SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

AN ANNUAL SURVEY OF SHAKESPEARE STUDIES AND PRODUCTION

50

Shakespeare and Language

EDITED BY
STANLEY WELLS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1997

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1997

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Bembo 10/12pt

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Shakespeare Survey was first published in 1948. Its first
eighteen volumes were edited by Allardyce Nicoll.
Kenneth Muir edited volumes 19 to 33.

ISBN 0 521 59135 X hardback

CE

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations *page* x

Shakespeare's Language and the Language of Shakespeare's Time *by* STEPHEN BOOTH 1
'I'll plague thee for that word': Language, Performance, and Communicable Disease *by* KEIR ELAM 19
The Language of the Spectator *by* DENNIS KENNEDY 29
Marlowe's *Edward II*: Penetrating Language in Shakespeare's *Richard II* *by* MEREDITH SKURA 41
Hamlet's Ear *by* PHILIPPA BERRY 57
Secrecy and Gossip in *Twelfth Night* *by* JOHN KERRIGAN 65
Shakespeare Rewriting Ovid: Olivia's Interview with Viola and the Narcissus Myth *by* A. B. TAYLOR 81
'Voice Potential': Language and Symbolic Capital in *Othello* *by* LYNNE MAGNUSSON 91
Household Words: *Macbeth* and the Failure of Spectacle *by* LISA HOPKINS 101
Erring and Straying Like Lost Sheep: *The Winter's Tale* and *The Comedy of Errors* *by* BRIAN GIBBONS 111
The 'Shakespearian Gap' in French *by* JEAN-MICHEL DEPRATS 125
Reading the Early Modern Text by MARION TROUSDALE 135
Shakespeare and the Metamorphosis of the Pentameter *by* KENNETH MUIR 147

Rereading Illustrations of the English Stage *by* JOHN ASTINGTON 151
Nietzsche's *Hamlet* *by* PETER HOLBROOK 171
'Strange and woonderfull syghts': *The Tempest* and the Discourses of Monstrosity *by* MARK THORNTON BURNETT 187
Shakespeare Performances in England, 1996 *by* ROBERT SMALLWOOD 201
Professional Shakespeare Productions in the British Isles, January–December 1995 *by* NIKY RATHBONE 225

The Year's Contributions to Shakespeare Studies

1 Critical Studies *reviewed by* JANETTE DILLON 237
2 Shakespeare's Life, Times, and Stage *reviewed by* MARK THORNTON BURNETT 254
3 Editions and Textual Studies *reviewed by* JOHN JOWETT 267

Books Received 291
Index 293

ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece: From the Prologue Season at the Globe Theatre on Bankside – Mark Rylance as Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* [Courtesy of Shakespeare's Globe]

1 Woodcut figures, Thomas Hill, *The Contemplation of Mankind*, 1571 153
[*By permission of The Bodleian Library*]

2 Ballad illustrations, 1615 155
[*By permission of The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge*]

3a Woodcuts from a broadside ballad, 1610 157
[*By permission of The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge*]

3b Ballad decoration, 1618 158
[*By permission of The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge*]

4a Equestrian figure, Jost Amman, *Kunstbüchlein*, 1599 159
[*By permission of Dover Publications, Inc.*]

4b Frontispiece to *The Valiant Welshman*, 1615 159
[*By permission of Oxford University Press, The British Library, The Victoria and Albert Museum*]

5 Title-page, *The Arraignment of . . . Women*, 1615 160
[*By permission of The British Library*]

6 Ballad illustration, 1629 162
[*By permission of The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge*]

7 Title-page, *Tarlton's Jests*, 1613 163
[*By permission of The Folger Shakespeare Library*]

8a Woodcut figure, *The Prologue and Epilogue to a Comedie*, 1642 166
[*By permission of The Huntington Library*]

8b Woodcut decoration, *A Conspiracy of the Twelve Bishops*, 1641 167
[*By permission of The British Library*]

9 Ole Worm, *Museum wormianum, seu Historia Rariorum* (Lugdunum Batavorum, 1655), p. ii 189
[*By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University*]

10 *The forme and shape of a monstrous child* (London, 1568; STC 17194) 191
[*Courtesy of the British Library*]

