HOW TO READ SHAKESPEARE

Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies explained

Written by Nicholas Royle

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

How am I to read *How to Read*?

This series is based on a very simple, but novel idea. Most beginners' guides to great thinkers and writers offer either potted biographies or condensed summaries of their major works, or perhaps even both. *How to Read*, by contrast, brings the reader face to face with the writing itself in the company of an expert guide. Its starting point is that in order to get close to what a writer is all about, you have to get close to the words they actually use and be shown how to read those words.

Every book in the series is in a way a masterclass in reading. Each author has selected ten or so short extracts from a writer's work and looks at them in detail as a way of revealing their central ideas and thereby opening doors onto a whole world of thought. Sometimes these extracts are arranged chronologically to give a sense of a thinker's development over time, sometimes not. The books are not merely compilations of a thinker's most famous passages, their 'greatest hits', but rather they offer a series of clues or keys that will enable readers to go on and make discoveries of their own. In addition to the texts and readings, each book provides a short biographical chronology and suggestions for further reading and so on. The books in the *How to Read* series don't claim to tell you all you need to know about Freud, Nietzsche and Darwin, or indeed Shakespeare and the Marquis de Sade, but they do offer the best starting point for further exploration.

Unlike the available second-hand versions of the minds that have shaped our intellectual, cultural, religious, political and scientific landscape, *How to Read* offers a refreshing set of first-hand encounters with those minds. Our hope is that these books will, by turns, instruct, intrigue, embolden, encourage and delight.

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For J.J.
rem acu tetigisti

PREFACE

Creative Reading

This book can hardly hope to live up to its title. There are so many ways to read Shakespeare. In the following pages, however, I try to put the *experience of reading* centre-stage, to suggest how bountiful Shakespeare's writing is in terms of its openness to different readings, and how rewarding it can be to slow down and reflect on some of the astonishing detail of his work. Our understanding of ourselves and other people, language, everyday life, politics, culture, philosophy, non-human animals, religion, love and sex, time and history – to pick out just a few examples – is immeasurably deepened and enriched by reading Shakespeare.

At a time when the study of English in schools and universities seems to be increasingly concerned with the role and importance of creative writing (everyone is a poet at heart, everyone has a novel in her, and so on), my inclination would be to advocate the value of creative reading. Creative reading is not about making things up, reading a line or passage of a text just as it suits us. It has to do with reading closely, paying attention to different possibilities of meaning. No writer in English has as much to tell us about creative reading as Shakespeare. To read his poetry and plays with care, patience and curiosity is a source of intense pleasure. At the same time creative reading entails a sense of the inventive and surprising: 'creative' relates to what is imaginative and original, to an apprehension of what has never occurred before. There is something of the atmosphere of *The Tempest*, the 'sea-change' of which Ariel sings, a metamorphosis of reading or listening into something 'rich and strange' (1.2.404–5). At such moments the ghostly substance and beauty of words can emerge like a new island out of mist. It is as if the reader were suddenly, mysteriously, encountering the English language for the first time. *How to Read Shakespeare* attempts to evoke and explore a few instances of such encounters.

The word 'creative' does not appear in Shakespeare's work. He could, however, plausibly have used it: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'creative' as an adjective ('Having the quality of creating, able to create; of or relating to creation; originative') dates back to 1513. He uses cognate words – such as *create, created, creating, creation* and *creature* – on plenty of occasions. Another book would be required to track the force and effects of Shakespeare's singular deployments of such words. I would like to comment briefly on just one instance. Sonnet 81 concludes:

> Your monument shall be my gentle verse, [9]
> Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,
> And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
> When all the breathers of this world are dead; [12]
> You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen)
> Where breath most breathes, ev'n in the mouths of men.

As elsewhere in the Sonnets (first published in 1609), Shakespeare's language is dizzying – at once extraordinarily dense and succinct, playful and grave. We need an annotated edition of these poems (such as Stephen Booth's) to get a good grasp of what is going on. The closing six lines (or sestet) of Sonnet 81 are, on a certain level, breathtakingly arrogant. The friend to whom these lines are addressed may or may not have really existed as a historical individual, but in any case, by a finely fitting irony, the person is not named. The friend is to be remembered, however, thanks to the poet's 'gentle verse'. The 'monument' here is not so much a stone tablet – as the poem's earlier references to 'a common grave' (l.7) and being 'entombèd' (l.8) might indicate – but rather the writing itself. As long as people read this poem, the friend will have 'immortal life' (l.5). Such is the power or 'virtue' of the poet's 'pen'.

What dizzies, above all perhaps, is the sense of an eerie futurity in the moment. Shakespeare invents a marvellous word here, 'breathers' (we are all breathing, creatures that breathe), at the same stroke as evoking the end of the world – when every one of us is dead, 'When all the breathers of this world are dead'. The poem imagines a future time when the speaker and his friend are dead, and indeed everyone now alive is dead, and at the same time invites us to read with 'eyes not yet created' (l.10). This final phrase conjures a bizarre image of reading the future or future readings. It is, in a sense, the ghostly opposite of those human skulls at the bottom of the sea in the marvellous lines about Clarence's dream in *Richard III*, featuring 'holes / Where eyes did once inhabit' (1.4.29–30). Implying Godlike power (only God can create eyes, we may suppose), this image of what is 'not yet created' may helpfully suggest that reading Shakespeare has to do not only with our understanding of the present and the past, but also with kinds of creation still to come. As Theseus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, observes of the imaginative power of poetry: it 'bodies forth / The forms of things unknown' (5.1.14–15).

Nicholas Royle, April 2014

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A NOTE ON TEXTS USED

I have found it helpful to refer to a number of editions of the main plays I discuss in this book. In the following list, the first edition of a given play is the text on which I have principally drawn for quotations and act, scene and line numberings: the New Cambridge *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. M. M. Mahood (updated edn., 2003), the Oxford World's Classics *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay L. Halio (1994), and the Arden *Merchant of Venice*, 2nd series, ed. John Russell Brown (1955); the New Cambridge *Julius Caesar*, ed. Marvin Spevack (1988) (including quotations from North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*), the Oxford World's Classics *Julius Caesar*, ed. Arthur Humphreys (1994), the Arden *Julius Caesar*, 2nd series, ed. T. S. Dorsch (1955), and the Arden *Julius Caesar*, 3rd series, ed. David Daniell (1998); the Oxford World's Classics *As You Like It,* ed. Alan Brissenden (1993), the New Cambridge *As You Like It,* ed. Michael Hattaway (2000), and the Arden *As You Like It,* 2nd series, ed. Agnes Latham (1975); the Oxford World's Classics *Hamlet,* ed. G. R. Hibbard (1994), the New Cambridge *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark,* ed. Philip Edwards (updated edn., 2003), and the Arden *Hamlet,* 2nd series, ed. Harold Jenkins (1982); the Arden *Othello,* 3rd series, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (1999), the New Cambridge *Othello,* ed. Norman Sanders (updated edn. 2003), the Arden *Othello,* 2nd series, ed. M. R. Ridley (1958), and the Longman New Swan *Othello*, ed. Gāmini Salgādo (1976); the New Cambridge *Macbeth*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (1997), the Arden *Macbeth*, 2nd series, ed. Kenneth Muir (1951), the Oxford World's Classics *Macbeth,* ed. Nicholas Brooke (1994), and the Norton Critical Edition of *Macbeth,* ed. Robert S. Miola (2004); the New Cambridge *Antony and Cleopatra,* ed. David Bevington (1990), the Oxford World's Classics *Anthony and Cleopatra,* ed. Michael Neill (1994) (including extracts from North's *Plutarch,* from which I quote), the Arden *Antony and Cleopatra,* 2nd series, ed. M. R. Ridley (1954) (which includes extensive extracts from North's *Plutarch* in the original spelling and with original marginal notes), and the Arden *Antony and Cleopatra,* 3rd series, ed. John Wilders (1995).

