“I loved my books”: Shakespeare and the Modernity of Loving Literature

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Publisher's version at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17450918.2017.1291535>

Over the past decades, the reading experience has acquired an increasingly important place in our cultural histories, as historians of reading trace profound shifts in the circulation and consumption of writing. Partly reflecting this development, Shakespeare criticism itself has become increasingly attuned to book history. The dialogue between the two disciplines, however, still shows significant hiatuses. This article will revisit key portrayals of readers in five plays so as to interrogate the uses to which Shakespeare has been put in some recent histories of reading. More specifically, it will show how Shakespeare's depictions of reading can bring important nuances to the historical argument of a seminal and much acclaimed history of readerly emotion, i.e. Deidre Shauna Lynch's *Loving Literature*.

In dissecting the preconception that those who teach literature are supposed to love their object of study, Deidre Shauna Lynch's *Loving Literature* offers more than a polemical rebuke to contemporary clichés about English professors who ruin the enjoyment that books afford. As her subtitle *A Cultural History* indicates, Lynch traces a genealogy of the emotions that literature is supposed to generate. She locates the roots of a love of literature in an eighteenth-century culture where the incipient professionalisation of literary study coincided with the rise of a culture of sensibility that encouraged affectionate responses to literary works. By historicising the idea of 'loving literature' as a comparatively recent construct, Lynch aims to dispel a tenacious myth about literary studies. Most reviews of *Loving Literature* confirm that her polemical argument has had remarkable purchase.¹ At the same time, comparatively few questions have been raised about its historical argument. By extending the chronology of a 'modern' love of literature into the early modern period through an examination of various portrayals of reading in Shakespeare, the present essay

does not purpose to de-historicise or essentialise such love, but to ponder on what its supposed modernity may owe to older forms of attachments to books. It will suggest that Shakespeare's work did not just become an object of modern affections (the only angle from which Lynch discusses the Bard): the plays may have also helped shape those affections through the portrayal of readers in texts that achieved canonical status during the age of sensibility.²

To the extent that literature was not constituted as an autonomous discourse before the period when its love is said to emerge, Lynch's historical argument seems both unanswerable and partly tautological: pre-modern readers would not have felt love for something that did not exist as such. Before the rise of 'literature,' of course, written texts had long elicited certain forms of affection: a *Book Lovers' Anthology* published in 1911 (and which seems to have escaped Lynch's notice) includes fragments that go back to Chaucer (Leonard). As Lynch herself concedes, "particular texts had been lauded for moving the passions since Longinus's day at least" (12). Still, she insists that our modern definition of the 'literary' emerged concurrently with the phenomenon of the 18th-century 'men of feeling,' and thus "cannot be understood apart from the history of emotional practice": the new idea of 'loving literature' thus represented "a watershed in the history of the emotions and intimate life" (6). Her historical argument bears both on the rise of "practices and institutions of reading" (12) and on the specific kinds of love for literature that they fostered among readers in an age of sensibility: not just vague, undefined "passions" (11) that could settle on texts just as easily as on any other object, but "the peculiarity of the emotional practices" (14) that the modern institutionalisation of literature brought into being. The process through which a new sense of 'literature' was partly defined by the emotions that reading could stimulate was a protracted one: Lynch herself gives examples of early-nineteenth-century self-styled lovers of literature whose reading still encompassed "political writing (...) that to twenty-first-century readers

might seem deficient in the imagination we require of instances of literariness” (7). She is more categorical in delineating the expressions of ‘book love’ that have come to define modern individuals’ private affections for reading, identifying four broadly recognisable varieties: a “grateful love” (15) to the book as a friend and substitute for authors whose presence books virtually materialised, a “possessive love” (15) that turned reading into “a secret enjoyment engaging one’s private rather than one’s public self” (86) and that transformed some literature lovers into manic book collectors, a “love that is a habitual, everyday affair” (15), where books were associated with the routine, stability and dependability of domestic life (16), and an “elegiac love” (15) that connected reading with mourning, necromancy and intimations of ghostly presences (17).

While Lynch marshalls compelling evidence from the works and practices of the likes of Samuel Johnson, Thomas Warton and Leigh Hunt, her own specialisation in 18th- and 19th-century literature may have caused her to play down earlier instances of some of those varieties of ‘book love’ – a phrase which is not quite synonymous with ‘loving literature,’ as its focus on the materiality of the book imperfectly overlaps with Lynch’s attention to the effects of the reading experience, but which Lynch regularly uses in her descriptions of readerly affect.³ Even though ‘books’ covered a wider discursive field than a body of ‘literature’ that was yet to be conceptualised in the Renaissance, they would of course have included works that fall within modern definitions of literature, which in their turn long remained permeable by other discourses. Most importantly, the responses that books elicited in the Renaissance sometimes coincide with or prefigure the different forms of love that Lynch anatomises. This is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in certain scenes of reading in Shakespeare’s plays – scenes which, famous though some are, remain curiously absent from Lynch’s discussion.⁴ While some of Shakespeare’s portrayals of readers bear out arguments that see a fairly sharp distinction between Renaissance reading practices and our

own, others depict incipiently modern varieties of book love more than a century before the revolution of feeling that is supposed to have spawned them.

