



Discussion Questions: *The Porpoise*

“Words, Words, Words” Book Club—November 2021

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? Are there any passages that stuck out to you?
2. Were you familiar with *Pericles* before reading this novel? If so, how did the context of Shakespeare’s play inform your reading? If not, does reading this novel make you more curious about the play?
3. Haddon was originally approached to adapt one of the “big” Shakespeare plays, but declined the invitation. He then used the lesser-known *Pericles* as inspiration for this novel. What are the advantages or disadvantages of adapting a popular work versus an unpopular one?
4. Angelica’s story correlates with a relatively brief episode in Shakespeare’s play. Are there other vignettes or side-stories in Shakespeare you would like to see similarly elaborated on?
5. Of Angelica, Haddon writes: “She forgets, sometimes, where the page ends and her mind begins. She recounts these tales to herself in idle moments, inevitably changing them a little every time and comes to believe, in some occult way, that these are stories of her own invention, that she is bringing these lives into being, as if she is one of the Fates, those supernatural women who make and cut the thread of life.” How much of Darius’s story do you think is in Angelica’s imagination? What do you think actually happened to Darius?
6. Which character do you think holds the most power in the novel, or does it shift?
7. Which setting (time and/or place) did you find the most interesting? How did you feel about the shifts between the narratives?
8. Haddon shows George Wilkins being guided in death by William Shakespeare. Why do you think he decided to concentrate on Wilkins and, in doing so, include Shakespeare in his story? How did this connect with the narratives?
9. What is the role of the supernatural in the novel? And are there any supernatural forces operating in the present-day narrative of Angelica and her father?
10. The ending is left open. Why do you think Haddon chose to do this? What is your interpretation of events? What might happen to Pericles, Marina, Chloë / Emilia if their narratives were to continue for another thirty pages?