Citations from all other Shakespeare works are based on *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (1997). For all of the plays discussed here I have found it extremely helpful to look at the 1623 Folio version (facsimile edition prepared by Helge Kökeritz, Yale University Press, 1954). I have also greatly valued being able to explore the 1600 Quarto text of *The Merchant of Venice,* the 1603 and 1604 Quartos of *Hamlet* and the 1622 Quarto of *Othello* (all freely available, either direct from the British Library website, *www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html,* or by Googling 'shakespeare in quarto').

INTRODUCTION

POLONIUS	What do you read, my lord?
HAMLET	Words, words, words.
POLONIUS	What is the matter, my lord?
HAMLET	Between who?
POLONIUS	I mean the matter you read, my lord.

(*Hamlet*, 2.2.191–5)

Hamlet, the stage direction tells us, is '*reading on a book*' (2.2.167). They are just words, he suggests, all of them the same, they go on and on and on. The bumbling old Polonius politely asks what the words are about, 'What is the matter, my lord?', but Hamlet apparently misunderstands him. He interprets the word 'matter' in the sense of 'issue' or 'something of concern'. '[Matter] between who?' Hamlet asks. Or in other words: I'm sorry, I was so immersed in my reading, despite the fact that reading is impossible in my current state of deep grief and melancholy, it's all just words, words, words. I didn't realize there was a problem (since my uncle murdered my father, married my mother – it's called incest – and took over from my father as King and pretty much no one seems to think anything of it, why should there be anything the matter, for example between me and the King, or me and all the rest of you? Honestly, I really hadn't noticed there was anything wrong). No, I don't mean that, says Polonius, 'I mean the matter you read.' If we have been reading or watching the play from the start, we know that Hamlet has earlier claimed that he is going to put on 'an antic disposition' (1.5.179), in other words to act in clownish or apparently mad fashion. How 'antic' is he being? How should we read his words? Is Hamlet being funny or deadly serious, calculating or distracted, mocking or indifferent? How might a particular director or actor choose to play him here?

There is something laughable and even crazy about the phrase 'how to read Shakespeare'. William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is probably the most complex, inspiring, challenging and elusive poet and dramatist who ever lived. He wrote many poems, including *Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece,* and 154 sonnets; and many plays (at least 38, a small number of them substantially collaborative), including idiosyncratic kinds of comedy, history, tragedy and romance. In their preface 'To the great Variety of Readers', at the beginning of the first collected edition of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (the book that came to be known as the First Folio or 1623 Folio), his friends and fellow actors John Heminge and Henry Condell offer some simple advice: 'Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe.' People have been doing this, or trying to do this, ever since. In the space of a short book there is no possibility of even pretending to touch upon the astonishing range or variety of his writings. In the chapters that follow, I aim to look in detail at just seven plays or, more narrowly, at seven shortish passages from seven plays or, in most microscopic fashion of all, at seven words that happen to occur in these seven plays: witsnapper, phantasma, love-

shaked, mutes, seel, safe, nod.

I hope that there is, however, a certain method in my madness. (I'm quoting Polonius again, his muttered aside after speaking with Hamlet, 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't': 2.2.204–5.) I endeavour to move across a number of Shakespeare's plays in what is generally reckoned to be chronological order: *The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar, As You Like It, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and Antony and Cleopatra.* This selection is certainly not intended to be representative of the range of Shakespeare's works; I offer no detailed readings of any of the sonnets or other poems, no histories, no romances. My interest is in deliberately *not* conveying an impression of 'coverage' and, with luck, in provoking readers to go off and explore some of the many texts that do not figure in the discussion. (I confess that the seven plays I have selected here are works I especially love; but I could with great pleasure have selected others.) The seven words I have singled out for close reading are likewise not uniquely special words that sum up Shakespeare's work. I happened upon them, in some respects, by chance; I could very easily have chosen seven others. Yet a detailed attention to such words will, I hope, testify to the incisiveness of Thomas De Quincey's remark, made in 1823, regarding the experience of reading Shakespeare: 'The further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident.'[1]

My principal aim in this book is to register and explore the *strangeness* of Shakespeare's writing (as we will see, 'strange' is itself a crucial word in his work) – its capacity to surprise and alter our sense of the world. I attempt to track this strangeness as it manifests itself in wordplay, hallucination and fantasy, racial and sexual difference, storytelling, silence and death, the madness and triumph of love, the mind of the psychopathic killer, the magical or telepathic, and the elusive power of ghosts. While I have deliberately avoided miring the discussion in technical details concerning the nature of poetic metre, the iambic pentameter and so on, I read Shakespeare's plays as the work of a poet. My overriding fascination is with the poetic as well as dramatic texture of a given passage, line or turn of words. One of my primary concerns is with trying to elucidate what is going on in a particular word, phrase and passage of Shakespeare, while also trying to acknowledge that paraphrase is itself a kind of madness. As soon as you start trying to *describe in other words* how, for example, 'matter' matters in the exchange between Hamlet and Polonius, you do a kind of violence to the text, no matter how much you may want not to. At the same time, if we cannot rely on the guidance of commentary and paraphrase to get a sense of what is going on when we are faced with the often perplexing or uncertain nature of Shakespeare's words, syntax, idioms and so on, we are lost. He was writing hundreds of years ago and the English language itself has changed in innumerable ways since then, so we all need help. Yet to read Shakespeare it is necessary to be as attentive as possible to what is, or is not, on the page in front of us. In this way it is still possible, I think, to have the feeling of coming to inhabit a line, phrase or word as if absolutely fresh, or even for the first time, after four hundred years or more.

In recent decades the world of Shakespeare studies has given great emphasis to the importance of performance, and the increasing

dominance of newer visual media, from TV and film to video, DVD and the Internet, has had an obvious role in this. *How to Read Shakespeare* proceeds in a somewhat different and perhaps unfashionable spirit, focusing above all on the *literary* dimensions of his work. We don't watch a Shakespeare play simply because it is gory and full of murders (though it often is), or because it's about famous people like kings and queens (though it often is), or because it's got lots of love and romance (though it often has). The enduring power of Shakespeare has to do, above all, with the astonishing nature of his language. To appreciate this it is necessary, I believe, to look as carefully as possible at what he actually wrote. This can entail further challenges, as there are many differences or uncertainties over what the text says or should say. I will try, at moments, to explore some of these more scholarly disputes. All of this is not to propose a merely 'linguistic' or 'textual' reading of Shakespeare. His language always calls to be read in terms of something happening – movement, gesture, making, doing. As I hope to make clear, one of the most immediate and profound things about Shakespeare's work is the sense of his love of language – a sense of playing with words and of the amazing, terrifying things that they can do. Words in Shakespeare seem to take on an autonomous life or machine-like power. They are like little search engines, meddling imps, strange creatures with wills of their own.

