south, in a damp cavern above the waves, the third king of the line of Dazalan. But other people say that the whole story was all a lie, made up by those who wished to prove the lineage of Dazalan, as they wanted to claim a part in it, although Dazalan himself was probably only a figure of legend and myth."

As can be readily understood, nouns of such complexity had to be discontinued, as they would swiftly have brought about the death of that most complex of languages, NPE. It is true that in the year 2321, the apex of the so-called 'Zaiitanic Renaissance,' (named after the most famous non-conformist among the writers then), the insane author Carlos Munoz composed a story of nearly eleven words which nevertheless expressed a tale of more than 500 pages in conventional text. Yet the enterprise of a cultivated mandarin like Munoz could not long be sustained; it only increased the isolation endemic in authors of that period, and, besides, it would surely have ensured the death of NPE. Instead of enriching its base, it cut away at it, and made it more difficult for the language to be learned. Indeed, the words could not easily be memorized; it took a whole lifetime for an anonymous student of Petroni's to learn Munoz's eleven words, after which he committed suicide, whether out of ecstasy or despair we are not told.

the existence of not only a sixth declension but also of a hypothetical seventh and eighth as well. The declension, as it stands now, reads:

nom.	lobster
gen.	lobstrin
dat.	lobsterin (also 'lobosh')
acc.	lobstri
voc.?	lobster

nom.	lobstera
gen.	lobsterim
dat.	lobstren
acc.	lobstras
voc.?	lobstera (also 'leyir')

This declension has been found in ninety-seven percent of recorded usages of the word since 2330, that is, in 426 cases, and of the other three percent, only one percent has been classified as being a true variant, whereas two percent of the discrepancies have been chalked up to typographical error. Furthermore, 'lobster' seems to have settled into a more or less well-defined single meaning.²⁶ To what are we to attribute this rather comforting homogenization? J. Phelan has argued that in searching for links between past and present uses in NPE in general, it is best to ignore the chaotic period 2315-25, as it represents only an aberration, an interesting one to be sure, but having no lasting influence on the language. Rather, we must go back to the previous stable 'common' period, when 'lobster' is found more or less consistently. We may reject out of hand the thesis that changes in the spoken use of NPE had any influence whatsoever on declensional shifts in general, since NPE is not a spoken language.²⁷

Another problem is how to classify the current 'modern' period. Does the relative homogeneity of forms and clarity of syntax indicate that NPE has passed once and for all through the difficult growing pains of its maturation, and is now settled in a more or less stable state which makes possible, for the first time perhaps, philological analysis? Or is it merely *resting*²⁸ between intervals of random change? This problem is left up to those who use the language, as they are the ones who will shape its future.

From recent developments it seems that the sixth declension is rapidly becoming a reality, and that a seventh and perhaps even eighth declensions are

²⁶ The translation of the NPE word could best be rendered, "the lingering sadness one feels at being unable to describe the exact shade of red the evening sky takes on twenty minutes after sunset in the islands of Nepal, between August 19-26 each year." -Trans.

²⁷ Thus we may summarily dismiss D. Jacoby's argument regarding orality as grievously misinformed (D. Jacoby, "Oral approaches to NPE dichotomies," *Language register* 3 (2360), 230-43). Jacoby's argument is entirely facetious, as he seems to believe that NPE has been spoken before. Being a written language exclusively, NPE is at once freed from problems of orality and restricted by them: that is we can at once say that its changes cannot be attributed to orality; but then we must find out to what they *are* to be attributed. It is true, no one really knows how NPE would sound when spoken, since no one has had the courage to try and speak it. Yet there is a strong feeling (though naturally unproveable) that the NPE of fifty years ago, or of two-hundred years ago, could not have sounded the same as it does now, if it were in fact currently being spoken. The argument is necessarily futile. As it stands today, NPE practitioners are gripped by the same fatal fear that tormented their forefathers: that were they to utter the language which they venerate it may turn out to be just another language among the languages, to not be perfect, to not be *the* language.

²⁸ The italics are Dr. Crockett's. -Trans.

currently in the process of formation, even as we speak.²⁹ In the 'dark ages' of NPE, the period (c. 2215-2235), declensional forms, not yet fully articulated, retracted into only two declensions, which have been christened X and W, having only three cases, the nominative, accusative, and vocative. Since then NPE has passed through several periods of rapid and violent change, has seen explosions of new forms, the steady loss of rarer forms as is usual with most language, and the more unusual resurfacing of these forms after the initial period of retraction has broken, sometimes as a result of institutional decree, sometimes at the whim of individual writers. The case of the noun 'porter' seems to point most decisively towards a seventh declension, indicating that a new period of growth may be before us.³⁰

The continuing definitive characteristics of NPE nouns can be classified as follows: a tendency towards abstract nouns; a tendency towards assonance in declensional endings as a safeguard in case one tries to recite aloud; the strict delineation of grammatical forms. In this last the schools run by the Committee have been instrumental; indeed, in some the mastery of grammatical forms has even replaced literature; it has become a kind of literature. The sixth declension has so far escaped their pedanticizing clutches. Time will tell whether the present argument has any validity; I am content to wait and see what happens.³¹

²⁹ For example, the nouns 'estere,' 'senne,' 'apex,' 'orchid,' have all a common genitive plural ending -seyai and dative singular -esre; and the nouns 'sled,' 'leadhef,' and 'vanity,' share a common privative nominative ending and a common genitive singular -denar. See also the example of 'porter' below.

³⁰ The declension runs:

nom.	porter
gen.	portrin
dat.	porterin (also 'portosh')
acc.	portri
voc.	porter

nom.	portera
gen.	porterim
dat.	portren
acc.	portras
voc.	portera (also 'peyir')

Although this declension appears at first glance to be identical to the sixth declension, we have reason to believe it is not, if the as-yet unpublished novel of R. Thornton Price, *Waived luq*, is any indication. I would like to thank Mr. Price for generously granting me access to this work well in advance of its publication date. In his work he upholds the traditional meaning of 'porter' as "that which accompanies reeling dizziness and wooden barstools and is followed afterward by belligerence and infidelity, among other things." Yet X. Carter, *The new declensions* (New York, 2365), argues that the word simply means 'brackishness of mind,' and gives to it fourth-declension endings. It remains to be seen who will win out.

³¹ Although there are now being heard ominous rumblings, from parties who wish to remain anonymous, that the Committee, in the run-up to its 175th anniversary gala in five years' time, is preparing an odious and unprovoked 'remedy' to a non-existent problem: that is, to tighten the restrictions it has placed on the introduction of new declensions. As we know, the Committee's rulings have sometimes been accepted, but just as often have been ignored. See W. Safford, *Archival Research into the 53rd Council* (San Luis Obispo, 2340) for one fascinating and little-known example. The primary source itself repays inspection: *Acts of the 53rd General Council for the Advancement of New Poetic English*, Act 231, column 4 (New York, 2246). That the Committee still possesses the restricting power it does, and has not been consigned to the oblivion of vestigial institutions that has befallen so many other would-be organizational bodies, is testament, I suppose, to the general public's huge continuing interest in NPE, which, since it is amateurish and shallow, requires, no, begs for, protective guidance. Fortunately, the layman's sheep-like veneration cannot infect those praiseworthy NPE authors who remain unswayed and uncorrupted, despite the Committee's sinister popularizing overtures.