11 Timothy Granger, *A moste true and marueilous straunge wonder* (London, 1568; STC 12186) 192
[*Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library*]

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

12 a and b Ambroise Paré, *The workes of that famous chirugion* (London, 1634; STC 19189), 193
[*Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library*]
13 Thomas Bedford, *A true and certaine relation of a strange-birth* 194
[*Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library*]
14 William Leigh, *Strange newes of a prodigious monster* (London, 1613; STC 15428) 194
[*By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library*]
15 'Heath's View' 199
[*Courtesy of* The Mail on Sunday]]
16 Mark Rylance as Proteus, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, directed by Jack Shepherd, Shakespeare's Globe Prologue Season, 1996 202
[*Courtesy of Shakespeare's Globe*]
17 Lennie James as Valentine, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, directed by Jack Shepherd, Shakespeare's Globe Prologue Season, 1996 202
[*Courtesy of Shakespeare's Globe*]
18 Rachel Joyce as Celia, Liam Cunningham as Orlando, Niamh Cusack as Rosalind, *As You Like It*, 3.2, directed by Steven Pimlott, RSC, 1996 205
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
19 Doreen Andrew as Hymen, Liam Cunningham as Orlando, Niamh Cusack as Rosalind, Robert Demeger as Duke Senior, *As You Like It*, 5.4, directed by Steven Pimlott, RSC, 1996 206
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
20 Roger Allam as Macbeth, Brid Brennan as Lady Macbeth, *Macbeth*, 2.2, directed by Tim Albery, RSC, 1996 208
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
21 Adrian Schiller as the Porter, *Macbeth*, 2.3, directed by Tim Albery, RSC, 1996 210
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
22 Joseph Fiennes as Troilus, Clive Francis as Pandarus, Victoria Hamilton as Cressida, *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.2, directed by Ian Judge, RSC, 1996 213
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
23 Philip Quast as Achilles, Louis Hilyer as Hector, with the Myrmidons, *Troilus and Cressida*, 5.8, directed by Ian Judge, RSC, 1996 214
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
24 Eric Mallett as Dromio of Ephesus, Maeve Larkin as the Courtesan, Leo Wringer as Dr Pinch, Simon Coates as Antipholus of Ephesus, Gary Oliver as Balthasar, Thomas Fisher as the Guard, Thusitha Jayasundera as Luciana, and Sarah Cameron as Adriana, *The Comedy of Errors*, 4.4, directed by Tim Supple, RSC, 1996 218
[*Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library*]
25 Eric Mallett as Dromio of Ephesus and Dan Milne as Dromio of Syracuse, *The Comedy of Errors*, 5.1, directed by Tim Supple, RSC, 1996 219
26 Gary Waldhorn as Henry IV, *Henry IV, Part 1*, 1.1, directed by Stephen Unwin, English Touring Theatre, 1996 220
[*Photo: Stephen Vaughan*]
27 Timothy West as Falstaff and Samuel West as Prince Hal, *Henry IV, Part 1*, 1.2, directed by Stephen Unwin, English Touring Theatre, 1996 222
[*Photo: Stephen Vaughan*]

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

STEPHEN BOOTH

> 'Many things are true which only the commonest minds observe.'
> 'Then I think the commonest minds must be rather useful.'
>
> *Middlemarch*, Book 1, chapter 5

Shakespeare is our most underrated poet. It should not be necessary to say that, but it is. We generally acknowledge Shakespeare's poetic superiority to other candidates for greatest poet in English, but doing that is comparable to saying that King Kong is bigger than other monkeys. The difference between Shakespeare's abilities with language and those even of Milton, Chaucer, or Ben Jonson is immense. The densities of his harmonies – phonic and ideational both – are beyond comfortable calculation, are so great that the act of analysing them is self-defeating, uncovers nests of coherence that make the physics of analysed lines less rather than more comprehensible.