1

WITSNAPPER

The Merchant of Venice

The Merchant of Venice was probably written around 1596–7 and first published in 1600 as *The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice*. This longer version of the title signals a tension between comedy and anti-Semitism that has characterized readings of the play from the start. Shylock is the best-known and most intimately portrayed Jewish character in Shakespeare. A money lender, he is at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice,* in at least two senses of 'the heart'. This 'Jew of Venice' lends three thousand ducats to the 'Merchant of Venice', a Christian called Antonio, on condition that, if within three months the bond cannot be kept, Shylock is entitled to a pound of Antonio's flesh, to be cut off from his breast, '[n]earest his heart' (4.1.228, 250).

The Merchant of Venice is a shocking play. Shakespeare repeatedly stresses the extent to which Shylock, and other Jews, were subject to abuse, both verbal and physical. The figure of the Jew is identified with that of the dog or 'cur'. This is especially derogatory because dogs were traditionally regarded, among Jews themselves, as unclean. We learn early on that Antonio has spat on Shylock and kicked him around like a stray dog. As Shylock tells him: 'You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, / … / You that did void your rheum upon my beard, / And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur / Over your threshold' (1.3.103–11). Antonio is pleased to accept these accusations: 'I am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too' (1.3.122–3). Shylock's word 'stranger' functions in an adjectival fashion, evoking a strange or stray dog one might kick away from one's door. It resonates at the same time with other instances of the 'strange' or 'stranger' in Shakespeare's play. *The Merchant of Venice* is about Christians hating Jews and Jews hating Christians, but it is also about ethnic, racial and cultural intolerance in more general ways. It is about the figure of the stranger and the question of what is 'strange'.

The Merchant of Venice is a strange play, a kind of Janus-headed work. It opens with Antonio declaring to two fellow gentlemen of Venice, Salarino and Solanio, that he is sad but that he does not know why. 'Now by two-headed Janus / Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time' (1.1.50–1), says Solanio, in an attempt to evoke, and laugh about, precisely this funny mixture of comedy and tragedy. Besides Shylock, the other principal character is Portia, a beautiful young heiress who, in order to obey the peculiar demands of her father's will, must test prospective suitors by having them choose from one of three caskets:

gold, silver or lead. It is more the stuff of romance and fairytales, strikingly distinct from the scenes of Venetian moneylending, commerce and law (Jew vs. Christian). And yet these different aspects of the play are at the same time oddly mixed. Among Portia's numerous suitors is a friend of Antonio's called Bassanio. Interwoven with the scheme of Shylock's moneylending, then, is the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio. Bassanio is in love with Portia and would like to be among her suitors but lacks 'the means / To hold a rival place with one of them' (1.1.172–3). Antonio borrows from Shylock to provide Bassanio with sufficient funds to woo Portia. Besides Bassanio, all the other suitors are described as 'strangers' (1.2.101–2). Portia's prejudice against a dark-skinned suitor, the Prince of Morocco, is made evident when, even before setting eyes on him, she associates him with having 'the complexion of a devil' (1.2.107) – in the Elizabethan period devils were often conceived as dark-skinned. When the Prince of Morocco does appear, and chooses the wrong casket (gold), she declares as he exits: 'A gentle riddance! … / Let all of his complexion choose me so' (2.7.78–9). The Jew, then, is not the only figure of the 'alien' in the play. (The word 'alien' is used at one point, specifically with reference to those who are foreign residents in Venice: see 4.1.349.) At issue are more general questions about what is human and inhuman, natural and strange, and about the very strangeness of language itself.

To recount the plot of a Shakespeare comedy is never simple, but it is also crucial if we are to have a clear sense of the context in which to begin reading a specific excerpt. In Shakespearean comedy the reader or spectator is switched from one kind of scene, one set of characters to another, in an exuberant, relentless, even hectic fashion. Critics talk about a Shakespeare play having a 'sub-plot' and this mode of classification and subordination has traditionally been perceived as helpful in describing how a given play works. The idea of subplot is, however, perhaps more strange than natural. The term 'sub-plot' does not appear anywhere in Shakespeare's own writings: it is a sort of critical supplement or afterthought. *The Merchant of Venice* has a so-called sub-plot involving Shylock's daughter, Jessica, his servant Lancelot the Clown, and a companion of Bassanio's called Lorenzo. But here, as in other Shakespeare plays, what is below or 'sub' the plot is curiously entwined and insidious, as much above or alongside as below the 'main plot'. Lancelot leaves Shylock in order to become Bassanio's man; Jessica, professing herself 'ashamed to be my father's child' (2.3.16), elopes with Lorenzo. Shylock's isolation is thus virtually complete. Lancelot becomes what the stage directions poignantly call 'his man that was' (2.5.0, s.d.), while Jessica summarily tells Shylock: 'I have a father, you a daughter, lost' (2.5.55). Lorenzo and Jessica travel to Belmont and are left in charge of Portia's household while Portia and her waiting-gentlewoman, Nerissa, disguise themselves as men and go to Venice. Portia impersonates a young doctor from Rome called Balthazar, Nerissa his clerk. Portia is able to exploit the fact that she is related to a 'learned doctor' called Bellario, whom the Duke of Venice has requested to advise on the case of Shylock, Antonio and the pound of flesh. Portia's arrival at the courtroom (as Balthazar) is preceded by that of 'his' clerk Nerissa, bearing a letter from Bellario explaining he is sick and recommending the young man Balthazar to stand 'in [his] stead' (4.1.158).

An apparently 'minor' scene in a Shakespeare play can be just as rich

and strange, just as illuminating of 'how to read Shakespeare', as a supposedly major scene. Indeed, looking in detail at a 'minor scene' can perhaps more readily lead to a surprising and different appreciation of the play as a whole. With this strategy in mind, I would like to turn to a passage from Act 3 scene 5. At the end of Act 3 scene 4, Portia and Nerissa have left Belmont for Venice, some twenty miles away. Act 3 scene 5 takes place at Belmont in their absence, effectively occupying the time of their journey to Venice. The scene opens with Lancelot the Clown and Jessica: he contends that she is 'damned' because her father is a Jew; she responds that she will be saved by her husband, since he has made her a Christian. Lancelot then jokes about the idea that there are already enough Christians in the world and her husband's having made her a Christian will make bacon impossibly expensive: 'This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs; if we grow all to be pork eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money' (3.5.17–20). At this point Lorenzo enters.

Enter LORENZO

JESSICA I'll tell my husband, Lancelot, what you say: here he comes.

LORENZO I shall grow jealous of you shortly, Lancelot, if you thus get my wife into corners.

JESSICA Nay, you need not fear us, Lorenzo: Lancelot and I are out. He tells me flatly there's no mercy for me in heaven, because I am a Jew's daughter; and he says you are no good member of the commonwealth, for in converting Jews to Christians you raise the price of pork.

LORENZO I shall answer that better to the commonwealth than you can the getting up of the Negro's belly: the Moor is with child by you, Lancelot.

LANCELOT It is much that the Moor should be more than reason; but if she be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for.

LORENZO How every fool can play upon the word! I think the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in none only but parrots. Go in, sirrah, bid them prepare for dinner.

LANCELOT That is done, sir; they have all stomachs.

LORENZO Goodly Lord, what a witsnapper are you! Then bid them prepare dinner.

LANCELOT That is done too, sir; only 'cover' is the word.

LORENZO Will you cover then, sir?