Loving Literature explicitly builds on histories of reading that situate the rise of the private reader in a post-Renaissance Western world marked by bourgeois individualism and by increased rates of literacy and of book circulation. As Daniel Boyarin explains, the “association of reading in the West with the private social spaces and meanings of the erotic” (19) is a relatively recent concept that emerged from the dissolution of a culture where readers marked their participation in a common rhetorical culture: as Trevor Ross among others has insisted, the point of reading was emulation and production rather than personal appreciation (13). Histories of reading often focus on the protracted transformation of an essentially public and civic performance into a private practice where personal gratification was central. The novelty of Lynch’s contribution to the field consists in charting the development of the emotional, quasi-erotic effects that attended on the modern reader’s new sense of privacy. Withdrawn, solitary readers existed in pre-modern times, but unless their practices were sanctioned by forms of religious devotion and/or scholarly labour that required the isolation and silence necessary for concentration, they were often depicted as aberrations. Augustine’s *Confessions* thus describe how the fourth-century bishop Ambrose of Milan, caused wonder by silently reading in the presence of others: “the practice seemed so unusual to Augustine and others around him that they debated about ... it and offered possible explanations for it” (Howe 60).⁵ Private reading could invite censure as well as puzzlement, particularly when it was linked with erotic associations. This is evident from the story of Paolo and Francesca in Dante’s *Inferno*, as the doomed lovers famously fell in love after they isolated themselves to pass the time reading a book together.⁶ Some studies situate a growing acceptance of solitary reading practices in the late Renaissance, although the period remained one of protracted arguments between supporters and opponents of private reading.⁷ The transition was long and

complex, but histories of reading broadly agree that Renaissance readers essentially inhabited a rhetorical culture where acts of reading had a public dimension: readers sought to improve their verbal skills through imitation and/or to access a public world where the texts that they read were debated.

Private habits of silent reading increasingly took hold among certain classes,⁸ but in their concentration on the social and material contexts of reading, histories of book use used to evade the question of the emotions that accompanied reading. Some of them yield limited anecdotal evidence of late mediaeval or early Renaissance expressions of book love that could actually fit in Lynch's 'modern' categories. In Erasmus's "The Godly Feast" (1522), the character of Eusebius declares "Among friends, I confess my love, I can't read Cicero's *On Old Age*, *On Friendship*, his *Offices*, his *Tusculan Disputations* without sometimes kissing the book": the scene displays "an affective relation to content" that reminds us "just how intimate the relation is between engaging a book physically and engaging it cognitively" (Cormack and Mazzio 8). The gratitude expressed by Erasmus's early Christian intellectual comes close to the kind of anthropomorphising love for the book as personal friend that Lynch sees as a defining feature of 'grateful love'. But the confessional tone of that rare, quasi-guilty admission also confirms that such emotional reactions were not fully sanctioned by a broader reading culture.⁹

When histories of reading draw illustrations from Shakespeare's plays, they mostly turn to Shakespearean readers as iconic representatives of Renaissance reading cultures. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker's survey of readerly practices in the period thus summons Hamlet and Prospero as follows:

In *Hamlet* meditation is epitomized by the actor with book in hand, the stage prop here a synecdoche of the intellectual life. Prospero's books were the very source of his magical

powers; Caliban's education into language the foundation of his civilization into society. (17)

Such vignettes do not always do justice to the complexities of Shakespeare's scenes or of his characters – in what follows, the straightforward link that is made between Prospero's books and a colonialist nexus of power and knowledge will be specifically queried. Another feature of those brief invocations of moments of reading in the canon is that Shakespeare's treatment of readerly affect remains a moot point: the focus remains on the social implications of public and private modes of reading. Shakespeare scholarship centred on his use of books offers more extensive but also more conflicted analyses: partly drawing on such debates, we will trace possible prefigurations of Lynch's modern book love (as well as more obvious counter-examples) in scenes of reading in five of Shakespeare's plays.

Love's Labour's Lost features various kinds of assiduous readers, but their relations to books are still clearly grounded in the rhetorical culture of Renaissance reading, even as this early comedy's satirical aspects hold that culture up to critical scrutiny. The play opens with the King of Navarre's resolution to withdraw from the world for three years in order to devote himself to the study of books, accompanied by three courtiers. Although such an exclusive dedication to reading became central to the eighteenth-century student literary clubs that Lynch discusses in her account of 'possessive love' (98-102), *Love's Labour's Lost* actually confirms a key difference between its characters' bookishness and the book love that defined reading in an age of sensibility. The King may envisage "a little academe,/Still and contemplative in living art" (1.1.13-14), but any idea of enjoyment is conspicuously absent, and the immersion in books, though meant to last for three years, is ultimately a means to a greater end that will be realised upon the scholars' return to the world. Navarre calls upon his courtiers to show themselves "brave conquerors—for so you are,/That war against your own affections" (1.1.8-9). The King clearly believes that the bookish recluses will need to ban all

possible sources of enjoyment from their lives: “[t]he distinction between knowledge and affection is central to the trajectory of the play” (Scott 91). Navarre’s ‘bookmen’ do not decide to devote their time to studying out of an emotional attachment to books, but because they see it as a way to achieve fame:

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
And then grace us in the disgrace of death (1.1.1-3)

This search for glory and immortality marks their bookish pursuits as a typical ambition of Renaissance intellectuals. The bookish life Navarre envisions thus differs from the eighteenth-century literary clubs of Oxford undergraduates that Lynch describes as “space[s] of furtive, pleasurable, and [...] puerile privateness” (100), where students spent their after-school time drinking alcohol and talking about books. Such literary gatherings were “a respite from ambition and seriousness” (100), their main goal, as the presence of liquor demonstrates, being enjoyment. For Navarre, by contrast, a proper relationship to books excludes the idea of pleasure, and is thus difficult to characterise as ‘book love’.

Navarre’s plan fails almost instantly. Although the king decreed that “Till painful study shall outwear three years,/No woman may approach his silent court” (2.1.23-24), the arrival of the Princess of France and her three attending ladies causes the ‘bookmen’ to forsake their plans. Berowne had already predicted that their war against affection would fail since “every man with his affects is born” (1.1.149), and the idea that such “affects” could be directed at books themselves clearly has no place at the court of Navarre. Shakespeare’s comedy satirically portrays would-be scholars who cannot repress their natural emotions for women, but nowhere does it explicitly depict an attitude to books that would be emotionally fulfilling. But if the satire of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* lacks a modern concept of book love from which

older attitudes to books could be criticized, other Shakespeare plays gesture more clearly towards that very idea.

