

♦ Frankie Rubinstein ♦

A DICTIONARY OF
SHAKESPEARE'S
SEXUAL PUNS
AND THEIR
SIGNIFICANCE

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A DICTIONARY OF SHAKESPEARE'S SEXUAL PUNS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

In her original approach to the subject Frankie Rubinstein discloses the great playwright's rich use of bawdy to lay bare character, motive and plot. Even after generations of scholarship and memorable productions of his plays, we may still find significant meanings and insights hitherto overlooked or deliberately ignored simply because of their sexual content. The puns are essential expressions of Shakespeare's profound understanding of the human condition in all its facets, its frailty as well as its nobility.

Veneration can cripple Shakespeare, as it did woman when she was placed on a pedestal that made her either virgin or slut. Recognition of the sexual pun can rescue many a line from meaninglessness and redeem many a one-sided character or banal situation: the unreal transvestites dallying in forests, 'inexplicably' evil Iago or Richard, mysteriously misanthropic Timon, idealised Portia and Imogen and guileless Othello, etherealised Ophelia and Romeo and Juliet, and Shylock who seemed to need apologising for – they all become real people who live in a recognisable world of confused passions and sex with its sorrows and delights. (Study of individual characters in terms of the relevant puns is facilitated by the invaluable Index of Characters.)

This dictionary examines previously unnoted puns on the erotic attitudes and practices of the heterosexual and homosexual, including lesbians, and of the sexual deviant and the impotent. It includes scatological puns in their usually bawdy contexts, and ethnic puns, as sexually snide then as now. It stresses the need to read and hear Shakespeare word by word, giving full weight to each and asking why the line is so and not otherwise. It heightens our awareness of Shakespeare's words, their Elizabethan meanings and connotations, and contemporary vitality. For today's non-specialist audiences, the sexual puns are invitations to the fun of Shakespeare.

The bawdy sexual terminology, which the author sees as enhancing rather than diminishing Shakespeare, is frequently to be understood as figurative language conveying the sordidness of political, religious and social realities, just as today's vulgarity is not always to be interpreted literally but is understood to be an expression of personal and social discontents. For Shakespeare the pun was a verbal elixir that stimulated, titillated, mocked, deflated, philosophised. It is a literary code, a key to his view of the fullness of life and the emotions that motivate its human actors.

Frankie Rubinstein took her degree in English at Temple University, Pennsylvania, and for many years taught in the Philadelphia Public High School system.

To Alvin Zachary Rubinstein

Acknowledgements

I thank my mother, a beautiful and wise woman, who gave me two fathers: the first, a sensitive amateur artist, who viewed life through a moral prism; the second, a Rabelaisian man, a bold and brilliant teacher, who showed me there was no conflict between their two visions. I wish, also, to express my gratitude to the staff of the Macmillan Press – in particular, T. M. Farmiloe and Julia Steward, for their understanding and counsel in the making of this book; Valery Rose, for her patience and skill in shepherding the typescript through the editorial process; and Graham Eyre, a copy-editing genius, for his faithfulness to detail, sensitivity to the nuances of language and kind concern for the needs of both book and author.

Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

F. R.

Introduction

About anyone so great as Shakespeare it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.

T. S. Eliot

After generations of annotated volumes of Shakespeare, untold numbers of glossaries and analytical works, countless performances of the plays in virtually every major language of the world, we may still find significant meanings and insights into the human condition not seen, ignored, lost – these simply because of their sexual or bawdy content. The blinders of mores, taboos, censorship, fear of censorship, biases, blockages and the like have been perpetuated by scholars, directors and audiences of Shakespeare's plays.

However, we are witnessing a virtual explosion in free expression on sexual subjects – in criticism, theatre, cinema and television, and thus in audience and reader sophistication. This is a happy time to write on Shakespeare's sexual puns and their significance.

This dictionary is intended as a contribution to the understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare. It is not a study of 'bawdy' if by that word one means pointless obscenity or, as Eric Partridge did in his classic *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, 'such terms as fall "within the meaning of the Act"'. I do not minimise the contribution of him on whose shoulders we stand in suggesting that a sophisticated reader of our decade might guess at much in that glossary and realise that 'ability', 'abstinence', 'abuse', 'accost', 'achieve', 'action' and 'adulterate', for example, mean in certain contexts sexual ability, sexual abuse, sexual action, and the like.

One purpose of this dictionary is to identify the hundreds upon hundreds of still unnoted puns and to indicate their enrichment of the plays; to extend *the Act* of Partridge to cover *those many* acts usually ignored in textual footnotes – the erotic practices of heterosexuals and homosexuals (including lesbians), perverts, castrates, and the impotent; to illustrate that the scatological puns appeared usually in a context that was also sexually bawdy, and that the ethnic puns were as sexually snide then as now. In short, to show that Shakespeare, who we say understood and wrote of the human heart in all its facets, its frailty as well as its nobility, did exactly that.

A second purpose is to reawaken us to the value of reading and hearing Shakespeare word by word, giving full weight to each one and asking why the line was so and not otherwise. We must *visualise* each thing, each action, each modifier; staging, props and gesture cannot do it for us. For example, a TAPER¹ should evoke more than merely the intellectual concept of something that gives light. It is a wax candle. It has a particular shape; and it burns, so is subject to all the puns that have been made on that word: ardently with love, torturingly with venereal disease. And it tapers, meaning it shoots up like a spire or it diminishes in width and thickness and gradually decreases in activity and power. Once we start *seeing* like this, the bawdy, the beauty, and the brilliance of lines such as the following can be understood: 'And tapers burn so bright and every thing/In readiness for Hymenaeus stand' (*TA*, I.i.324). Or 'O, let me clip ye/In arms as sound as when I woo'd, in heart/As merry as when our nuptial day was done./And tapers burn'd to bedward!' (*Cor*, I.vi.32). Heeding each word, we shall not miss the eroticism in burning tapers. Asking why every *thing*, why *stand*, why *bedward*, we will see the complementary bawdy implications (even without being told by Partridge, Colman *et al.* that these words are frequent sexual puns on the 'penis', 'phallic erection', and 'bed of

love-making'. And, though Hymenaeus is Latin for a wedding and for the god of marriage (represented as a young man carrying a *torch* and a veil), we shall realise that every thing is standing and tapers are burning for hymen, the virginal membrane, as well as for Hymen, the god.