The reason it is necessary to point out Shakespeare's poetic superiority to competing poets is, I think, that we have so long, so industriously ignored the qualities in literature that drew us to it in the first place. As a result, we – or, at any rate, the scholarly books and essays we write and read – and our students treat a Shakespeare play or *Paradise Lost* or *Huckleberry Finn* or even 'Kubla Khan' as if we valued it for its paraphrasable content or as a source of information about the time and society that spawned it or about its author. When I talk about what 'we' do, I speak not just of the 'us' of the last several years of sociology, sentimental anthropology, and crusading sanctimony in literary criticism but of the cultural residue of a trend that goes back in Western culture at least to Horace and Philip Sidney and their intellectually casual conclusion that value in literature resides in its supposed, rarely witnessed capacity as an agent of moral improvement.

In 1990 I published an essay in *Shakespeare Quarterly* called 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time and All Others' (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (1990), 262–8). At its core were (1) the idea that what the kind of literary criticism we call 'academic' does for us is offer plausible, but so far always insufficient excuses for the improbably high value society places on literature and (2) an appeal to the academic community (a), to admit that we have no good reason – that is that we have no philosophically dignified reason – for valuing the ultimately frivolous commodity that literature is when weighed against the things human beings value only slightly more – things like food, shelter, children, parents, gods, honour, and such; and (b), to admit also that we can and will and should cheerfully go on valuing art as we always have whether we have dignified excuse for it or not.

This paper continues in the vein of the essay. And my first ambition for it is that it remind you that there is good reason why the word 'poetry' has for so long seemed to be a simple synonym for the word 'verse' and that it remind you too just what the qualities are that differentiate verse from prose.

When we recognize something as verse, we recognize it as being organized in at least one non-substantive system, one system – traditionally a phonic one – other than the one composed of syntactic and semantic signals. Often a piece of verse will present several substantively extraneous phonic organizations, for instance, systematic rhythmic patterning, a rhyme scheme, and alliterative patterning or pattern in assonance or pattern in consonance or pattern in all three.

The key fact about verse is the irrelevance of its defining, non-substantive organizations to the matter of the sentences and paragraphs in which the extra organizations sport themselves. The qualities of verse that define it are ones that – if anything is frivolous – are frivolous. As I have implied, we are beings uncomfortable with ourselves as creatures who care about what does not matter. We want to believe that what is immaterial to what is being said doesn't matter. Witness the pathetic tradition by which apologists for poetry still sometimes attempt to comfort themselves and us with pious assertions that *s* sounds make us hear snakes and that rhythms imitate the substance conveyed by rhythmic lines (several generations of American high school students were regularly submitted to John Masefield's rhythmically purposeful 'Sea Fever', a poem called forward by English teachers under stress and a poem that thus caused several generations of Americans to grow up thinking that the purpose of rhythm in verse is to simulate seasickness in stay-at-homes).

Concentration on intellectually dignified, philosophically defensible elements in literature has left us so comfortably and so thoroughly self-deluded that we hear – and accept the underlying assumptions of – the phrase 'redeeming social value' without blushing – or even giggling. Moreover, concern with what sentences, speeches, poems, plays, and writers *say* (or can be said to say or once to have said) encourages attention to the kind of coherence that derives from *logical* relationships among elements and inattention to orderly relationships based in common factors comparable to colours and shapes, relationships that can matter to us though they convey none.

By way of exemplification, I want now to talk about the editorial glosses that we are used to seeing as adjuncts to Shakespeare texts. They are a product of the assumption that only signification signifies – that only the paraphrasable matter of a sentence or paragraph or speech matters in our experience of a work. They are also prime culprits in that assumption's preservation and perseverance. Glosses in footnotes give students the impression that Shakespeare's language and the language of Shakespeare's time are the same thing. And they encourage the widespread student belief that their purpose in reading a Shakespeare play is to show a teacher that they can find in it the slim little narrative it was before 400 years got in the way. Such notes also encourage the belief that a Shakespeare play is an obstacle course, encourage the assumption that the clarified, modernized versions of the plays that footnotes embody is the real thing and that simple substitution for Shakespeare's words (and some pruning of action and assertion that make the plot hard to figure or hard to take) is desirable.

The notion that Shakespeare's language is merely a screen to penetrate on the way to something simple is a close relative of the kind of commentary that recommends Shakespeare plays to students as essentially comparable in value to modern fictions that treat of similar situations – the kind of commentary that attempts to engender enthusiasm for the great literature of the past by insisting on the likenesses between – for example – Romeo and Juliet, on the one hand, and, on the other, the comic-book teenagers Archie and Veronica. I once heard a surprisingly reputable Shakespeare scholar tell a graduate seminar that the greatness of Shakespeare was evident from the fact that, four centuries after *Romeo and Juliet* was first performed, newly pubescent boys and girls still like to fondle one another. No wonder students think the value of Shakespeare is as an obstacle course and a source of stuff to test them on.