Titus Andronicus seems an unlikely place to look for book love. In its relentless focus on violence, this early tragedy mostly features readers whose erudition prompts them to emulate the bloodthirsty deeds contained in the literature they are familiar with. Bookishness in the play seems to generate a dreadfully literal version of Renaissance one-upmanship where the public uses of a literary culture are graphically displayed on stage. Thus, Chiron and Demetrius's plan to rape Lavinia and then cut off her hands and tongue is directly inspired by their reading the tale of Philomela and Tereus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Philomela's story is first mentioned by Aaron, who is plotting the murder of Lavinia's husband Bassianus. While informing Tamora of his plans, he explicitly links Lavinia to her mythological precursor: "This is the day of doom for Bassianus:/His Philomel must lose her tongue today" (2.3.42-43). The parallel is later also noted by Lavinia's uncle, Marcus Andronicus, when he meets his mutilated niece: "But, sure, some Tereus hath deflowered thee/And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue" (2.4.26-27). Marcus, however, also notes a difference between Ovid's story and Lavinia's situation:

Fair Philomela, why, she but lost her tongue,

And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind;

But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.

A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,

And he hath cut those pretty fingers off

That could have better sewed than Philomel. (2.4.38-43)

Marcus's allusion has been seen as a sign of his dependence on literature, as he seems "incapable of having a thought that does not either immediately point to some literary precedent or take its inspiration from an event made beautiful by literature" (West 73). Many

of the play's characters indeed allow their literary education to determine their words and actions (West 65-67, 73-75).

While Titus makes various references to literary texts in Act Four, it is not until Act Five that he tries to take revenge by actually imitating actions he has read about. Like the criminals he pursues, Titus tries to emulate the Philomela myth. Philomela was revenged by her sister Procne, who, after discovering that her husband had raped Philomela, killed her son by Tereus and served him to his father as a meal. Titus plans to kill Chiron and Demetrius and

make two pasties of your shameful heads,

And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,

Like to the earth swallow her own increase. (5.2.188-90)

Just as Chiron and Demetrius tried to outdo Tereus's crime by not only cutting off Lavinia's tongue but also her hands, Titus wants to 'improve' upon his literary model. "For worse than Philomel you used my daughter," Titus tells the brothers, "And worse than Procne I will be revenged" (5.2.193-94) (Hunt 210). Titus's banquet and his use of the Philomela story confirm that he "has read the myth, seen it deployed, and now becomes capable of rewriting it for his own purpose of revenge. Imitatio leads to inventio, which leads to a horrific amplification" (Pearson 44). As for his killing of his daughter Lavinia, Titus invokes the tale of Virginius, calling it "A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant/For me, most wretched, to perform the like" (5.3.44-45). On one level, by underscoring how texts function in a public culture, *Titus Andronicus* illustrates "the efficacy of a shared cognition" (Scott 38). On another level, such uses of literary culture are grimly exemplary of the public nature of Renaissance reading practices; the fact that they are steeped in the play's hyperbolic violence has prompted modern critics to speculate that Shakespeare was parodically criticising the very forms of emulation at which he himself was so adept. Lavinia's death has thus been interpreted as a critique of Titus's imitation of literary texts (Hunt 213).

Contrasting with the spiralling violence of emulation, *Titus Andronicus* also shows characters expressing a more private love of literature, namely in the scene where the Andronici find out what has happened to Lavinia. Not incidentally, the different form of reading that is at the heart of that scene is associated with a female reader – a type of reader for whom privacy gained cultural acceptance more quickly than in the still very public world of male reading.¹⁰ At the beginning of Act Four, Young Lucius enters the stage with his books under his arm, the maimed Lavinia running after him. In the previous scene, Titus had suggested to his daughter and grandson that they should try to find comfort by reading sad stories together:

Come, take away. Lavinia, go with me.
 I'll to thy closet and go read with thee
 Sad stories chanced in the times of old.—
 Come, boy, and go with me. Thy sight is young,
 And thou shalt read when mine begin to dazzle. (3.2.81-85)

When Marcus sees the boy's fear at his aunt's frantic behaviour, he reminds him of how Lavinia used to read to him: "Ah, boy, Cornelia never with more care/Read to her sons than she hath read to thee/ Sweet poetry and Tully's Orator" (4.1.12-14). Young Lucius then explains his fear, revealing that he, too, has read Ovid and has been influenced by it:

And I have read that Hecuba of Troy
 Ran mad for sorrow. That made me to fear,
 Although, my lord, I know my noble aunt
 Loves me as dear as e'er my mother did,
 And would not but in fury fright my youth—
 Which made me down to throw my books and fly,
 Causeless, perhaps. (4.1.20-26)

The references to Young Lucius's mother and to Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi brothers whose education of her sons made her famous, establish a link between reading and motherhood. More generally, the scene presents reading as an important part of family life, since it is essential to Lavinia's relationship to her nephew and to Titus's plan to console his daughter. Books are here the means through which the different generations of the Andronici are able to achieve mutual understanding (Scott 38).

Once again, the key text in this scene is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Andronici at first do not realise that Lavinia is looking for that particular book. Titus still believes that they will all try to find solace in reading together and therefore tells his daughter that she need not restrict herself to Lucius's schoolbooks:

Some book there is that she desires to see.

Which is it, girl, of these?—Open them, boy.