Were we an Elizabethan audience and truly word-conscious, we should realise that Marcius's 'taper' demands our attention since it was anticipated by Cominius's 'tabor', and that 'arms' encompasses both the affection and the military calling of the two speakers. We should know that MERRY often meant bawdy or wanton (as in *H5*, i.ii.271–2) and should recognise the merry/marry (K; as in *RJ*, iv.i.89) and 'nuptial' wordplay. We should also hear the pun on woo'd/wood (as in *1H6*, v.iii.77–90 – woo'd/would/wood), with the latter's potential for burning and its alternate meanings of passionate and enraged. Then we should see what Shakespeare intended: a whole sentence ablaze with sexual and military ardour.

Elizabethan scholars agree that we labour at a disadvantage because words were 'used in a way to which, without some training, we are no longer accustomed to respond'.² The Elizabethan audience was 'far more educated by ear and memory than we are, quicker in the uptake', says A. L. Rowse.³ They were up to date on the 'latest jokes with words' and were 'so well trained in the art of listening that they could hear a complicated joke on hour and whore', says Marchette Chute.⁴ This dictionary is intended to be a tool that can heighten our awareness of Shakespeare's words, their Elizabethan meanings, their connotations – and their consequent puns.

One way of determining whether Shakespeare intended a pun is to see if meaning is enhanced, and it is by the bulk of those I have selected. They act as signposts that Shakespeare stopped here and so should we. They alert us to larger metaphors or themes we might otherwise overlook and may be compared with biblical wordplay, which is based on the belief that names were keys to the nature and essence of a being or thing: 'God Yahweh formed man from clods in the soil and blew into his nostrils the breath of life' (Gen 2:7) – 'ādām means 'man' and 'a dāmā means 'soil'.⁵ Hence original man, Adam, made of clay.

When lines seem trite, self-evident, repetitive, or even lacking in sense, it may be that a pun carries the meaning. Samuel Johnson's criticism should be reversed – 'Reason, propriety, and truth' were not sacrificed by the Shakespearean 'quibble' but emerge from it. A simple example can be found in *VA*, 867–9, in which love-sick Venus 'hears no tidings of her love:/She hearkens for his hounds and for his horn:/Anon she hears them chant it lustily'. If to you the horn is only a musical instrument, the lines will be understood on one level only. But, if you see a second meaning of horn, i.e. the penis, or, as Partridge says, 'especially *penis erectus*', then you not only have a bawdy pun but also have given proper weight to the implication of 'lustily'. And for him who is rereading the poem – and it is only the rereader who can know the richness of Shakespeare's punning – the sensual impact of the line might be enhanced by his anticipating the later scene with another kind of horn – a tusk – and Adonis's death when 'the loving swine/Sheath'd unaware the tusk in his soft groin' (1115). The motif of Adonis's 'having a coital relationship with the hunted boar' has been pointed out;⁶ his death being a kind of parallel to the sexual experience he had tried to avoid with Venus: 'I know not love . . . nor will not know it,/Unless it be a boar, and then I chase it' (409).

Though a pun need not be repeated in order to be valid, when it is we feel confirmed in our judgement. Recurring word-clusters may also provide substantiation of intent. In *VA*, 867–9, the movement from *hears* to *hearken* and back to *hears* is the repetition in variation that is so often the sign of a pun. It directs our attention to 'hearken', derived from 'hark', i.e. to listen to and go in quest of – both of which Venus is doing; but its significance lies in its repeating the earlier ear–hearken–hears cluster, used by Venus when she urged Adonis to hunt, not the boar, but 'Wat', the hare: 'poor Wat . . . Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,/To hearken . . . Anon their loud alarms he doth hear' (697). Adonis pursuing the hare, symbol of lust and dedicated to Venus – this is the hunt Venus would have preferred, a reversal of their situation, and Adonis pursuing her. She is identified with Wat: personified, he 'Stands on his hinder legs'; he, too, *hearkens*, and he, too, hears the hounds anon; briars scratch his legs as bushes twine about hers. Cf. *AYL*, iv.iii.18: 'Her love is not the hare that I do hunt'.

The hare, also called a 'bawd' (*OED* 1592) or prostitute (P), is Shakespeare's punning perception of Venus. Adonis had described her as one that 'lends embracements unto every stranger./You do it for increase: O strange excuse,/When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse!' (790). Venus's hearkening for Adonis's 'horn' is one more punning element in the total picture of venereal excitement, meant to remind us that there are actually two simultaneous chases, Adonis's of the boar and Venus's of Adonis – and both are venery, i.e. the pursuit of beasts of game and/or the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

Of course, some puns are fun in and for themselves, of which the following from *Romeo and Juliet* is typical. 'By my [or "this"] count' is used twice in the play (the only two occurrences of the phrase in Shakespeare) and each time it means not only 'by my [this] reckoning' but also 'by my [this] cunt'.⁷ First, Juliet's mother says, 'ladies of esteem,/Are made already mothers: by my count,/I was your mother much upon these years/That you are now a maid' (i.iii.71).

