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**THE CASE FOR ‘SAVOURS’
IN A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM, IV.i.48**

Q1’s rendering of a passage in A Midsummer Night’s Dream—Oberon’s summary of how Titania (while still onstage caressing Bottom) had begged her husband for reconciliation—reads thus:

Ob. Welcome good Robin. Seeft thou this fweete fight?
Her dotage now I doe beginne to pittie.
For meeting her of late, behinde the wood, [5]
Seeking fweete fauours for this hatefull foole,
I did vpbraid her, and fall out with her.
For l^he his hairy temples then had rounded,
With coronet of fres^h and fragrant flowers.¹

Beginning with Q2 (1600 [1619]), subsequent 17th-century editors of the play corrected ‘fauours’ in line 6 above to ‘fauors’,² perhaps interpreting that the compositor had made the relatively frequent typesetting mistake of using an f̄ instead of a long s [ſ]. Yet with the publication of the Fourth Folio in 1685, ‘favors’ found its way back into Oberon’s lines.³ This trend of editorial

The place of publication for all references is London, unless otherwise specified.

¹ A Midfommer nights dreame (Q1-Thomas Fisher, 1600), sig. F3^v, lines 3-9.

² With slight differences in spelling: Q2 (sig. F3^v, line 6), and F1 gave, ‘Seeking fweete fauors for this hatefull foole’; F2 and F3: ‘Seeking fweet favors for this hatefull foole’.

³ The Fourth Folio reads, ‘Seeking fweet favors for this hateful fool’. Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies (1685), 141.

alternation between ‘favours’ and ‘savours’ continued over the next three centuries. Today, most editors opt for the Q1 reading of ‘favours’. This essay, however, would like to discuss the issue and challenge the current consensus, arguing the case for ‘savours’ in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, IV.i.48.⁴

The two possible readings of Oberon’s line resulted in part from uncertainty regarding the precedence of Q1 and Q2 before W.W. Greg’s 1908 discovery that the Pavier Quartos had been falsely dated.⁵ During the 18th and early 19th centuries, most editors opted for the ‘savours’ correction first introduced by Q2 and followed by F1, F2, and F3. The first notable exception was that of Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 Works.⁶ Since Rowe’s edition is largely based on the Fourth Folio, but he apparently also restored some passages from earlier quarto versions, here he may have chosen to render ‘Favour’ by following either Q1 or F4.⁷ After Rowe, Alexander Pope reverted to ‘savours’, with the majority of subsequent editors following suit.⁸ Joseph Rann seems to have been the only other notable eighteenth century editor besides Rowe to vouch for ‘favours’, with a riddling footnote explicating these as ‘garlands—

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, text references are to Peter Holland’s edition of A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Oxford, 1994). Likewise, all other citations of Shakespeare’s plays refer to The Oxford Shakespeare collection, ed. Stanley Wells.

⁵ Greg, W. W., ‘On Certain False Dates in Shakespearian Quartos’, The Library, xxxiv (1908), 113-131. Greg’s discovery that Q2 of Dream belonged to a group of quartos published in 1619, rather than being the 1600 edition claimed in the title page, ascertained the chronological precedence and thus the authority of Q1, which has since then remained unquestioned. Q2 is considered a reprint of Fisher’s quarto that managed to correct a number of obvious mistakes, but also introduced several others. The first Folio, finally, is generally thought to have followed Q2, while at times relying on some other relevant source.

⁶ Works, Rowe (1709), II, 505.

⁷ Contrary to the older volumes, Rowe chose to capitalise this and other words: the full line here, for instance, reads, ‘Seeking sweet Favours for this hateful Fool’.