[To Lavinia] But thou art deeper read and better skilled;

Come and take choice of all my library,

And so beguile thy sorrow (4.1.31-35)

Young Lucius reveals Lavinia's choice: "Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. / My mother gave it me" (4.1.42-43), which once again links reading and motherhood (Kolin 251). This connection is reinforced by Marcus, who suggests that the book has sentimental value for Lavinia: "For love of her that's gone, / Perhaps, she culled it from among the rest" (4.1.43-44). As the connection is clearly "based on emotion rather than intellect" (Scott 33), Marcus seems to believe that books, especially those that have old family associations, may have some therapeutic effect on Lavinia.

Lavinia's family only begin to understand what has happened to her once she shows them the story in her nephew's book. Titus immediately compares his daughter to Philomela: "This is the tragic tale of Philomel, / And treats of Tereus' treason and his rape; / And rape, I fear, was

root of thy annoy” (4.1.47-49). He describes the woods where Lavinia has been “Ravished and wronged as Philomela was” (4.1.52) as “Patterned by that the poet here describes” (4.1.56). Maurice Hunt remarks that Titus almost seems to imply that Ovid prophesied Chiron and Demetrius’s crime. He therefore interprets this scene as another example of how the play’s characters believe that life imitates art: from that point onwards, the Andronici turn to literature as an inspiration for their revenge (Hunt 199-201).

Towards the end of the scene, the characters use their reading in much the same way as during the rest of the play, couching their thoughts in the rhetoric of familiar texts and/or regarding them as spurs to emulation. This emphasis on literature’s public use value would confirm Lynch’s argument that, until the eighteenth century, literature did not function in the private sphere as an object of people’s affections (25-35). The beginning of the scene, however, suggests that the Andronici also experience a kind of private ‘book love’ similar to Lynch’s concept of ‘everyday love.’ First of all, as Charlotte Scott rightly insists, the scene takes place “within the private context of intimate relations” (41), as Titus intends to read stories with his daughter in the privacy of her closet. The idea of an ‘everyday love’ of literature is also brought to mind by the scene’s domestic setting and by the role books play in Lavinia’s relationship with her father and nephew. Lynch describes the domestication of literature as an epochal moment when “loved books served as one medium of ... everyday reaffirmations of togetherness” (160). *Titus Andronicus*, however, already exemplifies how favourite literary works foster the intimacy of the Andronici’s family bonds. Lavinia’s habitual reading with her nephew formed an important part of their bond, and it is to reading that Titus turns when he wants to comfort his daughter.

Another aspect of the Andronici’s reading practices that is linked to an ‘everyday’ love of books is their belief in literature’s therapeutic effects. Lynch states that, in the nineteenth century, reading books, especially novels, was considered to have medicinal effects. Novels

could be “means of re-steadying time and restoring routine in events’ wake” (187) and the repetition involved in the habitual (re)reading of books was associated with mental stability (179-88). It is precisely those remedial effects of literature that Titus pursues when he hopes that Lavinia might be able to “beguile her sorrow” through reading. Bethany Packard actually interprets Titus’s repeated imitations of literary texts in the rest of the play not just as a tool for revenge but as a “reiterative coping strategy” (294), a way for him to regain mental stability. Titus’s belief in literature’s therapeutic effects, which is related to a private, ‘everyday’ love of literature expressed within the confines of his home, influences his actions in the public sphere as well. Such interplay between private and public spheres, however, no longer consecrates the latter’s primacy: the private and affectionate sphere of home has made its way into the Andronici’s experience of reading, which sometimes transcends the endless cycle of emulation that is coterminous with the tragedy’s unfolding.

Women readers were prominent in the iconography of private, domestic reading that developed in the Renaissance (Long 182-90). One scene in *Cymbeline* confirms the link between (female) reading and domestic intimacy to which the Andronici’s private habits already gestured: Act Two, Scene Two opens as Imogen, lying in bed, prepares to go to sleep after a long, lonely reading spell. When she becomes aware of the presence of her waiting lady Helen, she asks her what time it is. Upon learning that it is “[a]lmost midnight”, Imogen remarks: “I have read three hours then. Mine eyes are weak” (2.2.2-3). Like Lavinia’s reading, Imogen’s will turn out to have its grimly ironic relevance outside her own private enjoyment: as he emerges from the chest in her chamber to spy on the sleeping Imogen, Iachimo notices her book and observes that “She hath been reading late/The tale of Tereus” (2.2.44-45) and that “the leaf’s turned down/Where Philomel gave up” (2.2.45-46). The reference to the story of Philomela, which also features in *Titus Andronicus*, draws a clear link between Tereus’s rape of Philomela and Iachimo’s intrusion into Imogen’s room (Garber

822), even if Imogen remains unaware of the similarities to which Lavinia desperately tried to call attention in *Titus Andronicus*. Imogen's innocent private reading is as overshadowed by her chosen text's resonance in the wider world of the play as the family books which Marcus and Titus were hoping might soothe Lavinia. Yet for all these dramatic ironies, Imogen's reading is also part of an intimate setting, suggesting the commitment of what Lynch would call an habitual, 'everyday book lover'. The sense of intimacy is reinforced by an anachronistic detail which links Imogen to another keen private (and, remarkably, male) reader: Brutus in *Julius Caesar*.

