

M. M. Mahood, *Shakespeares Wordplay*— Some Reappraisals Introducing the Subject

When I was a young girl a ticket for the gallery was 50 pfennigs (six-pence), and didn't I buy it and use it and wish to be tamed by Petruchio (who made his entrance by vaulting the rails) and cry over Gretchen in the dungeon, with the voice of heaven rendering Mephisto's verdict of guilty null and void, a blasphemy, a ridiculous presumption. The devil was a fool. Concerts were also to be had for 50 pfennigs but church music cost nothing at all, and so there was Bach, including *The Art of Fugue* played (for want of an even diviner instrument) on the organ and culminating in B-A-C-H (B and H meaning in German B flat and B).

So when I began studying literature, Aristotle and Horace and Quintilian had something to go on: of course there was such a thing as a cathartic experience through a work of art, in contrast with real pity and fear in real life, and of course poetry, especially dramatic poetry, makes it possible for us to be moved and delighted at the same time. Again of course, in poetry *nomen est omen* in the very sense that B-A-C-H is a fugal subject; no one makes this clearer than Shakespeare: "There are . . . books in brooks," and when ("only for a jest") Master Ford wants to be called Brook, the officiating Host employs a baptismal formula echoing Isaiah 9:6 and anticipating Handel's *Messiah*: "and thy name shall be Brook."

Yes, wordplay is a word to conjure by in the understanding of poetry. But, felt I, how to do it? For, if there is anything that needs a master, it is conjuring. As Sidney so very rightly says: for poetry to be brought into being it needs not only the divine fire but also a hard-won technique. Similarly, the pursuit of literary studies requires a natural affinity to that second nature as well as a detailed and extensive knowledge of it; both, however, will be of little use without a thorough

training in the art (or craft, or mystery) of interpretation. To proceed from appreciation to elucidation it needs valid criteria of how to read, that is to say, how to grasp the truly literal meaning of the words, uttered by the "tongues in trees" which are made audible by the language of poetry. Surely, "To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit," and the great thing is to learn that art of hearing.

One of the masters who helped me bridge the gap between the love of poetry and the interpretation of literary texts is M. M. Mahood, whose work I have found so especially congenial because she provides tools from the workshop of philology (and rhetoric and the history of literature and ideas) by which actually poetic matters can be handled. It goes without saying that they have to be used according to the poet's own "fore-conceit or idea of the work" and Professor Mahood does so use them, beginning with the most cherished plaything of poets, the word, and going on from there to the structured whole. In Shakespeare the words "word," "world," and "worth" recur as a triadic formula. The world and the word belong together as God's law and every jota of it, or as the grown tree and the seed in which all the "worth" is comprised, or as the poetic work and the single word which must not be lost or the whole structure collapses.

When we began to think of this re-review of *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, the chapter on *The Winter's Tale* seemed a likely choice because it reveals in an especially intriguing manner the poet's idea of play, be it with dramatic genres from ultra-modern pastoral tragicomedy to outgrown morality, or with the *dramatis personae* including Father Time and a live statue, or with the unities of place and time, or with the single word, which in this play is not only an element of play but called by that very name: "go play, boy, play."

My co-editors and I wish to thank Professors Gibbons, Hunt, Laird, and Muir for their contributions. Above all, we are grateful to Professor Mahood.—When this issue of *Connotations* was ready for the press the sad news—reached us that Professor Kenneth Muir has passed away. Working with him was as great an honour as it was a pleasure and we shall miss him very much.