Since Shakespeare's puns tend to grow out of one another, to dispose themselves not around a focal point but as in a helix, a simple pun often alerts us to the more subtle one. That function is performed here by the obvious pun depending for its humour on the contrast between the woman who was *made* and her who is a *maid*, 'making', as Partridge illustrates, meaning 'effectual copulation'; and it is by her 'count' that Lady Capulet was made a mother. In Juliet's repetition of her mother's pun, 'O, by this count I shall be much in years/Ere I again behold my Romeo!' (iii.v.46), there is supportive sexual innuendo in the pun on YEARS/arse and the introductory 'O'. As Shakespeare says in *MWW*, iv.i.53, in a pun on *fuck*: 'What is the focative case, William? – O, – vocativo, O.' Both 'O' and 'case' are puns on the pudenda (K; P).

Some of these puns may seem outrageous: Shakespeare's wit, like his genius, is unbridled. Ultimately each reader must decide for himself what meaning is pertinent, what irrelevant: whether what he is reading is a word with one simple clear-cut meaning, or a pun that functions coherently and consistently on two – or more – levels, or an ambiguity whose value lies in its connotations and overtones, indeed, in suggesting a word that may not even have been expressed.⁸ As Hilda R. Hulme says, 'To "prove" the existence of an indecent joke which the dramatic context seems strongly to suggest is not always easy.'⁹ A ROSE is a rose is a rose – but it is also a maidenhead, a pudendum, and a whore; it depends on where it is and whose it is.

Often, to make sense of difficult transitional or comic scenes and asides, we may find puns are our most helpful guide – and through them we may discern the continuity of important themes. For this reason alone, abridgement of the plays should be resisted. Let us look at several puns in one line of the comic interchange between certain Commoners and the tribunes that opens the play *Julius Caesar*. We shall focus on the cluster around the word ALL, which can mean any part of the pubic–anal area: the penis, a hole-boring tool, like the awl; the arse; the vulva, a (w)hole – i.e. all the 'holy [*sic*] reasons' for which the Clown in *AW*, i.iii.33, is marrying. To Shakespeare 'All is whole' (v.iii.37); and 'whole' means a *hole*, i.e. pudendum, rectum. (See P, s.vv. Whole, Hole, Holy.)

'Truly, sir, all that I live by is with the awl: I meddle with no tradesman's matters, nor women's matters, but with awl. I am, indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes.' This cobbler disclaims meddling (sexual intimacy) with the matters of the tradesman (brothel-keeper or bawd) or with women's matters (feminine pudenda; sexual intercourse). (For these puns see P; C.) Yet the all/awl does have *something* to do with these matters for, first, he did not need to mention them, and, second, he makes an exception to his disclaimer using 'but' and 'with awl', the latter punning on with his awl, withal or nevertheless, and a third pun meaning that, though he does not meddle, i.e. does not use his awl or sexual tool in such matters, still he does something *with all* the matters. The exception he makes is that with his awl he mends 'old shoes'. Since in his mind this activity has relevance to and yet must be distinguished from the first part of his sentence, we shall, for the time being, take old shoes to mean shoes of those in the trade, of tradesmen's (whores and pimps – P) shoes. For further clarification, see MATTER; OLD.

Or he may be a cobbler not by trade but only in the sense of that word's meaning a bungler, a botcher (*OED*; *Tim*, iv.iii.285). This is the meaning taken by the Tribune, for, though the Commoner has answered the question as to his trade with 'I am but, as you would say, a cobbler', Marullus, unsatisfied, persists, 'But what *trade* art thou? Answer me *directly*'

(italics added). Finally the Commoner redescribes himself as 'indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes'.

Since Shakespeare, like his contemporaries,¹⁰ used 'surgeon' and 'surgery' to allude to treatment of venereal disease (*Per*, iv.vi.29; see P), we see it is not shoes as such that the cobbler mends. He had also called himself a 'mender of bad soles' – as cobbler, the bad soles of shoes; but, as surgeon, the bad soles, bottoms or arses of whores – diseased and needing a surgeon. Marullus heard this bawdy implication, for he called the Commoner a 'naughty knave' – 'naughty' meaning obscene, bawdy; a 'naughty house', a brothel (*MM*, ii.i.77); and a 'naughty man', a whoremonger (P; F&H; C). A similar pun on the sole as the arse is made in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ii.iii.19, when Launce, after deliberation, decides the shoe 'with the hole in it' must be his mother (not his father) – 'the worser sole'. (See *WORSE* for puns on *whores*.)

The Commoner continues, 'when they are in great danger, I recover them', meaning he resolves the 'old shoes'. But 'great danger' certainly implies more than a hole in a shoe, and in conjunction with 'recover' suggests serious sickness, in this context, venereal disease.¹¹ Recovering refers to the cure this 'surgeon' effects and, since 'cover' means, and puns on, mount coitally (*OED*; P), *recover* indicates that they will be well and able to work, to fornicate and procure (to pander, as in *MM*, iii.ii.57). Cf. *recouvrer*, to recover, to procure (Cot).

So, though the cobbler meddles with no tradesman's or women's MATTERS, yet all he lives by is with the *awl* – yes, by recovering or curing the *all*, the (w)hole, or the diseased penis, vulva and arse(hole).

This metaphor continues in his boast, 'As proper men as ever trod upon neat's leather have gone upon my handiwork.' HANDIWORK is used three times by Shakespeare and the other two times it is explicitly 'God's handiwork' or the human body and is related to the act of creation. So not only do proper men walk upon his leather shoes, but they also tread and go, both of which mean copulate (P), *upon* the bodies of his cured whores. And the LEATHER or skin, a common pun on pudendum and whore,¹² is 'neat', a quibble on cow-hide and on clean or free from contagious disease (*OED* 1611; *1H4*, ii.iv.502: 'wherein neat and cleanly').