Possible prefigurations of a modern 'love of literature' in ancient Rome fall outside the scope of this discussion, but any book love would have reflected the material differences between ancient 'books' and the products of the Renaissance printing press – differences that Shakespeare blithely erases when he introduces books in scenes set in Roman times. Handing her book to her waiting lady, Imogen asks Helen to "[f]old down the leaf where I have left" (2.2.4) – a clear anachronism in a period antedating the introduction of printed volumes, but one to which Shakespeare was repeatedly drawn. Indeed, it also features in Act Four, Scene Three of *Julius Caesar*. After a heated discussion with his fellow-conspirator Cassius, Brutus asks his servant Lucius to bring him his gown and wishes Cassius and the officers Messala and Titinius good night. Observing that Lucius speaks "drowsily" (4.2.295), he shows understanding for the boy's exhaustion: "Poor knave, I blame thee not; thou art o'erwatched" (4.2.294). The soldiers Claudius and Varro are allowed to "sleep on cushions in [his] tent" (4.2.297). When they lie down, Brutus mentions his book for the first time: "Look, Lucius, here's the book I sought for so; I put it in the pocket of my gown" (4.2.305-6). Shakespeare's source material, Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, mentions that Brutus was "given to his book" (Skeat 107) and that he would often "read some book till the third watch of the night" (Skeat 136). Shakespeare's dramatic portrayal of Brutus subtly confirms those

remarks, since Lucius's rejoinder indicates that Brutus already looked for his book earlier: "I was sure Your Lordship did not give it me" (4.2.307). Lucius then plays a song until he falls asleep, which leaves Brutus surrounded by three sleeping men. Clearly a private reader, Brutus dips into the book he retrieved from the pocket of his gown: "Let me see, let me see; is not the leaf turned down/Where I left reading? Here it is, I think" (4.2.326-27).

Brutus's reading practices mark him off as a modern 'everyday book lover' rather than a reader steeped in a rhetorical culture – earlier in the scene, Brutus had angrily dismissed a professional "Poet" who proposed to serve his and Cassius's campaign (4.2.188-92). William R. Bowden, comparing the play's portrayal of Brutus's reading with Plutarch's descriptions of Brutus's studiousness, claims that Shakespeare's Brutus is not a real intellectual (58-59). But despite doubts about his intellectualism (or all the more *because* his reading is not primarily an intellectual pursuit), Shakespeare's Brutus exhibits a private, emotional love of books. The domestic details and Brutus's solitude amidst the three sleeping men render the moment as emotionally charged as it is intimate; his reading, contrary to common courtly practices, is not shared with the other men in the room.¹¹ As Maurice Charney argues, Brutus is here "represented in a very personal and intimate way" (139), and reading forms an important part of that representation. The anachronistic detail of the dog ear, together with Brutus's remark that he has been looking for his book, suggests that its owner is a regular bedtime reader (Charney 139). The moment suggests an atmosphere of quasi domestic comfort snatched from the preparations for war against which the scene is set. Such details, significantly, are all Shakespeare's additions to his source in North's Plutarch, which occasionally describes Brutus as an avid individual reader, but does not stress the domestic nature of the moments he spends with his books.¹² The anachronistic dog ear, hinting at a seasoned reader's ritual, adds to the sense that Brutus already qualifies as one of the 'everyday book lovers' seeking

“pacification” (149) whom Lynch categorises as an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phenomenon.

Brutus’s lonely book-reading vigil is soon interrupted by Caesar’s ghost. For Charney, the domestic details to which the book belongs are “obviously emphasized as a bulwark against the otherworldly” (141). In the light of what Lynch calls “haunted reading” (202) however, one may wonder whether the apparition is not in fact linked to Brutus’s readerly addictions. Lynch shows how, in Gothic romances, characters are often visited by ghosts while they are immersed in a book. Gothic novelists’ late-eighteenth-century reading habits, Lynch states, are “anachronistically projected onto premodern times” (202) in which the tales are set. The ghostly encounter that befalls a reading Brutus may suggest that the “haunted reading” of Gothic romances is not as modern as Lynch claims. The Gothic itself was after all profoundly indebted to Shakespearean representations of the supernatural (Drakakis and Townshend; Desmet and Williams)¹³, and those debts may well extend to scenes that bring out the uncanniness of the act of reading at night by ill-burning candlelight, as Brutus does here (4.2.328). To be sure, unlike Gothic heroines, Brutus has not been reading his book for long when the ghost appears, but the contrast perhaps owes more to the different narrative economies of novelistic description and dramatic representation than to a qualitative distinction between two modes of nocturnal reading. Indeed, Shakespeare’s scene already teaches viewers and readers to “associate the textual and the spectral” (Lynch 207). Some Shakespeare critics have described the mood of scenes such as 4.3 as “elegiac” (Charney 141), as characters’ thoughts are engrossed by death. Shortly before he opens his book, Brutus already has a foreboding that he himself will die, remarking to Lucius: “If I do live,/I will be good to thee” (4.2.318-19). The sense of loss that pervades such scenes clearly does not extend to a sense that literature itself is passing away (which Lynch can properly claim as a modern phenomenon), but the conjunction between Brutus’s private act of reading, his

ghostly visitation and his wider eschatological meditations indicates that certain aspects of ‘elegiac reading’ would not have seemed foreign to Shakespeare.

Brutus is simultaneously a keen, private, emotional, habitual and haunted reader, although he does not apply the word ‘love’ to his reading. The Shakespearean character who most memorably does so is Prospero. His use of and attachment to books has been much debated; we will argue here that he is the most intriguing early example of what Lynch would call a ‘possessive book lover’. Prospero’s exile was to a large extent caused by his inordinate fondness for his books. Prospero explains that he was so immersed in his studies that he gave his brother Antonio

The manage of my state, as at that time
Through all the seignories it was the first,
And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal arts
Without a parallel; those being all my study,
The government I cast upon my brother
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies. (1.2.70-77)

While Antonio conspired with Alonso, King of Naples, to overthrow his brother, Prospero spent all his time surrounded by books: “Me, poor man, my library/Was dukedom large enough” (1.2.109-10).