⁸ The list includes, apart from Pope (1723-5): Theobald (1733, and 1740), Hanmer (Oxford, 1743-4), Warburton (Dublin, 1747), Johnson (1765), Capell (1767-8), Steevens and Reed (1778), Reed (1785), Steevens (1793), Steevens and Reed (1803), Malone (1790), Malone and Boswell (1821), and Collier (1842-4, and 1853).

favours'.⁹

Editorial preference shifted from 'savours' to 'favours' as a result of an essay by Alexander Dyce, who in 1853 glossed the line thus: 'Titania was seeking flowers for Bottom to wear as favours'.¹⁰ Dyce cited a passage from Robert Greene to support what he deemed Shakespeare's figurative use of 'favours',¹¹ meaning either 'flowers' or 'flowers as love-tokens', in Oberon's line. Even though Dyce's analogy from Greene did not quite match Shakespeare's diction in Dream (as I will discuss below), his justification of 'favours' was endorsed as soon as 1856 by James O. Halliwell.¹² The following year Dyce confirmed his point of view alleging also the authority of the Fisher quarto, 'the most correct of the old editions'.¹³ His interpretation that Titania was 'seeking flowers for Bottom to wear as favours', or love-tokens, summarizes the on-going clarification that editors of Dream have since felt the need to note in order to try to make sense of the passage. Even before Greg established the precedence of Q1, editors after Dyce and Halliwell overwhelmingly agreed upon 'favours'.¹⁴ The few scholars opting for 'savours', like the majority of their 18th-century predecessors, have not felt the need for further explanation, possibly considering that it is ingrained in the meaning of

⁹ Dramatic Works, Rann (Oxford, 1786-94), II, 56-57.

¹⁰ Dyce, A Few Notes on Shakespeare (1853), 62-3.

¹¹ 'favour' 7a, OED. 'Something given as a mark of favour; *esp.* a gift such as a knot of ribbons, a glove, etc., given to a lover, or in mediæval chivalry by a lady to her knight, to be worn conspicuously as a token of affection'.

¹² Works, Halliwell (1853-65), V, 180, 192n.

¹³ Works, Dyce (1857), II, 219, 242n.

¹⁴ Amongst others, Richard Grant White (Boston, 1857-66), Howard Staunton (1858-60), William George Clark and William Aldis Wright (Cambridge, 1863-66), Edmund K. Chambers (1897), and Henry Cuninghame (1905).

flowers, nuts, grains, hay, and honey (all of them mentioned earlier in Dream IV.i), as ‘savours’ denotes the qualities of smell or taste essential to them all.¹⁵

Since then, 20th- and 21st-century scholars have agreed almost unanimously on ‘favours’.¹⁶ Most editors, from John Dover Wilson and Arthur Quiller-Couch in 1924, to Stephen Greenblatt in 2016, Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan in 2016, and Sukanta Chaudhuri in 2017¹⁷—among many—have opted for ‘favours’ and glossed its meaning as ‘love-tokens’, ‘love gifts’, ‘flowers as love-tokens’, and ‘tokens’; in sum, with various but similar expressions, at times explicitly crediting Dyce. This article questions the current editorial consensus on ‘favours’ for three reasons. First, evidence exists for the bibliographical possibility that the compositor of Q1 made a mistake. Second, a textual and stylistic analysis of Dream shows a stronger case for ‘savours’. Third, the scriptural origins of the phrase ‘sweet savours’, generally used to describe divine sacrificial worship, are echoed here to portray Titania’s love for Bottom as idolatry, consistent with the language of Renaissance courtly love.

In the first place, from a bibliographical perspective ‘favours’ could be the result of misreading f and f,¹⁸ given the frequency with which the two letters

¹⁵ ‘savour’ 1a, OED. ‘A quality or characteristic likened to a smell or aroma, esp. in extended metaphors’. ‘savour’, 3a, OED. ‘The quality perceived by the sense of taste; a specific taste or flavour, esp. (in later use) a touch or hint of a flavour other than the prevailing one. Also in figurative contexts’. Horace Howard Furness’ 1895 edition of Dream published the first folio text—thus, ‘savours’—but clarified his agreement with Dyce. A Midsummer Night’s Dreame (Philadelphia, 1895), 179-80. Thomas Keightley also opted for ‘savours’. Plays (1864), I, 349.