Anyway, Shakespeare's language and the language of Shakespeare's time were not the same – any more than the music of Beethoven is the same as the music of Beethoven's time or Vermeer's paintings are typical of the work of his contemporaries or the simple prose of Abraham Lincoln is typical of the simple prose of Lincoln's time.

Shakespeare's language really is as special as people say it is.

It is special in two ways.

(1) Shakespeare's sentences don't always make sense.

(2) Shakespeare's language is exciting to the minds that hear it – exciting to minds because what is being said in a Shakespearian sentence often comes to us in a soup of possibilities, possibilities engendered by substantively negligible, substantively irrelevant relationships among elements in a syntax to which those relationships do not pertain and by which those relationships are filtered from consciousness.

Number 1 is hard to take. Nonetheless, it is true that, when one hears a Shakespearian sentence or speech and understands what it is saying, one is often led to understanding by situation and by connotations of the words used – not by the demonstrable content signalled by syntax and the probabilities of the diction.

That is, one is hearing sense in nonsense.

And, when we do that, we do what we want to do: understand what we do not understand, what we still don't understand.

The best example I know of both kinds of specialness is the following passage from *Othello*; Desdemona, momentarily alone on stage, soliloquizes on Othello's abusive behaviour towards her:

> 'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
> How have I been behaved, that he might stick
> The small'st opinion on my least misuse?
> (4.2.110–12)

In the third of those three lines, editors who gloss 'opinion' ordinarily gloss it as 'censure' (or 'suspicion' or something similar and similarly improbable in a context other than this one). The Riverside Shakespeare says simply: 'opinion: censure'; so does David Bevington's 1992 complete works; the revised Pelican of 1964 glosses 'small'st opinion' as 'least suspicion'. What such glosses report is true, but the manner of the report distorts the truth. Such glosses casually, benevolently give readers the impression that 'opinion' once meant 'ill opinion'. M. R. Ridley's 1958 Arden edition of *Othello* is unusual in noting the anomaly by which context thrusts a sense upon the word 'opinion' that that word is not known ever to have had elsewhere; Ridley says '*opinion* must here, unusually, mean unfavourable opinion'.

Ridley's use of 'must here . . . mean' points in passing to a truth about the lines that is vital to an understanding, not of the lines, but of the way they work. 'Must mean' acknowledges the fact that a scholarly gloss on 'opinion' in *Othello* 4.2.112 is as unnecessary as it is unavailable: context tells one – tells anyone capable of getting the general drift of the scene – that '*opinion* must here, unusually, mean unfavourable opinion'. The New Folger editors, Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, did not gloss – evidently saw no need to gloss – 'opinion' at all. The same was apparently true for Kenneth Muir; he too sensibly leaves Desdemona's use of 'opinion' unglossed in his New Penguin edition. Although I have not attempted a full survey, I expect that those three editors have had a lot of company in their omission. That is because editorial glosses on words that act as 'opinion' does in *Othello* 4.2.112 mean to say only 'You, reader, are right: context does indeed demand that this word be understood as if it were "———".'

The same is true of all editorial glosses that begin 'i.e.'; glosses headed by 'i.e.' acknowledge that the sense both editor and readers take from some unlikely linguistic unit is determined by context not the syntactic and semantic signals that ordinarily govern and direct understanding.

What I care about in *Othello* 4.2.110–12 is what it is about these particular lines that makes the anomalous use of 'opinion' seem so commonplace, so usual, so *right* that one can read across the lines without pause and hear them in the theatre without even so much as a flicker of puzzlement.

When I say that the use of 'opinion' sounds right, the rightness I refer to is of the sort one feels in music where, at least in my purely amateur experience, one's mind regularly hears a given note or chord in a piece of unfamiliar music as if one had predicted it ahead of time.