These are not idle bawdy puns; they are Shakespeare's commentary on the conspirators. The citizens are 'Kind souls'; Caesar was a 'good soul'; and Brutus, the 'Soul of Rome', 'will make sick men whole', though some are 'whole that we must make sick'. So Brutus, too, is a cobbler, dealing in soles, holes and mendings: his 'unkindest cut of *all*' and 'the *hole* you made in Caesar's heart' (italics added) are sad echoes of the cobbler with his hole-boring awl. Brutus's dagger, his manhood, and his deed of murder stand condemned by the association. And unfortunately, in the assassination aftermath, Brutus, like the cobbler, proves a botcher who bungles. He who had said, 'Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers' winds up one of the 'butchers', as Antony labelled the conspiracy. 'So are they *all*, *all* honourable men –' (italics added).

Brutus was the surgeon who hoped to cure the ills of Rome by ridding it of Caesar, who, he said, 'hath the falling sickness'. It cannot be accidental that Shakespeare chose this sickness, this phrase that reflects the disease-ridden 'falling trade' – as prostitution was known – that the cobbler tried to mend. Nor is it accidental that 'Cassius' sounds like *casus*, from *L cadere*, to fall; and 'Casca', *It cascade*, to fall. Cassius's refutation tars them all: 'No, Caesar hath it not; but you and I/And honest Casca, we have the falling sickness.' To understand this as meaning epilepsy just because Plutarch mentions Caesar's 'falling sickness' is to ignore a powerful symbol. Shakespeare could have said 'epilepsy' directly, as he does in two other plays (in *Othello* even saying, 'My lord is fallen into an epilepsy' – iv.i.51) but he was aiming for the more important symbolic identification of epilepsy and syphilis – both known as the 'foul disease' (*OED*)¹³ – the latter typifying corruption, decay, and perhaps 'Caesar's ambition', as in *2H6*, i.ii.18: 'the canker of ambitious thoughts'. (See *WORM*, *RJ*, for puns on the chancre of syphilis.)

The big question Shakespeare tackles in this metaphor of mending with an awl that makes holes as it sews, of mending with a dagger that made holes in Caesar's body as the conspirators

did, is the moral one of men mending by murder. Is this final solution properly only God's? The first line in Act I, 'Is this a holiday?' (holy day),¹⁴ starts the wordplay – holy/hole/whole, all – that contains this ultimate question. Shakespeare frequently makes the point that one recovers what is lost ('That so he might recover what was lost' – *IH6*, II.v.32). Hence the cobbler spoke of recovering those *soles* in great danger, the lost *souls*. ('We have here recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery' – *Ado*, III.iii.180.) But this may properly be the job of religion and its servants. Hence Brutus wished to think of the conspirators as 'sacrificers' and not 'butchers'. The question, of course, is, which were they?

It is genius, and it is all lost when the puns are lost.

Shakespeare's plays contain references to perversions such as incest, planning to rape a woman on the pillow of her husband's murdered body, killing children and serving them cooked to their unwitting mother. The literary London of his time was characterised by 'a kind of horrified fear of sex coupled with a fascinated interest in its abnormalities'.¹⁵ The theatres were in Southwark, the centre for brothels, bear- and bull-baiting; clients of the one passed the clients of the other. There was a Molly-house or male brothel in Hoxton. In these houses 'doubtless in true bordel tradition there would be . . . all the equipments needed by sadists and masochists, with the necessary female (or if need be, male) partners'.¹⁶ Although the Tudor Acts prescribing death were in force, there were known homosexuals in the court circles and among writers, including Francis Bacon and Christopher Marlowe. Only 150 years later, Tobias Smollett wrote of homosexual prostitution and of hermaphroditic waiting-women; reason tells us these were not inventions of his century. Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn, who financed the Globe, of which Shakespeare was part-owner, operated brothels. Alleyn's wife was carted away from one of which she was proprietress. When old Lord Hunsdon, the Queen's Lord Chamberlain, died, the Queen appointed his son George Carey, 'Widely reputed to be a sodomite as well as suffering from syphilis', whom satirist John Marston lampooned: 'at Hoxton now, his monstrous love he feasts: for there he keeps a bawdy-house of beasts'.¹⁷ The prevailing horrors and the relatively futile treatment of the pox may account for the high incidence of punning on it in the plays.

Juvenal, Vergil, Ovid, Greek and Roman playwrights whom Shakespeare read and drew on, wrote of and punned on farting, defecation, dildoes and pederasty. So did Shakespeare's contemporaries. Even theoretically it is difficult to believe with Partridge that this man – the greatest and truest mirror of far more than his own time – 'disdained' scatology; alluded to homosexuality 'very seldom and most cursorily', and never to lesbianism, 'an extremely rare deviation in Shakespearean England'; and of the 'nine terms' that 'may be presumed to allude' to masturbation, 'none alludes to a woman's self-pollution'.¹⁸ But we need not rely on theorising; we have the puns.

It is not for me to explain why others have ignored or minimised Shakespeare's handling of these subjects. Perhaps it was discretion, 'The better part of valour', as Falstaff puts it (*IH4*, V.iv.121) in a hardly valorous moment when he saves his life by counterfeiting death and then as another manifestation of valour proceeds to stab a man he knows to be already dead. But, unlike Hotspur, Shakespeare has refused to die.

The higher incidence of sexual, including homosexual,¹⁹ references in my definitions and consequent interpretations of the plays has, for me, no bearing on Shakespeare's sexuality: male writers have created great fictional women, women have created male characters, and homosexuals have created both – to say nothing of not having to be a murderer to create a Macbeth. But I think it a mistake to overlook the playing of women's roles by boys under eighteen – even more to the point, their delivery of women's lines – with all the ambiguities that can stem therefrom. In a different context, Harold C. Goddard speaks of the 'nature of human imagination, which has scarcely altered in a thousand years',²⁰ and we know the reaction of a modern audience to a 'drag' theatrical troupe or to the well-known androgynous actors or the singers of the pop world. The Elizabethan audience was oblivious to neither the sex nor the age of the players (Cleopatra: 'and I shall see/Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness/I' the posture of a whore' – *AC*, V.ii.220; Rosalind: 'If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards' – *AYL*, Epil.). The restriction of women's roles to very young males

because even a shaven face and relatively lower voice would have dispelled theatrical 'illusion' raises the question whether the essential maleness was ever completely forgotten. Troupes of child actors commanded the highest admission fees; A. L. Rowse quotes a protest against the performances of the 'Children of her Majesty's Chapel, "the lascivious writhing of their tender limbs, and gorgeous apparel" and *other uses* to which they were put' (italics added).²¹ One must wonder at the Jacobean's 'strange pleasure in watching violent and sexually perverse dramas . . . performed by children'²² – even written for them, like George Chapman's *Gentleman Usher* (1605), a bawdy satirical play acted by actors aged eight to ten.