LANCELOT Not so, sir, neither; I know my duty.

LORENZO Yet more quarrelling with occasion! Wilt thou show the whole wealth of thy wit in an instant? I pray thee understand a plain man in his plain meaning: go to thy fellows, bid them cover the table, serve in the meat, and we will come in to dinner.

LANCELOT For the table, sir, it shall be served in; for the meat, sir, it shall be covered; for your coming in to dinner, sir, why, let it be as humours and conceits shall govern. *Exit*

LORENZO O dear discretion, how his words are suited!
The fool hath planted in his memory
An army of good words; and I do know
A many fools that stand in better place,
Garnished like him, that for a tricksy word
Defy the matter.

(3.5.21–58)

The first part of this extract is in the prose form often used by Shakespeare for servants or other so-called 'lowlife' characters. It is only when Lancelot the Clown exits, and Lorenzo and Jessica are alone together, that the text returns to blank verse (at 'O dear discretion …'). It is in many ways a peripheral, unremarkable-looking passage, and yet it raises questions that are crucial to a reading of the play as a whole. It prompts us to think about sexuality, the bawdy and the erotic, Jew and Christian, race, class and servitude, economy, wealth and consumption.

Above all the passage suggests how 'play[ing] upon the word' is bound up with the way the world works. It invites us to reflect on the question and significance of wordplay, of what critics (more or less *all* Shakespeare critics) refer to as puns or quibbles.

How to read Shakespeare is a question of how to think about wordplay. What are the limits of wordplay? Is 'plain meaning' absolutely separable from 'play[ing] upon the word'? Later in the chapter I will consider these issues specifically in terms of the word 'witsnapper', in Lorenzo's phrase 'what a witsnapper are you!' We need to pause first of all, however, on the words 'pun' and 'quibble'. These apparently innocent-looking terms crop up constantly when critics talk about wordplay in Shakespeare. Yet 'pun' and 'quibble' are not Shakespearean words. The only instance of the word 'pun' in Shakespeare is in the sense of the verb 'to pound': 'He would pun thee into shivers with his fist, as a sailor breaks a biscuit' (*Troilus and Cressida,* 2.1.37–8). Likewise, the word 'quibble' appears nowhere in Shakespeare. (According to the *OED*, the first recorded use of 'quibble' is in 1611, and 'pun' in 1662.) I am interested in the question of how to read Shakespeare in new and other ways, without falling back on these traditional but anachronistic critical terms. These terms ('pun' and 'quibble') tend to carry with them a kind of artificial and trivializing effect that is in fact often quite foreign to what is going on in a given passage of Shakespeare. They connote a certain frivolity, a momentary bubble of fun, something contained and under control, a kind of calculated but ultimately pointless exhibition of linguistic playfulness. Moreover they imply that there is a controlling intention – that a particular character is intentionally playing on the meaning of a word. To talk about a character's punning or quibbling is also a way of conveniently forgetting the fact that the character is, in turn, fundamentally Shakespeare's verbal creation: wordplay precedes character. As we will see later in this book, elsewhere in Shakespeare's plays we can find notions of 'double sense' and 'equivocation' (neither of these terms, it may be noted, having the same kind of connotations of frivolity); but strictly and literally speaking, *there are no puns or quibbles in Shakespeare*. The still widespread currency of the 'pun' and 'quibble' in Shakespeare studies perhaps tells us more about his critics than about his own writings.

Critical talk of the 'pun' or 'quibble' stretches back a long way. The most celebrated forefather in this tradition is Dr Johnson who, in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), noted with a mixture of disapproval and pity: 'A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible … A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it.'[2] Johnson would have liked Shakespeare to stop, but he does not stop. And in a sense, in the context of the anachronistic 'pun' or 'quibble', he does not begin. Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* famously declares: 'In the beginning was the pun.'[3] But Shakespeare, in fact, comes before the pun (no pun intended).

Here comes Lorenzo: 'I shall grow jealous of you shortly, Lancelot, if you thus get my wife into corners.' Even or especially when we are engaging with the work on the page, reading Shakespeare is always a

question of imagining the scene, how it looks and how it sounds, the body language of the characters, voice, tone and speed. To read Shakespeare it is necessary to project and disseminate ourselves, to try to conceive and figure things from the position of actor or character, as well as director and playwright. We may here imagine Jessica and Lancelot physically close together, in a corner of the stage well away from where Lorenzo enters and perhaps also from us as spectators. Lorenzo will shortly criticize Lancelot's inclination to 'play upon the word'; but there is already play in his own words. 'Corners' in Shakespeare are elsewhere specifically identified with sexual jealousy. In *The Winter's Tale* Leontes suspects his wife Hermione and Polixenes of playing footsie and more: 'Horsing foot on foot? / Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift, / Hours minutes, noon midnight?' (1.2.290–92). Etymologically suggestive of the horns of cuckoldry, 'corner' comes from the Latin *cornu*, 'horn'. 'Corner' in Shakespeare can also signify the female genitals. This sense is hinted at in the description of 'The old fantastical duke of dark corners' in *Measure for Measure* (4.3.164). The various senses appear together in Othello's exclamation, 'I had rather be a toad / And live upon the vapour of a dungeon / Than keep a corner in the thing I love / For others' uses' (*Othello*, 3.3.274–7). Getting his wife into corners and getting it up: we soon discover Lorenzo has grounds for suspecting Lancelot of putting it about and getting in there.

Jessica seeks to put her husband at ease by telling him that she and Lancelot are 'out', that is to say they have quarrelled – though there is also a perhaps less reassuring play on the word 'out' as 'out in the open'. She recapitulates on the argument they had been having about whether a Jew's daughter can ever be anything other than 'damned' (3.5.12) and about Lorenzo himself as an unworthy member of society ('no good member of the commonwealth') because his conversion of Jessica will help 'raise the price of pork'. In this jesting two of the most serious aspects of Shakespeare's play are mixed: the question of religious difference and the mercantile focus on everything in terms of a 'price'. Lorenzo now makes a surprising announcement: 'I shall answer that better to the commonwealth than you can the getting up of the Negro's belly: the Moor is with child by you, Lancelot.' 'Moor' in Shakespeare's day was a virtual synonym for 'Negro'. Until now there has been no mention in the play of a black servant and we never hear anything else about her. We may suppose Morocco (the rejected suitor of Act 2 scene 7) earlier made a present of a slave girl to Portia's household. So Lorenzo's words may be read: I think you will find I am better answerable to society, Lancelot, than you are, in the light of the fact that you have made the Negro servant pregnant. 'Getting up' suggests both sexually penetrating and impregnating. It also connects with other images of 'growing' in the passage ('I shall grow jealous', 'discourse [will] grow commendable', as well as the more obviously bawdy 'rais[ing] … pork', i.e. getting an erection).