Prospero’s neglect of his duties as Duke of Milan resembles that of another of Shakespeare’s reluctant rulers, namely King Henry VI. He too devotes an inordinate amount of time to his (religious) books, leading Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, to complain about the King’s “bookish rule” (2*H6* 1.1.257) and the Queen to comment that “His study is his tiltyard” (2*H6* 1.3.59). Even when he is about to be murdered by the Duke of Gloucester

in the Tower of London, Henry is still, as the Duke remarks, “at [his] book so hard” (3H6 5.6.1). Shakespeare’s history play, it has been argued, rehearses “popular Protestant and Puritan attacks on the ‘bookish’ contemplative life” (Mazzaro 406). Like Prospero, then, Henry VI is a ruler whose disproportionate attachment to books forms part of his downfall. One key difference is that Henry’s reading practices are linked to his religious devotion and not to a personal love of books in and for themselves; his bookish introversion mirrors the practices of mediaeval scholar-hermits. Prospero’s book love, by contrast, is less easy to fit into pre-modern patterns.

Prospero describes his love of books when telling his daughter how, after they were put on a boat by the usurper Alonso, they received help from a courtier named Gonzalo who

did give us, with
 Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessities,
 Which since have steaded much. So, of his gentleness,
 Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me
 From mine own library with volumes that
 I prize above my dukedom. (1.2.164-69)

Aside from Prospero, the only character in Shakespeare’s plays who explicitly says he ‘loves’ books is Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. His friend Valentine, who is about to depart to Milan, asks him if he will “on a love book pray for [his] success” (1.1.19), to which Proteus wittily replies: “Upon some book I love I’ll pray for thee” (1.1.20). In contrast to Prospero’s statement, Proteus’s promise is not necessarily an expression of a personal love of books, since his use of the verb is essentially part of a display of rhetorical one-upmanship that makes him chiastically transform Valentine’s mention of a ‘love book’. Prospero therefore stands out as the only Shakespearean character who literally characterises his own relationship to his reading as ‘book love.’

The fact that Prospero has his own library is, according to Marjorie Garber, remarkable in itself, since it was still quite rare for individuals to own a lot of books in the early seventeenth century (871). Earlier aristocratic libraries were sometimes well-stocked, but they essentially betokened power as displays of conspicuous consumption rather than an individual enthusiasm for reading. Even such aristocratic libraries as existed had developed slowly, partly because Castiglione recommended that courtiers should “eschew contact with books” (Watson 487). Not only does Prospero claim to love his books, but his reading practices also make it clear that he is what Lynch would call a ‘possessive book lover’. He prides himself on his library and on his determination to spend all his time with his books. He admits that he “neglect[ed] worldly ends” but claims that the goal of his studies in Milan was “the bettering of [his] mind” (1.2.89-90) – an instrumentalist view that could still recall the King of Navarre’s ambitions as a would-be Renaissance humanist intellectual in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Yet Prospero’s “bettering,” if it was indeed central to his reading, was largely autotelic. His books essentially serve, to use Lynch’s characterisation of modern reading, as “an arena for private gratification and secret enjoyment” (68). Prospero himself confesses to the solitary and secluded character of his reading practices when he mentions his dedication to “closeness” (1.2.90). In his neglect of his public duties, Prospero resembles those later readers such as Thomas Warton for whom the act of reading had become “a performance of privacy, a secret enjoyment engaging one’s private rather than one’s public self” (Lynch 86).

On the island, Prospero continues to spend a lot of time reading and studying. However, whereas before his exile his studies were chiefly concerned with “the liberal arts” (1.2.73), the precise nature of his reading on the island is less clear. Although the books he studies were taken from his own library, they partly seem to be linked to the magic he practises. This has often led critics to view Prospero’s reading as a source of his power over the island, ignoring the possibility that Prospero’s behaviour on the island may in part also be a continuation of

the ‘possessive book love’ he exhibited before his exile. Noting that Prospero’s reading shares several characteristics with early modern conjuring books, Barbara A. Mowat argues that the source of Prospero’s magic resides in *one* of his books (1-33), namely in the one he plans to destroy when he declares that he will “abjure” his “rough magic” and “drown [his] book” (5.1.50-51, 57).

In certain readings, Prospero discovered a utilitarian value in his books once he took over the island. Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio argue that Prospero’s overthrow taught him a lesson: his “overuse or misuse of his books and library has been the cause of his downfall and exile from Milan” as it “substituted for a practical civic consciousness”:

In the fantasy space of the island, on the other hand, his books enable him to govern and control its inhabitants: “Without them” Caliban says, “He’s but a sot” (3.2.93-94). If Prospero’s books in Milan were useful for action and practice, as Jeffrey Marsten points out, they “enable authority” on the island by grounding his ability to act and direct the actions of others. (27-28)¹⁴

Reflecting postcolonial approaches to *The Tempest*, such readings actually follow Caliban’s view of his master’s books. In a speech to Stephano and Trinculo, Caliban is convinced that, in order to overthrow his master, they will first have to destroy his books:

Why, as I told thee, ’tis a custom with him
I’th’afternoon to sleep. There thou mayst brain him,
Having first seized his books; or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his weasand with thy knife. Remember
First to possess his books, for without them
He’s but a sot (3.2.88-94)

Caliban's view of the source of Prospero's magic is however debatable. This is not just because, as Mark Taylor has argued, the slave's inability to grasp the nature of the metonymic relation between a book and its content means that he mistakenly believes that Prospero's magic inheres in the book as a physical object – a belief derided by Stephano when he orders Caliban to drink from his bottle by saying “Kiss the book. I will furnish it anon with new contents” (2.2.140-41) (M. Taylor 104-11). Caliban's mistake may also be to think that the acquisition of power over the island and its inhabitants is the sole use to which Prospero puts his reading.