If we accept this awareness, many puns become clear. In *The Tempest*, Miranda declares her love to Ferdinand: 'that dare not offer/What I desire to give, and much less take/What I shall die to want. But this is trifling;/And all the more it seeks to hide itself,/The bigger bulk it shows' (III.i.77). The involved wordplay – contrasting 'offer' and 'give' with 'take' and 'want'; 'less' and 'trifling' with 'more' and 'bulk' – is the usual indication that there is more than meets the eye. BULK meant the body of a living creature, a projecting part, and to swell, meanings on which Shakespeare elsewhere puns. Here we have an image strongly suggestive of a phallic erection that cannot be hidden, a situation familiar to us from other plays ('love is like a great natural, that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole' – *RJ*, II.iv.96). Reconciling this image to a woman's speaking of the nature of her love becomes easier when we realise that 'she' is a 'he'. Perhaps Miranda is glancing at that which on Ferdinand is showing 'bigger bulk', and Shakespeare is posing, as William Empson would say, a deliberate ambiguity for the enriched pun and the delight of the audience.

Or let us take something critics have called an anomaly, the association of one of Shakespeare's least attractive characters, Cloten in *Cymbeline*, with one of his loveliest lyrics (II.iii.22–30). It is a lovely lyric, on one level; but we are supposed to hear all the levels of Shakespeare's meaning, and when we do there are fewer anomalies and fewer things to explain away.

Here I merely want to point out that in the last couplet there is at least the possibility of a pun, since it is being sung not to a woman but to a boy playing the role (though he is off stage): 'With everything that pretty is,/My lady sweet, arise:/Arise, arise.' What I am suggesting is that 'arise' sung several times to a male could bring to mind a phallic erection, especially if he is to arise with every pretty 'thing', euphemism for the sexual organ (for use as penis, see P; C; F&H), and especially in the bawdy context of Cloten's having requested the musicians to 'penetrate her with your fingering, so: we'll try with tongue too'. The adaptation I am proposing is that her thing is really his thing and therefore her desired arising assumes a particular coloration. Colman says 'try with tongue' could allude to cunnilingus; however, could it not equally suggest what he recognises as 'the nearest homosexual equivalent' in a similar use of tongue in *TGV*, II.iii.52–5?

That 'arise' was intended as a bawdy pun is bolstered by other sexual innuendo in the same line, namely the use of PRETTY (ME 'prati') as a pun on *prat*, the buttocks (*OED*; P). This was a not uncommon word-association in Shakespeare's circle and times: Edward Alleyn wrote a letter for his apprentice, John Pyk, and jocularly signed it 'your petty, pretty, prattling, parleying pig'. Alleyn either deliberately punned on John Pyk/pig/Gkpyge (the rump) or else merely used current slang that had incorporated the pun: 'What prate ye, praty pyggsey.'²³ In *MND*, III.i.173, Titania orders her elves to light night-tapers 'at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,/To have my love to bed and to arise'. The close succession of her 'love' (whom we know to be Bottom), 'bed' and 'arise' indicates her anticipation of the sexual erection; again it is an ass/arise or prat (Bottom wearing his ass's head) that is to arise.²⁴

Arising only secondarily refers to the 'lady', to Imogen. The emphasis is on Cloten's erection, for it is, after all, the development of his character the scene intends to further. Even in the lyric sung to her, it was 'Phoebus 'gin arise' – a quibble on Phoebus, the sun, and Cloten, the son. This emphasis starts in the first line of the scene, when Cloten is called 'the most coldest that ever turned up ace'.²⁵ Here, in an ace/ass pun (K; noted in the Cambridge University Press edition of *Cymbeline*), it is again an ass (arse) that arises, that Cloten turns up. Concentration on Cloten's erection, expressed through the word 'up', continues in his saying 'I

am glad I was up so late; for that's the reason I was up so early'. And by the end of the scene he has made his decision to 'be revenged', which later becomes his plan for rape.

Most of Shakespeare's sexual puns have been interpreted in the light of male-female intercourse and with a too-heavy emphasis on female, at the expense of male, genitals. (Partridge claims there are fewer 'penis-terms' than 'pudendum muliebre'.) I propose that we remain open to the possibility that the context may ask us to employ analogous images. Not all concavities are vaginas; there are also anuses in Shakespeare's world. Not all globes are breasts or wombs; there are testicles. And the arse or prat or any punning synonym may not only mean the woman's buttocks and vaginal orifice, but apply equally to the man's buttocks and anal orifice, or for that matter to the woman's anus.

For example, Partridge confines Shakespeare's bawdy use of the word RING to the vulva; but, looking at Shakespeare's use of the word, we find that pun is too restrictive. Here is just part of the raw material from which he may have fashioned his alternate pun: *Lanus*, meaning ring; and the shape of the rounded anus itself.

In *Twelfth Night* our first introduction to a ring occurs in 'Run after that same peevish messenger,/The county's man: he left this ring behind him' (i.v.319). There is the same confusion about the ring, whether it is a man's or woman's (the Duke's or Olivia's) as there is about the messenger who 'left' it: Viola, a girl, passing herself off to the Duke as Cesario, 'an eunuch', whom Olivia believes to be a boy and is enchanted by. The confusion is capsulated in the paradox the 'county's man': 'county' or 'count' (pun in *cunt* – see p. xi) when joined to 'man' yields exactly what we have, a girl-boy, Viola-Cesario, a eunuch. And this girl-boy has left a ring BEHIND.