One possible source of the rightness of 'opinion' in Desdemona's soliloquy – one possible sustainer of the word 'opinion' as a synonym for 'blame' – is a bit of unstated trick logic – a logic probably generated in Shakespeare's unconscious and, I assume, ordinarily available only to the unconsciousnesses of listeners and readers. In the case of 'opinion' in the present passage, the logic would run this way: since 'censure' is a synonym for 'opinion' (as it is when Leontes says 'How blest am I / In my just censure, in my true opinion!' (*The Winter's Tale* 2.1.38–9), and since 'censure' and 'blame' are synonyms (as in 'the fault / Would not scape censure' (*King Lear* 1.4.203–4), 'opinion' and 'blame' must be synonyms too.[1]

Most of the other sources of overpowering rightness in the 'opinion' passage in *Othello* are much more ordinary in literary constructs than the subterranean chop logic by which 'opinion' is confusable with 'blame', but they are presumably just as distant – just as inevitably, just as eternally, distant – from the consciousnesses of audiences and readers. For one thing, a dusting of *m* sounds lies over the whole three-line passage. Only slightly more complex in its assurances of quasi-organic rightness is the recurrence of the third, and fifth syllables of line 110 – 'I' and 'be' – as the third and fifth syllables of line 111 – where, though nearly identical with the corresponding pair of sounds in the previous line, the syllables figure in a syntax entirely foreign to the one they echo ('I should be used' / 'I been behaved'). Moreover, in each of those two lines the sixth syllable concludes in a *d* sound; and '-haved', the sixth syllable of line 111 repeats the *v* of 'have' but in combination with what in any dialect at any time must have been a different kind of *a* sound. In the line that actually harbours the nonce synonym for 'blame', 'opinion' is not only supported on either side by the simultaneously paired and contrasted 'small'st' and 'least', but – by virtue of its second syllable,

---

[1] Compare the subscription of the Maria-Olivia letter in *Twelfth Night*: 'She that would alter services with thee' (2.5.153). The otherwise unheard-of use there of 'alter' to mean 'exchange' is made meaningful by accidents of its location. It is informed by a context relevant to 'an altar' – an altar in a church, sustained by the relevance of both the liturgical and sexual senses of 'service', and smoothed over by an implied logic that says that – since 'to exchange' and 'to change' are synonyms, and since 'to alter' and 'to change' are synonyms – 'to exchange' and 'to alter' must also be synonyms. For similarly casual nonce logic in the same play, consider Feste's use of the word 'welkin' – 'sky' – to mean 'proper sphere of action': 'Who you are and what you would are out of my welkin – I might say "element", but the word is over-worn' (3.1.56–8); 'element' can mean 'air' and can therefore replace 'welkin', but that does not make 'welkin' a universally available substitute for all senses of 'element'. The phenomenon occurs earlier when Toby commends Feste's singing voice by calling it 'a contagious breath' (2.3.53). 'Contagious', which is not known elsewhere as a synonym for 'attractive', *is* a synonym for 'catching', and 'catching' was presumably already capable of saying 'attractive' (*OED*'s first example of the adjective in that sense is from 1654, but 'to catch' meaning 'to charm', 'to attract', 'to captivate' goes back at least to Chaucer). In a typically Shakespearian skitter, Toby proceeds in his next speech to propose that he and his companions sing a *catch*.

'-pin', the fourth of the line – rhymes with 'been' the fourth syllable of the line it follows. The last word of the soliloquy also vouches mutely for the integrity of the whole: 'misuse' – there referring to impropriety committed *by* Desdemona, not against her – is also, is entirely incidentally, an echo of 'used' in ''Tis meet I should be used so' in the first line of the speech where 'used' said what 'misused' might have.

The phenomenon that led me to lead with Desdemona's 'opinion' speech here is of a kind to which I will devote the bulk of my paper: 'stick the small'st o*pin*ion on' enfolds within it the stuff of the familiar, here irrelevant, idea of sticking a pin (in fact sticking the 'small'st' pin: pins were already proverbial for both literal and metaphorical smallness – as in 'not worth a pin').