¹⁶ Suzanne Westfall opts for ‘savours’ but does not comment on the crux. A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Internet Shakespeare Editions, University of Victoria, 4 Feb. 2018. internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/MND_M/

¹⁷ A Midsummer-Night’s Dream, Wilson and Quiller-Couch (Cambridge, 1924), 52; The Norton Shakespeare, Greenblatt (New York, 2016), 1081; The New Oxford Shakespeare: Complete Works, Taylor et al. (Oxford, 2016), 1119; A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Chaudhuri (2017), 229.

¹⁸ Commenting on this issue, Harold F. Brooks made the point that ‘Q2 misread the long s’ (A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 1979, 89); Chaudhuri also noted the probable confusion of long s and f, granting that ‘savours’ would be ‘justifiable as either “aromas” (hence flowers) or “(food of) pleasing taste”’ (op. cit. 229n).

were mistaken for one another on account of their typographical and handwritten similarities. The Q1 text of Dream contains a pattern of the same typesetting slip that would suggest so, as may be observed by analysing the instances where the compositor of the Fisher quarto erred.¹⁹ In examining only quire F there appear to be three other possible confusions, in addition to the crux in ‘fauours’.

In two of them, f was used where an f would have been required. The first of these is found on page F^v, line 32: ‘I am feard in field & town. Goblin, lead them vp & downe.’ (for ‘feard’). However, both Q2 and F1 maintained the Q1 reading.²⁰ F2 was the first to mend the f to f, thereafter consistently followed by F3, F4, and successive editors. The possibility of another crux here should not be ruled out, for Puck could be depicting himself as either the braggart or the branded (for the mischief he causes, as per II.i.32-57).²¹ The second instance is on page F2, line 8: ‘Telling the bushes that thou look’ft for warres,’ (‘for’ instead of ‘for’). The obvious mistake was mended in all subsequent editions.

Finally, the third error involving the two letters may be seen in a confusion of ligature ft, where the Fisher quarto used ft instead: ‘Welcome good *Robin*. Seeft thou this fweet fight?’ (for ‘Seeft’). The again easily recognizable mix-up in F3^v line 3—only three lines above ‘fauours’—was mended by Q2, but surfaced again in F1, being henceforth corrected in the remaining Folios. In sum, the compositor was making the same mistakes that may have led to the particular confusion of ‘favours’ for ‘savours’.

¹⁹ Robert K. Turner pointed out that there is no evidence for proposing more than one compositor. ‘Printing Methods and Textual Problems in A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, Studies in Bibliography, xv (1962), 33-55, see esp. 33.

²⁰ The Oxford Concordance to A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Oxford, 1970, p. 64), nevertheless, reads ‘feard’.

²¹ OED v. 3d ‘To brand, stigmatize’. WT, II.i.73-4: ‘calumny will sear / Virtue itself’. AWW, II.i.170-1: ‘Traduced by odious ballads, my maiden’s name / Seared otherwise’.

Further evidence for ‘savours’ may be found in Shakespeare’s style, especially in his use of consonance and alliteration in the first nine lines of Oberon’s speech, IV.i.45-53. Perhaps the early correction to f in Q2, F1, etc., took into account what was deemed a better balance in the two groups of consonances sequenced in this line, starting with the triple alliterative s of ‘Seeking sweet savours’,²² followed by the triple f in ‘for this hateful fool’. The ‘favours’ option, on the other hand, would have left two occurrences of s and four of f, which might have sounded too close to the old alliterative style mocked later on in the play’s dumb show.²³ Thus, poets and men of letters such as Pope and Johnson, though contrary to Rowe, might have found that ‘favours’ produced a less euphonic effect.