The play's bisexual tensions²⁶ emerge from the revealing quibble in 'left' and 'peevish' – left, i.e. not right; and peevish, i.e. perverse (Shakespearean use – *OED*) or deviating from right. Shakespeare is determined that we see the messenger as peevish: Malvolio repeats it in his lie (ii.ii.14) that has elicited much critical commentary. If we keep in mind Olivia's instant infatuation, her inability to distinguish between girl and boy, between sister and brother, we shall see the deviation or perverseness at which Shakespeare is hinting. This glimmer of lesbianism, noted also by Colman – 'She loves me, sure . . . I am the man', says Viola (ii.ii.23) – is reflected in the glance at male homosexuality in the immediately following scene, when Antonio expresses (i.48) sentiments for Sebastian (Viola's twin brother) corresponding to those of Olivia for Viola: 'I do adore thee so/That danger shall seem sport [copulation – P; F&H; C]'. Sebastian had said that *both* he and his sister were 'left behind' – like the ring. The repetition of this pun is a further link between the two scenes and the sexual ambivalence they contain.²⁷

We learn exactly what the ring is when the priest, speaking of the marriage of Olivia to Sebastian, says it was 'Confirm'd by . . . joinder of your hands,/Attested by . . . close of lips,/Strengthen'd by interchangement of your rings' (v.i.160). You may think these are merely wedding rings, but if you are impressed by the parallelism of the three participial phrases, each containing a parallel prepositional phrase, then you will see that, preserving the parallel, 'rings' is the third in a list of body-parts; and, that being the case, the mutual 'interchangement'²⁸ must imply *both* male and female genitals or that ring both sexes share in common, the anus and by transference the arse, that bawdy anatomic catch-all.

In *1H4*, iii.iii, the ring is again a pun on the anus. Falstaff claims his pocket was picked of a ring while he slept 'behind the arras'. Of the eleven times Shakespeare uses ARRAS, eight of them are 'behind the arras', and suggest an arras/arse pun. The Prince allegedly said, 'that ring was copper'. Falstaff threatens to cudgel him 'if he said my ring was copper'. And the Prince repeats 'I say 'tis copper'. Now this is either tedious nonsense, or it has a point, presumably a funny one. And funny it is – when we see the bawdy underpinnings. Copper is *Laes, aeries*; and 'made of copper' is *L aenus*. So the purpose of having Falstaff sleep BEHIND the arras was to introduce in that preliminary pun the COPPER,²⁹ i.e. venereal, ring – the ass/*aes* or arse/*aeries*, ring; the ring that was made of copper or the anus/*aenus*. Falstaff eventually backs out of the argument with 'as thou art but man, I dare; but as thou art prince . . .', a verbose construction explained by its effusion of ass/arse puns: as/ass; ART, *L ars*; but/butt.

The bawdy reduction of Falstaff's ring to his arse, as the only possible thing in his pocket that could have been picked³⁰ (it turns out there never was a ring) is supported in similar rank bawdiness and vilification of the Hostess: 'Setting thy womanhood aside, thou art a beast to say otherwise' – 'What beast! why, an otter' – 'An otter, sir John! why an otter?' – 'Why, she's neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her.' Footnotes say 'where to have her' means what to make of her, though 'where' is not what and 'have' means not make but possess, and specifically possess carnally (P) – and she is to set her womanhood aside. And why does Shakespeare choose an otter, the only time he uses this word, which he even emphasises with the pun in *otherwise*?³¹ Because the Hostess and Falstaff have something in common: his was a *seal*-ring and she is an *otter*, another aquatic mammal 'often taken as the type of an amphibious creature'. And both are being twitted about their arses (see OTHER). 'Amphibious' means of ambiguous or double nature; hence Ben Jonson named 'a land and sea Captain' Thomas Otter; Charles Cotton said the 'Hermaphrodite' is 'amphibious'; and Henry Fielding humorously described transvestite clothing as 'amphibious'. Colman also sees these lines as a reference to anal intercourse, though he comes to it by a different route, pointing out that 'neither fish nor flesh' implies 'neither male nor female'.

The sterility of the usual footnotes for a modern reader can, unfortunately, be too easily illustrated, their uselessness often in direct proportion to their erudition. Rowse called it making Shakespeare dull with 'mountains of commentary'.³² Lear's disgust for the 'face between her forks' of a simpering dame certainly meant the genital 'face'; the *OED* uses this line as illustration of the fork of the human body. So it seems a little like dragging a red herring across the trail to define forks as 'ornaments for holding up the hair' and not to hint at a sexual quibble. Another example is the dry glossing of an incredible tour-de-force of 35 lines all centring on ass puns, starting with 'Judas I am', the jest being laid wide open by the concluding 'For the ass to the Jude . . . Jud-as, away!' (*LLL*, v.ii.599). Yet footnotes treat all the in-between comic references to faces literally, ignoring the frequent Shakespearean pun on the FACE as the buttocks. Cf. *les fesses*, buttocks (Cot); and *fesse*, popular slang for prostitute (F&H, s.v. Barrack-hack).

Holofernes, a farcical schoolmaster, acting Judas Maccabaeus in an entertainment, is baited by his audience who claim 'thou hast no face', to which he retorts, 'What is this?' Elizabethans would have known the jest, so his question may have been accompanied by a flowery gesture encompassing both of his 'faces'. His audience answers him with a list of quibbles on various faces. One that desperately needs an explanation if it is to be witty is 'The face of an old Roman coin, scarce seen.' I suggest this is the ancient Roman copper as or *asse* (Cot); 'This new brassen Asse . . . stamped with a two-faced Janus' (*OED* 1601); subject of a pun in Plautus, *Asinaria*, 590: 'To whop those asses if they happen to start braying in the wallet here.' And, of course, of the two human faces, the ass/arse is the one 'scarce seen'. See OLD for puns on whores.