I contend that substantively incidental irrelevant relationships like 'stick the small'st ... pin ... on' in Desdemona's speech are worth attention. They are the sort of typically Shakespearian phenomena that prompted me to say that Shakespeare's language is exciting to listening minds – that is, minds that listen casually the way we all do, not minds poised to pounce on the sorts of non-signifying organizations I pounce on here. Things like the locally irrelevant 'stick' / 'pin' relationship in Desdemona's soliloquy are the spiciest ingredients of the soup of possibilities in which the paraphrasable substance, the matter, of Shakespeare's sentences floats.

Such relationships are ordinarily and properly as completely overlooked by readers and listeners as the unostentatious extra organizations inherent in blank verse or in gentle consonance and assonance among syllables that perform their overt tasks without any substantive enhancement from the extra patterning. I suggest that, where they occur, substantively insignificant semantic relationships like 'stick' / 'pin' in *Othello* 4.2.111–12 are like alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhythm and rhyme in being persuasive contributors to our sense of the organism-like coherence of Shakespearian sentences, paragraphs, and speeches.

The submerged 'stick' / 'pin' pair in Desdemona's soliloquy would do what it does even if it were the only such pair in the canon, but, as champion of the aesthetic value and efficacy of this pair and of shadow locutions similarly submerged but unrelated to sticks or pins, I am encouraged to note other places in the plays where Shakespeare's mind appears to toy casually with one or another of the particulars of Desdemona's stick and pin speech. For instance, *Measure for Measure* 1.3.23–7: lines that play casually, gracefully, and without any demand for audience applause or acknowledgement on the verb 'to stick', meaning 'to affix' and the noun 'stick' meaning something akin to 'twig' and to 'rod':

> Now, as fond fathers,
> Having bound up the threat'ning twigs of birch
> Only to stick it in their children's sight
> For terror, not to use, in time the rod
> More mocked becomes than feared ...

For a final kind of casual 'stick' relationship, consider the incidental 'drumsticks' in *All's Well That Ends Well* 3.6.45–6: 'This drum sticks sorely in your disposition.'

Now I want to look at a succession of Shakespearian passages similarly enhanced by substantively extra patterning. Attention to that patterning should seem less frivolous, more reasonable than it otherwise might if you remember that I am not for a minute suggesting that there is any meaning to be squeezed out of these patterns and into the passages in which they lurk. You will be less uncomfortable than you might otherwise be, if you remember too that I do not mean for a second to imply that conscious perception of such patterning ought properly be part of your conscious experiences of Shakespeare plays.

All I do suggest is that such patterns contribute largely to the *eventfulness* of the passages. Indeed, my principal purpose in this paper is to argue that Shakespeare's language is more *eventful* than anybody else's appears to be, that Shakespeare's language all but bursts with activity generated by incidental relationships among its elements.

The following sentence is *Macbeth* 1.4.33–5. Duncan, overwhelmed with gratitude to his victorious generals, comments on his response:

> My plenteous joys,
> Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves
> In drops of sorrow.

The sentence is overtly witty, hinged on the familiar irony in which tears, signs of grief, register joy; Miranda remarks on the same stock paradox in *The Tempest*: 'I am a fool / To weep at what I am glad of' (3.1.73–4). But Duncan's sentence is also full to overflowing with relationships that could have been exploited, could have been pointed up and pointed out, but are not. A Biondello or a Grumio could have leapt upon the contextually irrelevant – and therefore contextually hidden – opposition of the paired words 'seek' and 'hide' and/or upon the irony by which the embarrassed joys attempt to *hide* in tears: agents of *display*. A pun-hungry Shakespearian clown might also be imagined to pick up on the contrasting pair that 'fullness' makes with 'want', the first syllable of 'wanton'. On the other hand, no responsible comic character would try to make something of the two uses of 'in' in the sentence. The 'in' of 'wanton in' says 'with respect to'; the 'in' of 'in drops of sorrow' is literal: it indicates location. The pair of non-identical twins that the two *ins* present is of a sort so common in everyday speech that not even the most desperate of Shakespeare's clowns would be likely to pick up on it, but – commonplace or not – the two *ins* in Duncan's sentence give it one more charge of incidental energy. An effect need not be unusual to be.