Additionally, the ‘savours’ option seems to be better suited within a larger pattern of s and f consonances in the first seven lines of Oberon’s speech, materialising in four groups of these two consonants: the first two alliterations of s in the second hemistich of the first line, and in the first hemistich of the fourth line; the first group of f immediately following—line four, second hemistich—and the second group in line seven, again in the second hemistich, thus:

----- / s - - s s [Welcome good Robin. Seest thou this sweet sight?]
 ----- / -----
 ----- / -----
 s - s s - / f - - f f [Seeking sweet savours for this hateful fool,]
 ----- / -----

²² A quadruple consonance, if counting the plural s in ‘savours’.

²³ Shakespeare made fun of excessive alliteration, for instance, in Peter Quince’s prologue: ‘Whereat with blade—with bloody, blameful, blade— / He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast’ (V.i.145-6); and also in V.i.279-81, and V.i.287-88.

----- / -----

----- / f - f - f - [With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers,]

Furthermore, only two lines later he echoes the same sequence of two consonances by hemistiches, this time with w and r:

w w - w - / r - r - r [Was wont to swell like round and orient pearls]

Stylistically, then, ‘savours’ would keep better company with Oberon’s highly patterned, symmetrical language—conventionally appropriate for a kingly figure—consisting of a set of carefully balanced, echoing groups of consonances and alliterations. One could speculate that at the time of composing Dream Shakespeare may have considered a fourfold, close iteration of the same consonant sound to exceed the limits of what he found fitting, unless of course for the uses of parody.²⁴

Moreover, Dyce’s claim that Shakespeare was using ‘favours’ as a metaphor for ‘flowers’ does not align with the playwright’s usage of these terms in Dream—or in general. The evidence provided by Dyce is an excerpt from Greene’s Quip for an Vpstart Courtier: ‘These [fair women] with syren-like allurement so entised these quaint squires, that they bestowed all their flowers vpon them for fauours’.²⁵ Dyce might have provided a similar instance from Shakespeare himself, had he given Paris’s words in Q1’s closing scene of

²⁴ Examples of a triple use abound: here is Oberon expounding his plans for Titania in II.i.258 (also with f): ‘And make her full of hateful fantasies’.

²⁵ Op.cit., 63, Dyce’s italics. He referenced the edition: ‘Quip for an Vpstart Courtier, sig. B2, ed. 1620’. The first edition of A Quip (1592) reads, ‘Thefe [faire women] with Syrenlike allurement fo entified thefe quaint squires, that they bestowed all their flowers vpon them for fauours, ...’, sig. A4.

Romeo and Juliet:

Par : Sweete Flower [Juliet], with flowers I ftrew thy Bridal bed:

.....
Accept this lateft fauour at my hands,

That liuing honourd thee, and being dead

With funerall praifes doo adorne thy Tombe.²⁶

Neither of these passages, however, would parallel the metaphorical use of ‘favours’ for ‘flowers’ that Dyce was proposing for IV.i.48 in Dream. On the one hand, Greene and Shakespeare used similes (both terms are explicit), rather than metaphor (the latter term being substituted by the former). In both excerpts ‘flowers’ appears beforehand, and only afterwards is ‘favours’ used—in the same sentence—to refer to them anaphorically as tokens of love. Conversely, the ‘favours’ in Dream IV.i.48 appear first and alone in a separate sentence, while ‘flowers’ comes only later in his speech—making for an unlikely and extremely strained proleptical reference.

Perhaps both Greene and Shakespeare were conscious of the need for an earlier referent, given the unprecedented use of ‘favours’ as a trope for ‘flowers’. ‘Favours’ would be more typically employed on its own in the literal sense, referring to tokens such as a ring (in WW); a brooch with the miniature of a lady, a pair of gloves, and pearls (in LLL); again, a glove, and a silk band or the plumes of a helmet (in 1H4), among other Shakespearean occurrences.²⁷ In

²⁶ An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Iuliet (1597), I4^v.

