



David Crystal finds love in Shakespeare to be a many-compounded thing.

Shakespeare on Love

Illustration Belle Mellor

A 'Young Hearts' season is an appropriate moment to reflect on Shakespeare's lexical innovations in the use of the word *love*. It is one of his commonest content words, as noun and verb, turning up (as *love, loves, loveth, lovedst*, etc) 2890 times, by my count, and appearing in every one of the plays. If we do a play-by-play count, we might expect *Romeo and Juliet* to be at the top. In fact it is pushed well into second place by *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Valentine and friends will surely have to appear in 'Young Hearts II', one day.

It's perhaps a bit of a surprise to find *love* turning up at all, in a series of articles on Shakespeare's lexical creativity. It is, after all, one of the oldest words in the English language, appearing in early Anglo-Saxon glossaries of Latin vocabulary. And indeed, seen in isolation, there is nothing idiosyncratic in its use. But if we look at the way it forms compounds, we find a different story. There are nine innovative compounds beginning with *love* in the canon – and you will hear six of them in the 'Young Hearts' plays.

There are two in *Romeo and Juliet*, first of all. 'Then love-devouring death do what he dare', says Romeo to the Friar (2.6.7), and Juliet balances this with 'Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night'. Two more occur in *As You Like It*, both addressed to Rosalind. 'I am he that is so love-shaked', confesses Orlando, and 'You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate', complains Celia.

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Love's Labour's Lost provides a further two. Berowne describes Cupid as a 'Regent of love-rhymes'. And Boyet describes to the Princess how the King and his friends, disguised as Russians, 'every one his love-feat will advance / Unto his several mistress'. *Love-feat*, meaning an act of courtship or 'love exploit', has caused editors a bit of trouble. That is how it appears in the

Folios and first Quarto; but it is love-seat in the second Quarto, and some editors have emended to love-suit, which is known in other authors of the time – and also found elsewhere in Shakespeare (in *Henry V* and *Cymbeline*). Doubtless the emendation was prompted by the Princess's allusion, a few lines later, when she says:

For, ladies, we shall every one be masked,

And not a man of them shall have the grace,
Despite of suit, to see a lady's face.

But *feat* was a common word at the time, and Shakespeare uses it several times in other plays, so it shouldn't be jettisoned lightly.

That leaves three other innovations. In *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby talks of *love-brokers*. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon describes Cupid's love-causing arrow as a *loveshaft*. And in *Richard III* – an odd bedfellow for these other plays, but still... – Buckingham asserts to the Lord Mayor that Richard 'is not lulling on a lewd love-bed' – or, at least, so goes the First Folio; the Quarto has *day bed* (also used in *Twelfth Night*).

Love would be useless without *lovers* – a medieval (not Anglo-

Play	Instances of <i>love</i> (<i>loves, loveth, etc</i>)	Instances of <i>lover(s)</i>
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	189	8
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	149	7
<i>As You Like It</i>	140	23
<i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>	122	1
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	121	26
<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	116	9
<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>	109	11
<i>Othello</i>	107	1
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	88	3
<i>Richard III</i>	87	1
<i>Hamlet</i>	84	
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	82	5
<i>All's Well that Ends Well</i>	81	1
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	75	
<i>King Lear</i>	68	
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	68	4
<i>Henry VI Part 3</i>	56	
<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	56	
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	55	
<i>Coriolanus</i>	52	1
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	52	2
<i>King Edward III</i>	49	2
<i>King John</i>	49	
<i>Henry V</i>	46	1
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	44	1
<i>Henry VIII</i>	41	
<i>Cymbeline</i>	40	4
<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	40	
<i>Richard II</i>	39	
<i>Henry IV Part 1</i>	36	
<i>Pericles</i>	35	1
<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	35	1
<i>Henry VI Part 1</i>	32	
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	32	1
<i>Henry IV Part 2</i>	29	1
<i>Henry VI Part 2</i>	29	
<i>Macbeth</i>	25	
<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	20	
<i>The Tempest</i>	20	1
<i>Poems</i>	292	7
Total	2890	123

Numerical data derived from www.shakespeareswords.com

Saxon) word – and nearly half of Shakespeare's 116 uses of *lover* occur in just two plays, *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. No grounds for innovation here, however. The solitary exception occurs in the poems. 'Who young and simple would not be so loved', we read towards the end of 'A Lover's Complaint'. The usage means 'provided with a lover'. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it was an adjectival usage which stayed dormant for over 300 years, before surfacing again in the middle of the 20th century. In 1995 there is a quotation from the *Daily Mail* of someone wanting a 'multi-lovered' sex life. Sounds almost Falstaffian.

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