I just used the word 'energy' as a critical term, and I will use it several times more in the next few pages. Before going on to other Shakespearian passages, I should acknowledge some uneasiness about my terminology. I worry that I will seem to be generating a jargon, a special, especially imprecise language that behaves as if compensating for its vagueness were the responsibility of consumers. I worry in particular about my use of the word 'energy'. I would use a more precise word if I could find it. What I wish 'energy' better labelled is the product of a substantively incidental organization that coexists with the syntactic organization of a sentence or paragraph or speech. I call that product energy because it resembles the heat generated by the interaction of two bodies that rub or jar against one another.

I want now to look at *As You Like It* 4.1.191–4, a speech occasioned by a display of traditional, knee-jerk antifeminism by Rosalind in her role as Ganymede, boy physician to the lovesick. Orlando takes his leave, and Celia accuses Rosalind:

> You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate. We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest.

The passage is prose, but it has extra energy comparable to the energy that derives from phonic patterning in verse.

It gets that energy first – and most obviously, given the specialized context of this paper – from the ordinarily non-obvious conjunction of 'bird' with the word 'plucked' – a word that has a specialized sense in context of birds and feathers but is here used – used in a context still ten syllables short of concern for birds – to mean simply 'pulled'.

Secondly and just as unostentatiously, the speech gets energy from the multiple physics it conflates and makes easy for us. For one thing, the passage lets us believe ourselves able to imagine a doublet and hose as capable of being lifted over the wearer's head like a skirt; what is described is presumably not what a listener imagines: the action the words describe would at best result in pain to the wearer and destruction of the garment. One's mind has to behave – and easily does behave – as if it had imagined a doublet and hose as a skirt. Interestingly then, what the passage invites one to imagine includes an incidental assertion of the femininity the speaker wants to expose.

The passage rests heavily and obviously on the idea that 'it is a foul bird that defiles its own nest' (a time-honoured proverb to which, by the way, two details give just the sort of incidental energy that concerns me here: (1) the unexploited pun on 'foul' meaning 'evil' and 'fowl', a synonym for 'bird' and (2) the presence of 'defiles' doing a job that 'fouls' might have done: *it is a foul fowl that fouls its own nest*). The proverb feels straightforwardly pertinent to Celia's speech – feels so and therefore is so, even though, if one gives the speech the sort of thought it does not invite, one would be hard put to explain its application.

Two mutually exclusive thought patterns meet when Celia introduces the proverb. The two might be expected to collide, but they do not; instead they do something vaguely comparable to blending together and passing through one another. Each of the two thought processes relates to the same general private area of Rosalind's anatomy. Given the dramatized situation in which Celia speaks, the proverb refers to Rosalind's hidden identity as a female, but in the terms of the proverb itself what is hidden by clothes and discernible in demesnes adjacent to her telltale genitalia would be that Rosalind has fouled herself.

Let me insist once again that my point about Celia's speech is a variation on the points I have made about the passages I talked about earlier: Celia's speech makes its listeners effortlessly capable of an experience so complicated as to seem impossible to a mechanism as limited as the human mind. The several intertwined intricacies I have laboured to describe in Celia's speech come into our minds as smoothly as butter. They are ideational counterparts of the phonic complexities we handle with equal ease when we hear verse or rhythmically elegant prose.

The next thing I want to talk about is Antonio's big speech from the courtroom scene in *The Merchant of Venice*. I want to spend more time on that passage than any other – not because it is richer than the others or even because it is longer, but because it is at once so showy about its rhetorical flourishing *and* alive with unobtrusive patterning that makes no call at all for our attention. The speech, I contend, is thus like the other pieces that concern me here in letting us feel more capable mentally than human beings can be or can imagine being – lets us feel an orderliness beyond our capacities to comprehend and lets us feel capable of doing what in fact we never do – cannot do: cope with unmediated experience.