²⁷ Another instance of ‘favours’ as ‘tokens’ may be found earlier in an extended metaphor where ‘tall’ cowslips are described as Titania’s pensioners, i.e., gentlemen-at-arms. As such, they wear a livery and display scented tokens granted by their mistress: ‘In their gold coats, spots you see: / Those be rubies, fairy favours; / In those freckles live their savours’ (II.i.12-14). Cowslips wear on their ‘gold coats’ (petals) the red anthers of their stamens as ‘spots’, ‘rubies’, and, in apposition, ‘fairy favours’. Thus, Shakespeare uses ‘favours’ here to name the tokens granted by a mistress (The Fairy Queen) to her servants (the gentlemen-pensioners)—to use the language of courtly love.

1793 George Steevens stressed its trinket-like connotations by noting, ‘Fisher’s quarto reads—favours; which taken in the sense of ornaments, such as are worn at weddings, may be right’.²⁸ That is, he could not think of ‘favours’ as a metaphor for flowers, either.²⁹

Though Titania does present Bottom with flowers, textual evidence suggests that Oberon’s mention of ‘sweet f/savours’ does not refer to these blooms. At II.i.248-58, Oberon informs us that she sleeps in a bank where thyme, oxlips, violets, woodbine, musk-roses, and eglantine grow. At IV.i.1-3, the Fairy Queen confirms this by asking Bottom to sit down ‘upon this flow’ry bed’ while she sticks ‘musk roses in thy sleek smooth head’. It should be noted that, from the point of view of performance, Titania frequently acts this scene by placing flowers in his head, and it is not uncommon for Bottom to come out already garlanded with them. However, if her bower is so abundant in bloom, why would Titania seek flowers elsewhere? Oberon’s description implies that she is seeking potentially non-floral ‘savours’. Moreover, he begins at IV.i.47 by stating that he has met Titania “behind the wood”, that is, away from her forest bower, and there he upbraids her “For she his hairy temples then had rounded / With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers” (ll. 50-1), that is, she has by then already crowned Bottom with a garland and is being reprimanded also for it. Thus, in this interpretation, whatever Titania may be looking for, it is not the particular flowers with which Bottom has already been wreathed.

If not flowers, what could those ‘f/savours’ be that she is seeking? The most likely answer suggested by the text is the honey, provender, oats, hay,

²⁸ Steevens, 1793, V, 124n.

²⁹ Neither could Rann, who had felt the need to paraphrase his choice of ‘favours’ in 1787—already mentioned—as ‘garlands-savours’, thus, ornaments again, whether the wreaths be of fruits, leaves, or flowers. Op. cit.

and/or the nuts previously mentioned in the scene by Titania and Bottom. The ‘savours-edibles’ option also accounts for the real dimensions of Oberon’s cruelty toward his wife. It has led Titania to a shameful breach of queenly decorum³⁰: she has been caught engaging in menial work—collecting food—for her asinine lover. This is how Oberon manages to instill guilt in her and obtain the Indian page: gathering ‘savours’ for Bottom demeans Titania further than would the more courtly ‘favours-flowers’, thereby rendering her more vulnerable to Oberon’s chastisement.

Strong evidence for ‘savours’ may also be drawn from an analysis of Shakespeare’s use of both terms with the accompanying adjective, ‘sweet’. ‘Sweet favour’ appears at least in another two instances: Sonnet 113 portrays the poet’s mind so usurped by the image of his beloved that whatever he sees, including ‘the most sweet-favour or deformèd’s creature’, he only but seems to see.³¹ Similarly, in WW, I.i.98, Helen soliloquizes how her heart holds in it all the features (‘every line and trick’) of Bertram’s ‘sweet favour’, i.e., his face.³² In both cases the references are to the visual perception of beauty.

