

He prepared the Original Pronunciation transcript of *Romeo and Juliet* last year, and this year he's done something similar for *Troilus and Cressida*. How will it sound? asks **David Crystal**.

Hark, hark, what shout is that?

There's a great joke in *Troilus and Cressida*, but nobody ever gets it. It's when Thersites harangues Achilles about Ajax in Act 2: 'for whomsoever he be, he is Ajax'. It isn't noticed in modern pronunciation. Indeed, the line seems rather pointless. But in original pronunciation (OP) it would have raised a huge laugh among the groundlings. Because in Shakespeare's time, the name was pronounced like 'a jakes' – and a *jakes* was the word for a pisshouse!

This is just one of the many shafts of linguistic sunlight that illuminate a Shakespeare play, when it is done in OP. The sounds of Elizabethan English add a freshness and vitality to the text. The speech is much faster than it would be today. Hamlet recommended that the players 'speak the speech ... trippingly upon the tongue'. That's what you hear in an OP production. Certainly no 'mouthing'.

The speed of the speech gives some words a fresh character. Consonants are often dropped – *so heavens* could be pronounced 'henz' and *devil* as 'deel'. Vowels were often dropped too – *deliv'ry*, *ven'mous*, *magnan'mous*, *everyb'dy*. And the 'little words' in English – such as *my* and *he* – are said very quickly. In the Folio and Quarto texts you can see some of them spelled with apostrophes – *I'th*, *a'* – a clear indication to say them trippingly. But even without the apostrophe, they were said colloquially. In *Troilus's* opening words, *Call here my varlet*, the rapid 'mi' is typical of the style of the times, and these shortened forms are one of the most distinctive features of OP.

Several of the pronunciations remind us of modern regional accents. *Mi varlet*, for instance, might make us think of the north

of England. The *r* that is always heard after a vowel, as in *varlet* and *master*, reminds us of a West Country, Irish, or American accent. The *o* vowel in words like *go* and *know* might make us think of Yorkshire or Wales. The way *yes* and *yet* are pronounced with an 'I' vowel will sound Australian. The *h* in such words as *what* was sounded, so that *wine* and *whine* are different, which might make us think of Scots. That's the intriguing thing about OP: it has resonances of many modern accents but is identical with none of them. People hear hints of their own regional accent in it. But no-one (unless you were at the Globe last year) has heard this accent on the London stage before – at least, not for 400 years.

There are some features that appear in no accent today. The 'ch' sound is missing in such words as *nature* – pronounced 'nay-tur' – and the 'sh' sound is replaced in *affection* – pronounced with a 'see-on' ending. Words like *one* and *other* have a long vowel: 'ohn', 'ohther'. And several words have a different stress pattern, such as *canonize*, *advertized*, *gallantry*. Some names sound different: *Ulysses* has his last syllable rhyming with *says* rather than *seas*. And there are fresh rhymes, such as the one closing Act 4, when *Troilus* tells *Ulysses* (4.5.292):

She was beloved, she loved, she is,
and doth;

But still sweet love is food for
fortune's tooth.

It is 'tuhth', not 'tooth'.

In fact, only some of the sounds have changed since Shakespeare's time. For instance, the *i* in *sit* and the *e* in *set* haven't changed at all. And most of the consonants are exactly the same. There are some lines which are virtually identical with modern English, such as *This challenge that the*

gallant Hector sends (1.3.321). This line would sound the same today, apart from the *r* sounded in *Hector*, and the dropping of the *H* (*h's* were often dropped, in Shakespeare's time, but there was no feeling of sloppiness about the practice, as there is today). So modern listeners don't have as many problems of understanding as they first think. Past experience suggests that ears tune in (if passing helicopters don't get in the way) by the end of the first scene.

Past experience? This isn't the first OP production at the Globe, of course: that was in June 2004, when a weekend of OP performances of *Romeo and Juliet* was put into the middle of the run. But *Troilus* was different: the whole run of six performances was in OP, and the actors rehearsed the play in OP from the very beginning. Not for them the trauma of having to keep two versions of the play in their heads at the same time. The result is a production in which, to my mind, the OP ties in with the movement and the character interaction even more seamlessly than it did in 2004. It doesn't take long for the audience to forget it was OP, and just enjoy the play – though with the enjoyment, I hope, enhanced by the frisson of freshness which OP brings. This is as it should be. The play, not the pronunciation, is the thing.

David Crystal OBE is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, and the author with Ben Crystal of *Shakespeare's Words*. He has recently contributed an introductory essay on Shakespeare's language to the second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare* (reviewed on pages 42-43)

Troilus and Cressida runs at the Globe until 28 September.



Illustration Belle Mellor

And how do we know how Shakespearean English sounded? There are three sources of evidence. First, there are the way the words were spelled: for instance, when we see *travail* spelled *trauell* in both the Quarto and Folio texts of *Troilus*, it suggests it was pronounced in the same way as *travel*. Second, there are the rhymes and puns which Shakespeare uses: in *Troilus* we hear *done* rhyming with *bone*, and *fool* is made to pun with *full*. And most important of all, there were the descriptions made by the scholars of the time, which gave detailed accounts of exactly how Elizabethan vowels and consonants were pronounced. How do we know the *r* was pronounced after vowels? Because Ben Jonson, among many others, tells us: he describes it as a ‘doggy’ sound (think *grrr*)! There’s more on this background in my *Pronouncing Shakespeare*.

A guide to some original *Troilus* pronunciations

Achilles – last syllable rhymes with *lays*
affection – ending is ‘see-on’
after – drops the *f*
Ajax – rhymes with *a jakes*
another – second syllable is ‘oh’
beshrew – rhymes with *toe* not *too*
cousin – first syllable rhymes with *was*
Diomedes – last syllable rhymes with *days*
fault – drops the ‘l’
fellow – ends in ‘uh’, as *fella*
flower – sounds like ‘flohr’
Grecian – ending is ‘ee-an’

haste – rhymes with *fast*
hour – sounds like ‘ohr’
morrow – ends in ‘uh’
move – rhymes with *love*
neither – rhymes with *tether*
none – rhymes with *moan*
nothing – sounds like *no thing*
once – has no ‘w’ at the beginning
one – rhymes with *own*
other – first syllable is ‘oh’
pageant – ending is ‘ee-an’
picture – sounds like ‘pic-tuhr’
pleasures – sounds like ‘ple-zuhr’
prove – rhymes with *love*
quality – begins with ‘kol’, not ‘kwol’
quoth – sounds like ‘koth’
shoulder – drops the ‘l’
taste – rhymes with *fast*
Thersites – first syllable rhymes with *are*; last one rhymes with *days*
Troilus and *Troy* – first syllable rhymes with *try*
Ulysses – first syllable is ‘yuh’ not ‘yoo’; last syllable rhymes with *says*
woman – first syllable rhymes with *woe*
ye – sounds like ‘yuh’
yea – sounds like modern *yeah*