It is as if Lancelot's play on 'Moor', and its homophone 'more', has already begun to grow in the 'much': 'It is much that the Moor should be more than reason; but if she be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for.' It is significant ('much'), in other words, that she is bigger than is normal ('reasonable'), but to say she is not chaste or respectable ('honest') is a major understatement. There is something quite disturbing and strange about this fleeting discussion of the

pregnant black woman. She is apparently worth no more consideration. Yet the very fleetingness of her (non-) appearance here in some respects makes her the more haunting. In particular we might recall her elliptical presence at a crucial moment in the court scene (Act 4 scene 1). This is when Shylock attempts to defend his entitlement to a pound of Antonio's flesh by comparing it with the apparently unquestioned legitimacy of slavery among the Christian 'commonwealth' of Venice:

> You have among you many a purchased slave,
> Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
> You use in abject and in slavish parts
> Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,
> 'Let them be free! Marry them to your heirs! …'?
>
> (4.1.90–94)

This 'defence' of slavery corresponds with the extraordinary speech Shylock makes earlier about the nature of the Jew: 'I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?' (3.1.46–50). In each case Shylock questions how society responds to the figure of the stranger, how it reckons with the other (non-Christian, black or Jew), and suggests an alternative thinking of freedom. Shylock's speech, as if in spite of itself, invites us to conceive of society in ways that would be free of what is 'abject' or 'slavish'.

Lorenzo responds to Lancelot's play on 'more' and 'Moor' with an expression of disapprobation: 'How every fool can play upon the word! I think the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in none only but parrots. Go in, sirrah, bid them prepare for dinner.' Playing on words is something to be expected of a clown or fool; but Lorenzo's apparent exasperation extends beyond this, to a sense of any and every fool. He suggests that silence will become the most gracious form of wit ('wit' here bearing the sense of knowledge or wisdom as well as witticism). There is a flash back to his witty description of himself in the opening scene of the play as a 'wise dumb [man]' (1.1.106). Correspondingly, the image of people's speech ('discourse') becoming foolish to the point of merely parrotic takes us back to the Janus-like creatures, evoked by Solanio in the opening scene, who 'will evermore peep through their eyes, / And laugh like parrots at a bagpiper' (1.1.52–3). These 'strange fellows', as Solanio calls them, have their eyes half-shut because they are laughing all the time and they laugh even at what is melancholy. (There is a moment early on in *1 Henry IV* when Falstaff talks of being 'as melancholy … as the drone of a Lincolnshire bagpipe': 1.2.65–7.) A single word in Shakespeare, such as 'strange' or 'parrot' or 'melancholy', opens up into a drama of wits, a drama of reading extending across and beyond the text in which it appears. Playing on words, playing with words, words playing all by themselves: wordplay in Shakespeare entails the wit of seeing how no word is exempt.

Thus the word 'witsnapper' is dropped into the proceedings. Lorenzo attempts to restore or at least recall a sense of 'plain meaning': 'Go in, sirrah,' he tells the Clown, 'bid them prepare for dinner.' But this won't

work either, as Lancelot plays on the superfluity or ambiguity of the 'for'. Those who are to eat dinner are already prepared, since they already have 'stomachs' (i.e. appetites). Lorenzo tries again, this time omitting the 'for': 'Goodly Lord, what a witsnapper are you! Then bid them prepare dinner.' Lancelot then takes 'cover'. Having introduced the word himself he now chooses to understand it not in the sense of 'laying the table' but of 'putting his hat on'. 'I know my duty,' he says. He knows he should not 'cover' (put his hat on) in the presence of superiors. At another moment in the play the Prince of Arragon, who chooses the silver casket when wooing Portia, imagines a world in which social ranks and positions of authority are not 'derived corruptly', in which 'honour' is based on 'merit': 'How many then should cover that stand bare!' (2.9.41–3). Again, in the play of a single word another conception of society is tacitly inscribed.

'Witsnapper' is a beautiful, strange word: it exists nowhere else in Shakespeare and indeed, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is not recorded anywhere else in the English language before this point. 'Witsnapper' is, apparently, Shakespeare's invention. Elsewhere in his work the snapping of wit is associated with speed. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example, wit is evoked in the figure of a sword striking home: 'A sweet touch, a quick venue of wit! Snip, snap, quick and home!' (5.1.51–2). How quickly can or should we read? Shakespeare encourages and accommodates close reading, reading in slow motion; but that closeness is also a matter of going quickly, moving (in Hamlet's phrase) 'with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love' (1.5.29–30). In a sense, we can never read Shakespeare quick enough, and never speak or write about him quick enough either. 'Speak, breathe, discuss. Brief, short, quick, snap', as the Host exhorts in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (4.5.1–2). How quickly or how slowly should we read Shakespeare's 'witsnapper'? This verbal invention might even appear to snap together, clamlike, something resembling the beginning and ending of his name, 'Wi[lliam Shakes]per[e]'. Shakespeare's witcraft snaps, snaps at us, snaps us up, knaps us. To knap is to hit (as in *King Lear,* 2.4.125), but also to munch or eat. (The current English word 'knapsack' carries that sense.) 'Witsnapper' might also be wits-knapper, or wit's knapper. At the start of Act 3, Antonio's friends Salarino and Solanio discuss the latest 'news on the Rialto' (3.1.1.). When the loss of Antonio's first ship is disclosed by a 'gossip' woman whom Salarino calls 'Report', Solanio retorts: 'I would she were as lying a gossip in that as ever knapped ginger' (3.1.5–7). It is perhaps not by chance, in this context, that Lancelot's witsnapping has to do with stomachs and appetites, eating and digesting; or that Act 3 scene 5 ends (as we will discover in a moment) with Jessica and Lorenzo witsnapping on these same topics.

There is, apparently, no end – and, more disturbingly perhaps but just as significantly, no beginning – to witsnapping. 'Wit' may primarily refer to humour here, but it can also mean sense, intelligence, imagination, invention, understanding, not to mention both male and female genitals. The snapping might be figurative or literal, funny or painful. To be a witsnapper is apparently to take everything and anything in the wrong sense or at least in a different sense, in other words to be 'quarrelling with occasion'. 'Wilt thou show the whole wealth of thy wit in an instant?' Lorenzo's question suggests that there is something good about holding wit in, about being sparing or restrained in its deployment. It is a

question of economy, once again. Lorenzo seems to be rehearsing the role of Dr Johnson, whose disdain for Shakespeare's witsnapping we noted earlier. 'I pray thee understand a plain man in his plain meaning,' Lorenzo tells Lancelot. But what does this mean? We could suggest that there is no plain meaning in Shakespeare without irony, and where there is irony there is no longer any plain meaning. Ironically, as if by a sort of thought transference or mental contagion of words, Lorenzo is here in fact repeating what Lancelot was saying before Lorenzo entered: 'I was always plain with you' (3.5.3), he tells Jessica at the start of the scene.

At Lancelot's exit Lorenzo's discourse shifts into verse: 'O dear discretion, how his words are suited!' He ironically apostrophizes discrimination ('discretion') as precious ('dear'), again evoking the mercantile language of wealth. Lancelot's words are said to be 'suited' or adapted to the matter in hand and yet they 'defy the matter', as Lorenzo goes on to make clear. 'Play upon the word' is still going on, even if Lorenzo does not say (or even realize) as much. While the sense of 'adapted' is clearly primary, the word 'suited' can also mean 'dressed', as it does earlier in the play when Portia ridicules the English gentleman who comes to woo her: 'How oddly he is suited!' (1.2.60). In Lorenzo's speech this other sense only becomes evident by a sort of deferred effect, a retroactive reading, as we reach the word 'garnished': 'I do know / A many fools that stand in better place, / Garnished like him, that for a tricksy word / Defy the matter.' 'Garnished' means 'dressed' (in terms of clothes) but also 'furnished' (in terms of language). Shakespeare's language is tricksy – ironic, deceptive, artful, ambiguous, crafty or capricious – even when it may appear 'plain'.