On the other hand, ‘sweet savours’ alludes mostly to the other senses, particularly taste and smell. Christopher Sly is tricked into believing he is a nobleman by their presence: ‘I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak, / I smell sweet savours and feel soft things. / Upon my life, I am a lord indeed’ (Shr, Ind. 2, 68-70). Similarly, Adriana reproaches Antipholus of Syracuse for neglecting her with a list of bygone sensuous delights, among them, ‘never meat sweet-savoured in thy taste, / Unless I [...] carved to thee’ (Err, II.ii.120-21). Finally,

³⁰ Cf. MM, I.iii.31; Ant, V.ii.17.

³¹ Sonnets and Poems, Colin Burrow (Oxford, 2002), 606n. ‘favour’ 9a, OED. ‘Appearance, aspect, look’.

³² ‘favour’ 9b, OED. ‘The countenance, face’. ‘favour’ 9c, OED. ‘A feature’.

earlier on in Dream, during the rehearsal for the dumb show, flowers are mentioned twice as being of ‘savours sweet’, through the pun on ‘odious’ and ‘odours’ (III.i.78-79):

BOTTOM (as Pyramus) Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet.

QUINCE Odours, odours.

BOTTOM (as Pyramus) Odours savours sweet.

These variations of the phrase ‘sweet savours’ indicate that Shakespeare was using it both to refer to a pleasing sensory experience, and as a coined expression that he could alter and use in wordplay. This he did in Venus’s ominous prophecy after finding Adonis dead: ‘Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend. / It shall be waited on with jealousy, / Find sweet beginning but unsavoury end’ (Ven, 1136-8). Besides appearing in Shakespeare’s works more frequently than ‘sweet favours’, the phrase also seems to be one he expected audiences to be familiar with.

Indeed, Shakespeare’s usage echoes the biblical origins of ‘sweet savours’. The expression can be found in the 1560 Geneva Bible, at least 41 times in the Old Testament and twice in the Gospels.³³ The English formula, possibly coined by William Tyndale,³⁴ was generally repeated to describe God’s pleasure at the scent produced by the burning of sacrifices for his worship.³⁵ At the altars, following the rituals minutely regulated by Leviticus and Numbers would result in a ‘sweet savour unto the Lord’. However, most germane to

³³ For the most part in the Pentateuch: at least 1 occurrence in Genesis (8:20-22n), 3 in Exodus (29:18,25,41), 17 in Leviticus (1:9,13,17; 2:9,12; 3:5,16; 6:15,21; 8:21,28; 17:6; 23:13,18; 26:31), 18 in Numbers (15:3,7,10,13,14,24; 18:17; 28:2,6,8,13,24,27; 29:2,6,8,13,36), 4 in Ezekiel (6:13; 16:19; 20:28,41), and once in 2 Corinthians (2:15), and in Ephesians (5:2).

³⁴ Tyndale probably translated from the Septuagint here, since the Greek formula does not vary, ‘ὄσμη εὐωδίας [τῷ Κυριῷ]’, ‘fragrance of perfume [for the Lord]’; whereas the Hebrew from the Masoretic text may—it generally reads, ‘רִיחַ נְיָהוָה’.

³⁵ Oblations could be of animals—rams, lambs, pigeons—and also of products such as wine, oil, and bread.

Dream IV.i.48 would be the use of the phrase to denote idolatry, as in Ezekiel when he prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem for worshipping idols: ‘Then ye shal knowe, that I am y^e Lord, when their flayne men shal be among their idoles rounde about their altars, vpon e-uery hie hill in all the toppes of the mountaines, and vnder euery thicke oke, which is the place where they did offer fwete fauour to all their idoles’.³⁶