Calling Holofernes 'Monsieur' (v.i.47) reminds us we are in France and are speaking French, in which *fesses* are buttocks. When told the entertainment would be shown 'in the posteriors of this day' (94), Holofernes finds 'the word is well *culled*, *chose* . . . I do assure you, sir, I do assure' (italics added). Cul (*OED*) and *cul* (Cot) mean arse; *Fr chose* is the pudendum (P, s.v. Culled; F&H). How many clues do we need to know what face he has and what he is?

Another face, 'A cittern head', is glossed by W. J. Rolfe, learned editor of Shakespeare's plays (and by others following his lead) as the head of a cittern or guitar, often grotesquely carved. Yet he undoubtedly knew a cittern head meant a dunce, in other words, an ass: as John Marston wrote in the Prologue to *The Source of Villanie*, 'Shall brainlesse cyterne heads, each jobernole. . . .' He probably also knew the cittern was a pun on a whore. In Farmer & Henley, under 'Barber's music', we read that barbers provided citterns for waiting customers: in *The Honest Whore II* by Dekker (v.ii), Matheo speaks of a barber's citterne for every serving-man to play upon. In *The Silent Woman* by Ben Jonson (III.v), Morose says of his wife, whom his barber had recommended, 'I have married his cittern that is common to all men' ('common' applies to a prostitute – *OED*; P). This is the humour underlying Holofernes's saying, 'You have *put me out* of countenance' and 'you have *out-faced* them all' (italics added). He is punning on 'put' as to put coitally (*OED*; P) and on *fesse* and OUT (*hors* – Cot) as whores and

on *fesso* (a woman's 'quaint or water-box', i.e. cunt – F). His audience – 'as he is an ass' – has described him in terms of the ultimate degradation, a whore's ass.

It was probably Rolfe's feeling that an educated audience would see the puns or that it was poor taste or inexpedient to footnote them. Shakespeare's witty bawdry was often intended for sophisticated audiences in the court, the house of some nobleman, or the Inns of Court. We are frequently told, as if by way of apology, that the ribaldry was for the 'groundlings'. Yet Chute makes the point that Elizabethan audiences have been misrepresented and that the groundlings, the young apprentices sent up to London to learn a trade, 'belonged as a class to one of the most privileged and intelligent groups in London'.³³

One could go on and on to show how the modern non-specialist reader, even a well educated one, is left in total ignorance of the fun. It is such gaps as these that this dictionary seeks to fill.

Puns have many levels of meaning. Vulgar punning on the subject of fucking and bugging, name-calling such as 'whoreson' (son-of-a-bitch), is sometimes intended literally; more frequently it is figurative speech. It means no more than – and yet as much as – such language today. It is man's way of expressing the strength of an emotion, his anger or fear in the face of an antagonistic, destructive force, larger than he is, perhaps; a feeling for which the language of reason may seem inadequate. To the extent that we believe that the corpus of Shakespeare's work mirrors life, we should expect to find all kinds of sexuality, both as symbol and as substance, appearing across the stage he has set for us.

The emphasis in this dictionary is on literary interpretation, not phonetics or etymology. Any such information offered is tentative and meant to be suggestive only. It may or may not have been related to the formation of these puns, which must, ultimately, stand or fall on their own merit, on their contribution to understanding and enjoying the plays.

I do not minimise the threat some of the puns pose and can understand reluctance to open the Pandora's box. They may require radical reinterpretations, expose a seamier side to lines of lovely poetry, or upset cherished images of favourite characters. However, they are invaluable indicators of larger dramatic issues, reveal the complexity of many characters who might otherwise prove one-sided or banal, often rescue lines from meaninglessness, and provide intellectual stimulus and delight. The balance-sheet is in their favour.

Finally, whether the puns are deliberate or unconscious is a question sometimes raised by those who feel that, if they are not deliberate, then they may safely – and happily – be ignored. It is asked more often by Americans than by English. To look at a British newspaper is to see why: I have chosen, at random, the *Guardian*, 2 July 1981 – and here are some of the headlines. Pick your field. Politics? 'Blasted nuisance' (effect of nuclear weapons on communications systems). Business? 'How an industry took a pasting' (monopoly rules applied to roadside-poster marketing-company). Sports? 'Hitchhiker thumbs nose at challengers' (the *Hitchhiker* won the sailing race). Movies? 'A wizard knight club' (review of film *Excalibur*). Science? 'Keeping bats out of hell' (on their declining population, fewer roosting-places, and insect food being done away with).

These are Shakespeare's heirs who may not have his genius, but they have his will! And, if the puns were unconscious, does it really matter? If they come from his depths and speak to ours, perhaps that is the very source of their power over us, as potent as his conscious craft.

NOTES

Abbreviations are explained in the list on pp. xxi–xxiii; for publication details of modern works first cited in abbreviated form, see the Bibliography, pp. 316–20.

1. Words in small capitals are developed in the Dictionary.
2. L. C. Knights, *Explorations* (New York: New York University Press, 1964) p. 18.
3. A. L. Rowse, *William Shakespeare: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) p. 68.
4. Chute, pp. 102–3.