Lorenzo then turns to his wife, addressing her as his 'good sweet' (3.5.59). This 'good' is ironic, picking up on the 'army of good words' he has just attributed to Lancelot's memory, while the 'sweet' intimates edibility. Jessica would like to extol her husband's virtues but Lorenzo doesn't want to hear any more, he just wants to go to dinner. Reworking Lancelot's wordplay, Jessica says: 'Nay, let me praise you while I have a stomach' (3.5.75). Playing on the words 'serve' and 'digest', Lorenzo replies: 'No, pray thee, let it serve for table talk; / Then howsoe'er thou speak'st, 'mong other things / I shall digest it' (3.5.76–8). And Jessica's final retort at the end of the scene, 'Well, I'll set you forth' (3.5.78), plays on the sense both of extolling or greatly praising and of dishing up. The scene thus ends with a hint of cannibalism that whets the appetite and knife, anticipating the gruesome dimensions of the court scene that follows.

A few words to finish off, then, concerning Shylock. He loses his case, of course, but his final fate in the court scene (4.1), whereby he is ordered to convert to Christianity, is deeply humiliating, and his abrupt disappearance makes him the greatest after-presence of the play. If the retribution wreaked upon him seems, at least to a contemporary reader or audience, strangely cruel, excessive and unjust, we are also left with a strong impression of Shylock himself as 'strange', strangely strange. At the beginning of the court scene, 'strange' is the crucial word for the Duke in his preliminary summation of Shylock's case:

> Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
> That thou but leadest this fashion of thy malice
> To the last hour of act, and then 'tis thought

Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty.

(4.1.17–21)

Here the word 'strange' shifts from one sense ('remarkable') to another ('abnormal', 'unnatural'). 'Strange' is haunted by this strange capacity to become a stranger to itself. Portia, disguised as the young Doctor Balthazar, picks up on the word again when first addressing Shylock: 'Of a strange nature is the suit you follow, / Yet in such rule that the Venetian law / Cannot impugn you as you do proceed' (4.1.173–5). The court scene is in many ways in an entirely different tone and register from the passage in Act 3 scene 5 that we have focused on in this chapter, and yet it too turns on wordplay, on the strangeness of witsnapping. It is the witsnapper Portia who prevents Shylock from slicing up Antonio by noting that the bond says a 'pound of flesh' but says nothing about blood:

Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh,
But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are by the laws of Venice confiscate
Unto the state of Venice.

(4.1.304–8)

As I noted near the outset, *The Merchant of Venice* is a kind of Janus-headed play. In the court scene, as in Act 3 scene 5, we are left with a sense of the disruptive, non-frivolous or uncertainly funny nature of Shakespeare's language. Wordplay or witsnapping makes up the enduringly *strange* character of his writing.

2

PHANTASMA

Julius Caesar

A single word in Shakespeare can provide the spur for a reading of the entire play in which it appears. With this in mind, I want to suggest that what is perhaps most striking about *Julius Caesar* is its shaking of distinctions between being awake and being asleep, its dramatization of the strangeness of time, its ghostliness, its dreamy, hallucinatory qualities – in a word, its sense of 'phantasma'.

Julius Caesar was very likely written in 1599, though it was first published only in 1623, in the First Folio. The play is organized around the historical event of the assassination of Julius Caesar, in 44 BC. The narrative can provisionally be divided into three parts: the build-up, particularly focusing on those conspiring to do the deed (Brutus, Cassius, Casca, Trebonius and others); the event itself (centring on Caesar's '*Et tu, Brute*?': 3.1.77); and then its after-effects, from the extraordinary, crowd-stirring funeral speech by Mark Antony, 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!' (3.2.65), to the military victory of Antony, Octavius and Lepidus – the triumvirate in charge of the Roman Empire following Caesar's murder – over the chief conspirators, Cassius and Brutus. Cassius finally orders his servant Pindarus to kill him; Brutus commits suicide.

The word 'phantasma' appears fairly early on in the 'orchard scene' (Act 2 scene 1). This is the scene in Brutus's orchard when the conspirators gather to confirm that they will carry out the assassination. Just before the entrance of the other conspirators, there is a brief soliloquy in which Brutus says:

> Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar
> I have not slept.
> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
>
> (2.1.61–5)

The word 'phantasma' does not occur anywhere else in Shakespeare's writings. It has been variously defined as 'hallucination', 'wild vision' and 'nightmare'. The time of Shakespeare's play, I would like to suggest, the time of its happening and the time of its reading, is the time of a phantasma. As we hear more than once in *Julius Caesar*, 'What is't o'clock?' (2.2.114, 2.4.23). Is it night or day, today or tomorrow? Am I awake or asleep? Is this a nightmare or hallucination? And when will the

'phantasma' have stopped? It is primarily Brutus who thinks and experiences in terms of 'phantasma' but phantasma effects resonate, seep backwards and forwards, profoundly affecting the question of how we read the play as a whole.

The 'orchard scene' opens with Brutus trying to wake up his young attendant, Lucius, wondering what time it is and wondering when he will ever sleep soundly again: 'I cannot by the progress of the stars / Give guess how near to day. Lucius, I say! / I would it were my fault to sleep so soundly / When, Lucius, when? Awake, I say!' (2.1.2–5). Apparently posed as a question to someone who is not even awake, perhaps the most haunting word here is 'when?' Brutus's invocation of the 'phantasma' or 'hideous dream' occurs just after he has read a paper that has been surreptitiously left in his closet by Cassius, an apparently anonymous letter in which he reads: 'Brutus, thou sleep'st. Awake, and see thyself!' and 'Brutus, thou sleep'st. Awake!' (2.1.46, 48). In his soliloquy Brutus appears to invert this figure of sleep and wakefulness, saying that he has not slept since Cassius 'first did whet' (sharpen, excite, incite) him against Caesar. Yet the syntax of his remark unsettles things further. 'The interim' is itself figured as a hysteron proteron, the rhetorical term for a situation in which what should come after ('the acting' of the 'dreadful thing') is referred to in the speech first, before 'the first motion', the first thought or inward impulse. The 'interim', the time before the assassination, is thus evoked as a phantasma in which time is in reverse.

On the one hand, this sense of the later coming first and the first coming later is in keeping with the play's stress on portents, prophecy and foretelling, on the future shadowing the present. Most memorably, perhaps, there is the soothsayer who tells Caesar to 'beware the Ides [i.e. the 15th] of March' (1.2.18–23), a man whom he dismisses as, ironically enough, a dreamer: 'He is a dreamer, let us leave him' (1.2.24), Caesar declares. Correspondingly, there are the phantasma-like sightings of 'prodigies' and 'portentous things' (1.3.28–31) accompanying the great storm, the 'strange impatience of the heavens' (1.3.61) the night before the assassination.

On the other hand, the sense of the first coming later entails deferral, delayed action or after-effect. There is deferred effect, deferred meaning. The effect and meaning of the assassination take time to become apparent. They become, indeed, apparitional. Caesar is dead before the play is halfway through; yet he is in some respects more present, more active and imposing in the second half of the play than in the first. Shakespeare's play explores the idea that the dead are not as dead as one might like to suppose, especially if (like Brutus) one is answerable for their death. A person can be at least as powerful dead as when alive, and in *Julius Caesar* the dead person goes on demanding answers.