Oberon’s line in Dream, then, would be hinting at a similar sinful action. Titania is caught collecting ‘sweet savours’ and offering them in adoration to Bottom as to her idol. Figuratively, the dotting Fairy Queen also sacrifices her royal dignity to the rude mechanical as if he were God. Moreover, the audience may bear in mind that during the dumb show rehearsal at III.i, it is Bottom himself who foreshadows that, once presented to him by Titania, the sweet savours will become ‘odious’—at least to Oberon. Precisely, this reading makes coherent the query posed by Holland, who finds Oberon’s words for describing Bottom, ‘hateful fool’, ‘surprisingly strong’.³⁷ His harshness, however, seems better justified if Titania is worshipping the weaver with ‘sweet savours’ meant for God, than if she is just offering him ‘favours’ to wear. The idea of Titania’s idolatry is of course more abhorrent to Oberon than the relatively simple gesture of pampering her lover with a love token. In sum, Shakespeare here seems closer to Ezekiel’s blasphemous oblations than to Greene’s scattering of flowers as favours on the beloved.

It remains to be seen if the scriptural echo in ‘sweet savours’ could not have made the phrase suspicious to Dyce and other critics. This point is suggested by a comment made by Halliwell (Dyce’s friend and associate),

³⁶ Ezk. 6:13, sig. Ooo.i.v

³⁷ Op.cit., 216n.

denying the religious hint of the famous soliloquy by Bottom in IV.i.207-10, ‘The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen (...)’. All scholars currently agree that the rude mechanical’s words are comically echoing Paul’s in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.³⁸ However, writing in 1856, Halliwell’s note on this passage seemed irate and offended at the suggestion made by Francis Douce in 1793 that Bottom was here ‘blundering upon the scriptural passage of “Eye hath not seen”’.³⁹ Halliwell, however, justified the words as mere punning⁴⁰ and refused to name the scholar who had pointed it out—Douce—insisting on his own take of Shakespeare’s intentions here: ‘This kind of humour was so very common, it is by no means necessary to consider, with some, that Shakespeare intended Bottom to parody Scripture’.⁴¹

Thus, Halliwell’s comment openly states what, sixty years after Douce’s insight, could have become a standing anxiety among some scholars, i.e., that Shakespeare might not have seen the Bible as the sacrosanct word of God (or not only), but rather as another source of apt verbal materials—as sound as the many others he drew from—available for use in the production of his own works of dramatic entertainment. In fact, editors preceding Halliwell had already begun to omit Douce’s comment as early as 1821.⁴²

The case of Dream IV.i.48 could point to a fear that might have been especially present in two of the editors who opted for ‘favours’: Rann and Dyce, both of whom were members of the clergy. Given their training in hermeneutics,

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:9: ‘But as it is written, The things which eye hathe not fene, nether eare hathe heard, nether came into mā’s heart, are, which God hathe prepared for them that loue him’. Geneva 1560, sig. VV.i.

³⁹ Steevens, 1793, V, 136n.

⁴⁰ Halliwell’s explanation speaks for itself: ‘Mistaking words was a source of merriment before Shakespeare’s time’, V, 200.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Malone and Boswell, 1821, V, 304-5; Collier, 1842, II, 450-51.

perhaps they were more aware than other scholars of the scriptural resonance in ‘sweet savours’. Likewise, the fear of irreverence may have been stronger in them. In this instance, opting for a less potentially blasphemous reading of Shakespeare, with the help of Q1’s unstoppable prestige and a quote from a respected author such as Greene, became possible. Whether this came to happen unwittingly or not would be, of course, matter for further speculation.⁴³

In sum, the likelihood that the compositor had made a mistake; the evidence provided by a study of the consonances and alliterations in the passage; the use of a coined scriptural expression; and the coinciding with the topic of love as idolatry, all bear sufficient weight for considering ‘sweet savours’ a preferable reading. After 170-odd years of almost unanimous agreement on ‘favours’, future editors should consider the case for ‘savours’ in A Midsummer Night’s Dream IV.i.48.

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⁴³ The possibility that scholars such as Dyce, Rann, Halliwell, Malone-Boswell, and others, may have acted out their anxiety over the scriptural echoes in Shakespeare’s plays in their editorial practices may offer a fruitful area of study in the future.