5. *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, ed. and trs. E. A. Speiser (New York: Doubleday, 1964) pp. 14, 16.
6. C, p. 159; Keach, pp. 79–81.
7. F&H, s.v. Shap, the female pudendum. Count: 'a woman's shappe', *con*. See also Burford, 'Orrible Synne', p. 230; C, p. 182, for a possible account/cunt pun in Son 136. *H5* Folio sp. 'count', pun on *con* (iii.iv.47–53). See K, s.v. GOWN/*con*, for the pun in 'count'.
8. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. I am deeply indebted to this study on ambiguities, which Mr Empson defines as 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reaction to the same piece of language'.
9. Hulme, p. 114.
10. John Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan*; 'house surgeon Mary Faugh' (ii.ii) is the 'Bawd' (i.ii); see BARBER.
11. In many clusters, recovery and danger are associated with the plague (VD), disease and lechery: 'He is so plaguy proud that the death tokens of it/Cry "No recovery"' (*TrC*, ii.iii.188); 'be cured of this diseased opinion . . . 'tis most dangerous' (*WT*, i.ii.298); 'dangerous piece of lechery' (*Ado*, iii.iii.179).
12. Leather: 14th–20th c., skin; 16th–20th c., female pudendum (P2). Leather: mutton, i.e. prostitute (F&H, s.v. Stretch). *L scortum*: hide; harlot.
13. See *OED*, s.v. Foul: 'The f. disease or evil: (a) epilepsy, (b) syphilis.' Shakespeare spoke of the 'foul disease' in *Ham*, iv.i.21, and *KL*, i.i.167, the 'evil', 'The mere despair of surgery', in *Mac*, iv.iii.146 – and I think it a fair assumption he knew these terms were applicable to both epilepsy and syphilis. See P and C for bawdy puns on 'fall'. Dekker and Middleton, *The Honest Whore I*, ii.i.30: 'down and arise, or the falling trade'.
14. Kökeritz notes the holiday/holy day pun in *KJ*, iii.i.81.
15. Chute, p. 200.
16. Burford, *Queen of the Bawds*, p. 73.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
18. P, pp. 8, 13, 25. Colman, however, points out the force of 'Shakespeare's references to chamber-pots, close-stools or flatulence'. He also notes 'lightning-flickers of lesbianism' that 'play round the two young women in their private conversations' in *Twelfth Night* (pp. 4, 86). For literature on the lesbian theme in the 16th–17th c., see West, pp. 178–9. Cf. Jonson, *The Underwood*, xlix, 'An Epigram on the Court Pucelle': 'What though with tribade [Lesbian] lust she force a muse'.
19. We use the term 'homosexual' to cover engaging in homosexual practices the one time under discussion, some time, or all the time; understanding that in literature, as in life, homosexuality does not exclude affairs or marriage with women or the having of children by them.
20. Goddard, vol. i, p. 8.
21. These are the same 'children' who 'are most tyrannically clapped for't' in *Ham*, ii.ii.354. This quibble of Rosencrantz on 'clap' (coit – P; gonorrhoea – *OED*) dovetails with the sentiments of the City Fathers. Dryden in *MacFlecknoe* speaks of the 'Nursery' (the theatre in which young actors were trained) as the place 'Where unfledged Actors learn to laugh and cry./Where infant Punks [whores] their tender Voices try'. And Jonson in *The Devil is an Ass*, ii.iii, tells of a 'very pretty fellow', an 'ingenious youth' who was brought to parties 'Drest like a lawyer's wife' and would 'talk bawdy' so that 'It would have burst your buttons' (in the 16th c. these commonly referred to those on the codpiece; see BUTTONS).
22. *The London Theatre Guide, 1596–1642*, ed. Christopher Edwards (London: Burlington Press, 1979) p. 38.
23. Chute, p. 217; F&H, s.v. Pigsney (Skelton 1529).
24. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, New Variorum edn, ed. Furness, quotes scholars who wonder that Shakespeare, usually so observant, could make such an error as to speak of lighting tapers at the glow-worm's eyes, when, they say, everyone knows the fire is in the glow-worm's tail. Whenever a Shakespearean error is mentioned, one should suspect the possibility of an overlooked pun: by 'eyes' Shakespeare meant the tail (i.e. posterior) and

- was making one of his frequent puns on eyes (arse), which – in this disputed line – leads right into the pun on Titania's desire to have her love *arise*. See EYES.
25. This line is one of several (Cloten was also called a 'capon') that permit speculation that Cloten was bisexual. In a review of the 1979 Stratford production of *Cymbeline*, the actor of Cloten was described as having assayed 'the epicene' (*Observer*, 22 Apr 1979). In 'turned up ace', 'turn' is copulate (P; F&H).
 26. A Stratford production of *Twelfth Night* was praised by reviewer Robert Cushman for successfully conveying these tensions in an atmosphere that is 'in Auden's phrase a bit whiffy': 'the most believable boy-girl since . . .'; and 'an Orsino . . . as apt to fondle a page as a mistress, who at the close addresses himself to the wrong twin'.
 27. The pun on BEHIND is strengthened by the rapid succession of arse puns in the one sentence: Sebastian was left 'behind' and would have so 'ended' had he not been taken from the 'breach' (common breach/breech pun) of the sea by Antonio.
 28. Guilt by association links interchangement to sexual intercourse: 'joinder . . . close . . . interchangement'. CLOSE = the sexual embrace, as in 'and 'twere dark, you'd close sooner' (*TrC*, III.ii.51). To JOIN (*L copula*) = copulate.
 29. 'Venereal' means of or pto to COPPER, formerly called Venus by chemists. In alchemy Venus is the metal copper, which was anciently used for mirrors, a mirror still being the astrological sign for the planet Venus.
 30. Picking pockets – mentioned six times in this scene – is not merely picking them of money but quibbles on sexual digging or piercing: 'this house is turned bawdy-house; they pick pockets'.
 31. K, p. 109. 'Th' was pronounced 't' as in the goat/Goth pun, *TA*, II.iii.110 and death/debt pun in *IH4*, I.iii.185.
 32. Interview on the Dick Cavett television show, 1 Dec 1978.
 33. Chute, p. 39. Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), makes an even stronger case for a 'privileged' clientele, saying plebeians were much less frequently in the audience, and in much smaller numbers, than has been assumed.