Even though Prospero seems to make use of at least one of his books to wreak his magic, his reading practices on the island are also a continuation of his earlier ‘possessive’ behaviour. Miranda, who is arguably a closer observer of her father's habits than Caliban, links Prospero's reading with self-absorption. She reassures Ferdinand by telling him that her father is “hard at study” and therefore “safe for these three hours” while they pursue their courtship (3.1.20-21): this implies that Prospero follows a certain reading routine that his daughter recognises, and that he is far from being in complete control of what happens on the island when he devotes his time to reading. As it happens, Prospero is actually *not* at his books in that scene, but is present “at a distance” (3.1.14), and eavesdropping on Ferdinand's wooing of Miranda. He manages to control and manipulate the young couple in so far as he is precisely *not* engrossed in his books – only after they have left the stage does he actually announce “I'll to my book” (3.1.95). Scott is therefore right in remarking that “despite the consequences of his bookish seclusion in Milan, Prospero replicates the secrecy and isolation on the island” (161). The play's attention to the materiality of Prospero's books – indeed, the very fact that their precise contents remain a mystery – further highlights the possessiveness involved in the former Duke's reading habits. On the island that is a fitting symbol of his

isolation, Prospero's books partly continue to be the source of a modern book lover's "private gratification and secret enjoyment" (Lynch 68).

Prospero's magical powers have long invited speculation that his character was inspired by John Dee (Mowat; Yates 186-92). While Dee's reputation reinforces the perception of Prospero as a misanthropic dabbler in strange arts, scholars who have studied Dee's extensive library actually qualify the view that the Elizabethan magician was "an isolated wizard": as "one of the period's most active readers," Dee was actually a "well-connected scholarly adviser":

To recover his reading practices is to go some way toward appreciating the ways early modern readers gathered and processed textual information and applied it in activities which implicated them in not only literary and philosophical but social and political economies ... the place of Dee's reading forces a reassessment of some deeply rooted assumptions about the 'private' nature of both the library and the act of reading. (Sherman 63)

If Dee, for all his esoteric interests, was still essentially a Renaissance humanist reader whose books connected him with a public network of other readers, Prospero's library remains a defiantly personal, even secretive place. The nature of his books remains a mystery to other characters – and indeed, to the play's spectators and readers alike. A jealously possessive lover of his library, Prospero is already in many ways a modern lover of books; for him, "their status as commodities is not defined by use- or trading value, but through possession or destruction" (Scott 162). Solemnly announcing that he will "drown" a book that remains tantalizingly unseen, Prospero fetishises and anthropomorphises his prized possession in a way that already matches the obsession of Lynch's modern bibliophiles: in the final act, "the fetishism of this dematerialized text is articulated in the same language that the concept of the fetish attempts to demonize: the language of the power of things (books, amulets, 'trinkets'),

to *charm*” (Kearney 463, emphasis in original). The drama that is eventually played out around the object of Prospero’s long hours of study is a drama of love.

Recent film adaptations of *The Tempest* have often turned Prospero’s book(s) into an icon of modern literary love by self-reflexively including a volume of Shakespeare’s works in his library. Their final scenes irresistibly turn the drowning of Prospero’s book into the symbol of a modern elegiac love for literature itself – a form of ‘book love’ that remains distinctive of recent centuries, or is at least not attested in Shakespeare.¹⁵ Other readers in Shakespeare have also been refashioned into modern lovers of literature – not least some of our modern Hamlets, whose post-Romantic reputation as a self-absorbed, oversensitive intellectual reading the “book of himself” owes much to the revolution of feeling that Lynch sees as a watershed.¹⁶ Shakespeare’s Hamlet was arguably a less emotional reader whose book-reading cannot be disentangled from the play-acting of his “antic disposition” (1.5.173); he is thus difficult to analyse as prefiguring modern book love, even as his reading behaviour confirms the rise of private, individual reading in the Renaissance.¹⁷

Romanticising accounts of Shakespeare’s career also turned the Bard himself into an unequivocally modern lover of literature. The early-twentieth-century antiquarian E.J. Fripp thus insisted that Shakespeare “loved” his copy of Ovid, and read it “in forbidden if not in lawful hours, when his master was not looking – in bed, in his father’s garden, in the forest” (Keilen 234). Recent analyses of Shakespeare’s relation to Ovid have replaced such idyllic visions with much more sobering speculations: “In all likelihood, young Shakespeare spent the bulk of his time with Ovid’s poetry in the classroom, under the watchful eye of his teachers ... rather than alone with Ovid in the woods” (Keilen 236). Whatever Shakespeare may have felt or not felt about his Ovid, his portrayal of the Andronici show them bearing a private ‘love’ of the texts in certain moments.

Prospero and some of the other readers considered here already anticipated modern varieties of book love. In her account of the phenomenon, Lynch possibly overemphasises the effects of the enlargement of the reading public and the development of reading protocols surrounding an emerging English canon. Rather than marking the origin of a modern love of books, these developments may have amplified an already existing phenomenon. Modern book love in the Renaissance was likely limited to the aristocratic circles from which Shakespeare's fond readers are generally drawn, and early plays like *Titus Andronicus* show how easily it could still morph into more public uses that were typical of Renaissance rhetorical culture. The Andronici, at any rate, are not chiefly remembered as book lovers. But prominent reading characters from more securely canonical plays like *Julius Caesar*'s Brutus or *The Tempest*'s Prospero had the potential to provide figures of identification for the broader public of book lovers who emerged in the age of sensibility. Lynch herself briefly but regularly returns to the increasing popularity of Shakespeare in this period (41-43, 225-26, 255-56). Bardolatry, however, was arguably not just the product of the 'new' love for literature she analyses: it also gave modern bibliophiles, haunted readers and everyday book lovers prototypes with whom they could identify, in gestures that were less anachronistic than an insistence on the radical modernity of their affections has so far allowed.

¹ See e.g. Raphael Lyne, Dora Zhang, David Winters, William Giraldi, and J. S. Jost. For some reviews that pay closer attention to the historiographic dimensions of Lynch's book (without however querying her chronology), see Joshua Rothman, and Daniel O'Quinn.