One of the most persistent and literally provoking words in *Julius Caesar* is, indeed, 'answer' (or cognate forms such as 'answered'). In attempting to answer for himself at Caesar's funeral, Brutus declares: 'If … any dear friend of Caesar's … demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer – not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more' (3.2.16–20). By way of answer, in his great 'Friends, Romans, countrymen' speech, Antony picks up on this word 'answer', now grimly turning it to the sense of 'pay the penalty for': 'The noble Brutus / Hath told you Caesar was ambitious; / If it were so, it was a grievous fault, / And grievously hath Caesar answered it' (3.2.69–72). The word is then

taken up with further deadly force in the following scene, the so-called Cinna episode, in which a group of plebeians, roused to destructive frenzy by Antony's funeral speech, confront a poet and friend of Caesar who happens to have the same name as one of the conspirators ('Cinna'). In menacing fashion they demand that he tell them what is his name, where is he going, where does he live, and is he a married man or a bachelor, and order him to 'Answer every man directly … briefly … wisely … and truly' (3.3.9–12). We are invited to share with the poet the paralysing but deadly challenge of having to answer such an unmanageably multiplicitous demand. He says he is a bachelor, going to Caesar's funeral, lives near the Capitol, name is Cinna, not Cinna the conspirator but Cinna the poet. The plebeians are evidently going to 'tear him to pieces' (3.3.26) in any case. No answer, it seems, can save him.

How is one to answer, respond to, or think about *Julius Caesar*? The most celebrated question in the play, '*Et tu, Brute*?', might appear to be a rhetorical question, or in any case a question that Caesar himself answers: '*Et tu, Brute?* – Then fall, Caesar' (3.1.77). Yet the rest of the play is concerned with how Brutus answers Caesar's question – with how he responds, how he is answerable, and how he pays the penalty. It is a question that continues to haunt: literally, it leads to the appearance of a ghost. The Ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus in Act 4 scene 3. This is the most dramatic and explicit instance of a phantasma in the play. It is also a scene of reading. Brutus is reading – inevitably prompting thoughts of the reader reading Brutus reading. In this passage we as readers encounter the idea that the very act of reading has a capacity for conjuring ghosts. What is a ghost? How do we respond to or *read* the Ghost in *Julius Caesar*?

It is night. Brutus is in his tent, in the camp near Sardis. In Shakespeare's condensed timescale, the Battle of Philippi is about to occur: the immediately following scene (Act 5 scene 1) shifts the action to the plains of Philippi. (In fact, Brutus was at Sardis early in 42 BC, and the Battle of Philippi did not take place until the autumn.) Others are requested to sleep; Brutus, as usual, cannot. He tells two of his men, Varrus and Claudio: 'Lie down, good sirs, / It may be I shall otherwise bethink me' (4.3.250–51). Evidently still subject to a strange vigilance, as he was at the start of the 'orchard scene', he asks his sleepy boy, Lucius, to bring him his book, then to play him some music and sing:

LUCIUS I have slept, my lord, already.

BRUTUS It was well done and thou shalt sleep again,
I will not hold thee long. If I do live
I will be good to thee.

Music, and a song

This is a sleepy tune. O murd'rous slumber,
Layest thou thy leaden mace upon my boy,
That plays thee music? Gentle knave, good night,
I will not do thee so much wrong to wake thee.
If thou dost nod thou break'st thy instrument.
I'll take it from thee and, good boy, good night.
Let me see, let me see, is not the leaf turned down
Where I left reading? Here it is, I think.

Enter the GHOST OF CAESAR

How ill this taper burns! Ha, who comes here?
I think it is the weakness of my eyes
That shapes this monstrous apparition.
It comes upon me. Art thou any thing?
Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,
That mak'st my blood cold and my hair to stare?
Speak to me what thou art.

GHOST Thy evil spirit, Brutus.

BRUTUS Why com'st thou?

GHOST To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi.

BRUTUS Well, then I shall see thee again?

GHOST Ay, at Philippi.

BRUTUS Why, I will see thee at Philippi then.

[*Exit Ghost*]

Now I have taken heart thou vanishest.
Ill spirit, I would hold more talk with thee.
Boy, Lucius! Varrus! Claudio! Sirs, awake!
Claudio!

LUCIUS The strings, my lord, are false.

BRUTUS He thinks he still is at his instrument.
Lucius, awake!

LUCIUS My lord?

BRUTUS Didst thou dream, Lucius, that thou so cried'st out?

LUCIUS My lord, I do not know that I did cry.

BRUTUS Yes, that thou didst. Didst thou see anything?

LUCIUS Nothing, my lord.

BRUTUS Sleep again, Lucius. Sirrah Claudio!
[*To Varrus*] Fellow, thou, awake!

VARRUS My lord?

CLAUDIO My lord?

BRUTUS Why did you so cry out, sirs, in your sleep?

BOTH Did we, my lord?

BRUTUS Ay. Saw you anything?

VARRUS No, my lord, I saw nothing.

CLAUDIO Nor I, my lord.

(4.3.263–305)

Here as at many other points in the play, Shakespeare's account closely follows Sir Thomas North's translation (published in 1579) of Plutarch's lives of Julius Caesar and Marcus Brutus. The question of how to read Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is intimately bound up with his own reading; this play offers particularly fascinating opportunities for observing instances of how Shakespeare himself read, of how he picked up the words of others, repeated and altered, mimed and made them his own. Most good modern editions of *Julius Caesar* (the Arden, Oxford and New Cambridge, for example) provide extensive excerpts from North's *Plutarch* to facilitate such straightforward but richly illuminating sleuth work.

In the corresponding passage in North's *Plutarch*, we read that 'Brutus was a careful man and slept very little' and that he would often 'read some book till the third watch of the night'. In North's translation the appearance of the ghost is described as follows:

> One night very late, when all the camp took quiet rest, as he was in his tent with a little light, thinking of weighty matters, he thought he heard one come in to him and, casting his eye towards the door of his tent, that he saw a wonderful strange and monstruous shape of a body coming towards him, and said never a word. So Brutus boldly asked

> what he was, a god or a man, and what cause brought him thither. The spirit answered him: 'I am thy evil spirit, Brutus; and thou shalt see me by the city of Philippes.' Brutus, being no otherwise afraid, replied again unto it: 'Well, then I shall see thee again.' The spirit presently vanished away; and Brutus called his men unto him, who told him that they heard no noise, nor saw anything at all.

It is clear that Shakespeare is indebted to this account in numerous ways, down to the very word or phrase. North's 'thinking of weighty matters' seems to have given Shakespeare the more concentrated, enigmatic and inwardly directed 'I shall otherwise bethink me' (4.3.251). The 'wonderful strange and monstruous shape of a body' in North is transposed to what 'shapes this monstrous apparition'. In North's *Plutarch*, Brutus asks the spirit 'what he was, a god or a man'; in Shakespeare Brutus asks (in similar though also in more Christian and anachronistic fashion), 'Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil …?' The words exchanged between Brutus and the 'evil spirit' are almost identical in both texts ('thy evil spirit, Brutus … thou shalt see me [at] Philipp[i]', 'Well, then I shall see thee again'), though it is a fascinating detail that the last of these formulations is presented as a question in Shakespeare ('Well, then I shall see thee again?'). There is, in fact, a peculiar unsettling of question and answer. In North we read that '[t]he spirit answered' and then Brutus 'replied again unto it'. The 'again' here is curious, since there was no first reply as such. Does one question a ghost? Or does a ghost question one?