These lines are openly, insistently artificial – brittle and brittly witty in the 'hard' (difficult)/ 'hard' (rock-like) play in 77–9: 'You may as well do any thing most hard / As seek to soften that – than which what's harder? – / His Jewish heart':

I pray you think you question with the Jew. 69
You may as well go stand upon the beach 70
And bid the main flood bate his usual height; 71
You may as well use question with the wolf 72
Why he hath made the ewe bleak for the lamb; 73
You may as well forbid the mountain pines 74
To wag their high tops and to make no noise 75
When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven, 76
You may as well do any thing most hard 77
As seek to soften that – than which what's harder? – 78
His Jewish heart. Therefore, I do beseech you, 79
Make no more offers, use no further means, 80
But with all brief and plain conveniency 81
Let me have judgement and the Jew his will. 82
(*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.69–82)[2]

The open play on kinds of hardness has lots of equally showy company here. Whatever else it may be, the parallelism of 'question with the Jew' in line 69 and 'question with the wolf' in line 72 is also brazen in its artifice. The speech is also openly artful in its organization. The standard anaphora by which one repeated phrase, 'You may as well', begins lines 70, 72, 74 and 77 is similarly palpable and similarly gross as an effect.

---

[2] In following the quarto and giving 'bleak for the lamb' in line 73, I deviate from the Oxford text, which follows the Folio and gives 'bleat'.

At the same time, however, the speech is full of unobserved echoes and repetitions and substantively irrelevant articulations. For a simple first example, note that the play on kinds of hardness is at once enriched and rendered less openly artful by the unassertive phonic echo that 'heart' in line 80 is of 'hard' and 'harder' in lines 78 and 79. Similarly simple are the pattern in prominent *b* sounds in lines 70–4 (in 'beach', 'bid', 'bate', 'bleak', and 'forbid') and the accidental-sounding echoes of 'may' from the 'you may as well' formula audible in 'main' (71), 'made' (73), and 'make' (75). And, at the end of the speech, the 'Make no' construction in 'Make no more offers' in line 80 is at once urgently like and urgently unlike the 'Make no' construction in 'Make no noise' back in line 75. I suggest that each of those unobtrusive patterns gives extra, non-purposeful (and thus less artificial-seeming) unity to the lines over which they spread.

Consider too the casually complex, deeply uninteresting patterning that results when the fifth syllable of line 76, the *en* sound in 'fretten', is casually echoed by the fifth syllable of line 78, the *en* sound in 'soften'. A similarly quiet harmony occurs earlier, within line 76 itself, when the last word of the line, 'heaven', echoes 'fretten' from its middle. The harmonies in which 'fretten', 'heaven', and 'soften' participate are only specialized variations on more pervasive, even less obtrusive patterning in final *n* sounds in the speech. All three words chime almost as precisely with 'mountain' in line 74 as with one another. And better than one in ten of the speech's 143 syllables ends in an *n* sound (four of them in line 81 in 'plain conveniency' alone).

Listen too to the final harmonious note the last word of the passage strikes when 'will' casually, quietly echoes 'well' from the repeated formula 'You may as well' (the echo would presumably have been even more audible in Shakespeare's time than in ours because vowels like the one in 'well' were apparently pronounced West Texas style: 'You may as w*i*ll').

The speech, a very forest of quiet, substantively insignificant relational harmonies, is unusual not only in the density of its patterning but in the complexity of some of the patterns. However, such accounts of patterns in minutiae as I give here are hard to read about. I fear that my accounts will already have become a mere drone. Moreover, I have a strong impression that – hurrying toward a critic's conclusion and the chance to judge that conclusion as convenient or inconvenient to their own thinking – readers of literary criticism regularly skip across the details on which the critic's conclusion depends – even details inherently much more interesting than the muted patterns I present here. So, lest my accounts of the further harmonies nested within Antonio's 'question with the Jew' speech get overlooked, I want to mark some of the patterns out with arbitrary uses of italics and small capitals. For instance, quoted below are the first lines of the speech in a typography designed to call attention to what is perhaps the most delicate, least effect-like effect in the whole passage. That effect occurs when the fourth line – 'You may as well use question with the wolf' – echoes first the first four words of the speech's second line ('You may as well go stand upon the beach') and then the last five words of the first ('I pray you think you question with the Jew'):

I pray you think **YOU** **QUESTION WITH THE JEW**
You may as well go stand upon the beach
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
You may as well **USE** **QUESTION WITH THE WOLF**
Why he hath made the ewe bleak for the lamb . . .

In addition to its bold italics and small capitals, the foregoing copy of *The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.69–73 uses large, bold capitals to take special notice of 'you' in the first line and 'use' in the fourth. It thereby accentuates (and thus makes cruder than it is as heard or read) the most elegant of the relationships within the complex