² On Shakespeare's canonisation in the long eighteenth century, see e.g. Michael Dobson, and Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor.

³ Lynch's chapter on 'possessive' lovers of books records the hostility that professed lovers of literature felt for the compulsive bibliomaniacs who were chiefly interested in books as objects, but

she also shows how both types could actually merge in the book collecting of readers like Leigh Hunt (108-34).

⁴ The evidence we will discuss will be drawn from literary representations of readers rather than from Renaissance biographical documents. Seeking for instances of book love in the latter would be a different project, but one which this article hopes to stimulate. In the meantime, Shakespeare's representations of reading will here be taken as convincing portrayals of practices that must have been observable in his age. Social histories of reading have few qualms about using literary portrayals as evidence; Lynch herself often resorts to fictional illustrations from Jane Austen, Gothic novels, and James Boswell's partly fictionalised biography of Samuel Johnson (183-87, 202-19, 248-61) alongside diaries, letters and (auto)biographies.

⁵ A protracted discussion of the episode from Augustine's *Confessions* also features in Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading* (43-50).

⁶ Daniel Boyarin writes that Dante's narrative "explicitly thematizes a scene of reading for private ['we were alone'] pleasure ['to pass the time away'], but we can easily see, it renders precisely that practice thoroughly problematic as well ... even if the text that Paolo and Francesca were reading was the pious prose *Lancelot* (and all the more so if they were reading Chretien), the text and its author can be *justly* accused by Dante of causing the evil that befell Paolo and Francesca, because of the very scene of reading that it presupposes – even against its overt intentions ... notwithstanding the pious content of a text, Dante is suggesting that the very practice of reading for pleasure can be morally dangerous" (21-24).

⁷ Cecile Jagodzinski shows that "[a]s late as the 1660s there were signs of unease with individual privacy ... The royalist Evelyn took the traditional view that solitude was suspect: political conspiracies, vice, and solipsism are the stepchildren of the private life, he claimed ... Evelyn, interestingly, lay the blame for this chaos on the private reading of books ... [he] deplores bookishness because it seems to capture the essence of the private life, which removes men from their proper place in the society of other like-minded men (3)".

⁸ The evolution of silent reading has been sketched as follows: “The first were the copyists working in the monastic scriptoria. Then, around the middle of the twelfth century, scholars in the universities acquired the ability. Two centuries later the lay aristocracy learned to read silently. By the fifteenth century silent reading was the norm, at least for readers who also knew how to write and who belonged to segments of society that had long been literate” (Castan, Lebrun, and Chartier 125).

⁹ Lynch records how the expectation of a ‘grateful love’ for dead literary authors only developed in the eighteenth century and was initially resisted by reluctant book lovers like Samuel Johnson (24, 44-50).

¹⁰ In her study of the iconography of reading in Western art, Elizabeth Long notes how “[a]s the secular and private sphere of leisure expanded [in the Renaissance], images of women reading proliferated ... the solitary woman reads, encompassed by an interior that is no less timeless than the scholarly study, but profoundly domestic. Her reading is inscribed within the family circle.” In later centuries, book-reading women became symbols of “a literacy at once leisurely and trivialized”, as “the solitary woman reader/writer finds her ideological place in a binary opposition that associates authoritative men with the production and dissemination of serious or high culture, and even privileged women with the consumption and ‘creation’ of ephemeral or questionable culture” (82).

¹¹ Andrew Taylor discusses an anecdote in which the poet Froissart presented a book to King Richard II, who “tooke it into his secrete chambre.” The scene, Taylor insist, should not necessarily be construed as an indication of private reading at the court: “the chamber rarely offered perfect solitude. The king, for one, was never without a select group of courtiers in attendance. Chamber reading among the aristocrats and gentry might mean someone reading alone ‘to drive away the night’, but it could as readily involve a select and intimate group poring over the illuminations together or listening as one member read aloud. There was no clear separation between the public and private realms” (41-43).

¹² Relevant passages in North include the following: “Brutus, being in Pompey’s camp, did nothing but study all day long, except he were with Pompey; and not only the days before, but the self-same day also before the great battle was fought in the fields of Pharsalia, where Pompey was overcome” (Skeat 108) and “But now whilst he was in war, and his head ever busily occupied to think of his

affairs and what would happen, after he had slumbered a little after supper, he spent all the rest of the night in dispatching of his weightiest causes; and after he had taken order for them, if he had any leisure left him, he would read some book till the third watch of the night, at what time the captains, petty captains, and colonels, did use to come to him” (Skeat 136).

¹³ Frederic Burwick’s “Afterword: Shakespearean Gothic” in the latter volume includes a discussion of ‘Gothic’ stagings of Caesar’s ghost in the Romantic period .

¹⁴ The quotation from Marsten’s reading of *The Tempest* is taken from the latter’s *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama*.

¹⁵ The best known and most discussed example of such films remains Peter Greenaway’s *Prospero’s Books*, which is mentioned by e.g. Kearney (433), Mowat (1), and Scott (157). Julie Taymor’s 2010 adaptation also ends with the drowning of a Shakespeare volume.

¹⁶ On Romantic transformations of Hamlet’s characters, see e.g. R.A. Foakes, Alexander Welsh, and Margareta de Grazia. Mallarmé’s celebrated description of Hamlet “lisant au livre de lui-même” is to be found in “Divagations, grands faits divers” (275).

¹⁷ As Scott argues, Hamlet uses his book to avoid having to interact with the rest of the court, the act of reading being closely linked to the idea of privacy (141-42). Polonius’s question “What do you read, my lord?” marks him off as a typical Renaissance courtier for whom reading has the public function of serving as a basis for conversation. When Hamlet sends him packing with the reply “Words, words, words,” he also signifies his own rejection of that courtly culture (2.2.194).

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