The spirit's vanishing ('vanished away', 'thou vanishest') is in both texts, and Shakespeare also draws on the detail of Brutus then calling his men and discovering 'that they heard no noise, nor saw anything at all'. But there are remarkable differences between the account in North's *Plutarch* and what we find in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's text produces some far more complex and disturbing effects. In North, '[Brutus] thought he heard one come in to him' and, after the spirit vanishes, his men 'told him that they heard no noise'. Shakespeare does something new and profoundly different with this, first of all introducing a new figure, Lucius, who is not in Plutarch at all. There is '*Music, and a song*'; it is 'a sleepy tune', one that sends the player himself to sleep. Brutus says 'murd'rous' (a word which we might indeed reasonably associate with him) not of himself but of sleep or slumber, as if in a strangely transferred epithet, in a beautiful, querying apostrophe: 'O murd'rous slumber, / Layest thou thy leaden mace upon my boy, / That plays thee music?' Slumber is murderous in that it brings about '[t]he death of each day's life': there is an anticipation here of Shakespeare's account, written probably some seven years later, of 'murder[ing] sleep' in *Macbeth* (2.2.35–41). There is also a reference back to a description in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: 'Morpheus had with leaden mace / Arrested all that courtly company' (I.iv.44–5). Brutus queries what is happening, as if in indignation, asking how slumber can be arresting the person who is playing music to him: the allusion is to the sergeant or sheriff 's officer who places someone under arrest by placing his lead mace on the offender's shoulder. There is a further confusion and uncertainty here as to who ought to be declared or be declaring themselves a murderer. It would appear as if, paradoxically, it is the arresting officer who is 'murd'rous', not the musician. It is as if, in 'sleepy' language, Brutus is playing out some unconscious query that goes back to his contention in

envelop a singularly nightmarish world of its own, rendering to itself a hideous dreamtime.

3

LOVE-SHAKED

As You Like It

As You Like It is generally thought to have been written between 1599 and 1600, although it was not published until 1623, in the First Folio, and indeed there is no definite record of performance before 1740. As its title suggests, the play is concerned with desire. It is both simple, light, straightforward, and not. Consider the little word 'as', complex and deceptive from the start. It is not only the first word of the title but the first word of the play as well: 'As I remember,' it begins. We (who may like to think of ourselves as the 'you' referred to in the title) might choose to read the 'as' as a 'because', 'since', 'while' or 'when', but are perhaps more likely to read it as 'in the way that', 'to whatever extent', 'in whatever proportion'. The latter reading still entails uncertainty. Does 'as' involve something complete and whole ('just as', 'in just the way that') or not ('only to the extent or in the proportion that')? There is irreducible ambiguity here, whether we like it or not. Is the 'it' of the title the world or life? Or does 'it' refer to the play itself, or indeed the title? *As You Like It* is very much a play about itself, and about the limits (or not) of the stage. This is the play, after all, in which we find the great speech from the melancholy Jaques (to be variously pronounced 'Jakus', 'Jakwis' or, in Shakes peare's more lavatorial humour, 'Jakes', i.e. 'a privy') that begins: 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players' (2.7.139–40). 'Merely' here means 'purely' and is a word I will come back to. *As You Like It* is a masterpiece of lightness that is also a profound meditation on the nature of acting and the stage, playing and dissimulation. It shows how deeply desire and love are caught up in language, and dramatizes the pleasures as well as the anguish and strangeness of being a 'player'.

At the heart of *As You Like It* is the love between Rosalind and Orlando. She is the daughter of Duke Senior, a good man who has been deposed by his younger brother, Frederick. Banished from the court, Duke Senior has gone to 'the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England' (1.1.109–11). (The Forest of Arden is supposed to be in France, though it also happens to have been the name of a forest near Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford.) Orlando is the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys, now deceased but formerly one of Duke Senior's most loyal supporters. In accordance with contemporary English law, Orlando's eldest brother Oliver inherited all the family wealth on their father's death. Oliver was also charged with looking after young Orlando's education, a duty he has neglected. Rosalind stays at the court principally on account of her close friendship

with her cousin, Duke Frederick's daughter Celia. We are told that 'never two ladies loved as they do' (1.1.106–7), but then Rosalind meets Orlando and it is, evidently, mutual love at first sight. Shortly after this the usurping Duke, apparently of the view that his niece's positive standing among 'the people' (1.3.77) is working at the expense of his daughter's, banishes Rosalind along with her father. Celia chooses to go with her beloved cousin and live in the forest. Rosalind dresses as a young man, disguising herself as a shepherd called Ganymede, while Celia becomes a shepherdess, Ganymede's sister Aliena. Likewise Orlando is compelled to flee from the increasingly violent Oliver. As the old family servant Adam tells him: 'this night he means / To burn the lodging where you use to lie, / And you within it' (2.3.23–5). Orlando, then, also takes off for the forest.

The plot of Shakespeare's *As You Like It,* mostly based on Thomas Lodge's popular novel *Rosalynde* (1590), focuses on love and sexual desire, but also turns on the importance of religious or similar conversion. Duke Frederick meets an old religious man on the outskirts of the forest and becomes a 'convertite' (5.4.179), whereupon he hands back his crown and lands to Duke Senior, enabling his banished brother finally to return to the world of the court. Oliver, who gets into a scrape with a snake and a hungry lioness in the forest and is saved by his brother, Orlando, experiences a 'conversion' (4.3.137) to brotherly love and reconciliation. Romantic love seems similarly sudden and dramatic. Oliver also falls in love with Celia (or rather Aliena) at first sight. Looking, it seems, is enough to turn 'like' to 'love': 'Is't possible that on so little acquaintance you should like her? That but seeing, you should love her?', as Orlando puts it (5.2.1–2). And Celia likewise falls in love with Oliver. The play ends with no fewer than four marriages (Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, a shepherd called Silvius and shepherdess called Phoebe, and the court jester Touchstone and Audrey, a goatherd). The final scene, then, is of 'rustic revelry' (5.4.172), celebration and song.

If the world of the play is pervasively that of a 'golden world' (1.1.113), a world of romance and fantasy, it is also a stage on which we witness intricate and unsettling explorations of the nature of love, self and language. The key player in these explorations is Rosalind, as we can see from a passage in the middle of the play, shortly after Orlando first re-encounters her, now disguised as the shepherd Ganymede. Orlando has been wandering lovelorn through the woods, carving her name on the barks of trees and leaving love poetry hanging from the branches. One of these poems starts: 'From the east to western Ind / No jewel is like Rosalind' (3.2.84–5). But what is Rosalind 'like', in truth? In the dialogue that follows we encounter a strange cocktail of possible answers, along with some provocative suggestions regarding the nature of love and desire.

ROSALIND There is a man haunts the forest that abuses our young plants with carving 'Rosalind' on their barks; hangs odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles; all, forsooth, deifying the name of Rosalind. If I could meet that fancymonger, I would give him some good counsel, for he seems to have the quotidian of love upon him.

ORLANDO I am he that is so love-shaked. I pray you, tell me your remedy.

ROSALIND There is none of my uncle's marks upon you. He taught me how to know a man in love, in which cage of rushes I am sure you are not prisoner.

ORLANDO What were his marks?

ROSALIND A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not – but I pardon you for that, for simply your having in beard is a younger brother's revenue. Then your

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