

Little Doing in *Much Ado*, But Endings Are Well in *All's Well*

David Crystal searches out the neologisms in two comedies coming up at the Globe next season.

When we explore the first recorded instances of words in Shakespeare (Williamisms), we often find unexpected trends in word-formation in different plays. Some plays use more compound words than others – *Henry IV Part 1*, for example, where over a third of the Williamisms are compounds (*tallow-catch*, *fat-witted*, *mouth-filling*...). Some plays use more prefixes, or a particular kind of prefix. There are more coinages beginning with *un-* in *Hamlet* than in any other play (*unpregnant*, *unprevailing*, *unsifted*...). What neologisms should we listen out for in this year's plays?

We won't hear many in *Much Ado*. With only 19 Williamisms, this must come close to the bottom of any list ranking the plays in terms of the neologisms they contain. And even this figure is misleadingly high, for several of the coinages are unreal words. They come out of the mouth of Dogberry, who regularly makes a fritter of the language with his innovations:

you shall comprehend all vagrom men (i.e. 'vagrant', 3.2.25)

Is our whole dissembly appeared? (i.e. 'assembly', 4.2.1).

And nobody else is yet known to have used *non-come* or *eftest*:

Here's that shall drive some of them to a non-come (i.e. 'state of bewilderment', 3.5.57)

Yea, marry, that's the eftest way

(whatever it means – 'convenient', probably, 4.2.34)

Coinages such as *vagrom* and *dissembly* are usually called Malapropisms, but Dogberryisms were there first.

On the other hand, we do find a few expressive coinages in the play, such as Beatrice's *unmitigated*, Benedick's *bookful*, Claudio's *crossness*, the Friar's *reclusive*, and Leonato's *preceptial*:

with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour (4.1.301)

a whole bookful of these quondam carpet-mongers (5.2.32)

one breath of her accustomed crossness (2.3.176)

In some reclusive and religious life (4.1.240)

passion... / Would give preceptial medicine to rage (i.e. 'governed by precepts', 5.1.24)

So something does come from *Nothing*.

All's Well is a very different story, for it contains 45 Williamisms. Parolles has the most (11), including the jocular *kicky-wicky*, the colloquial *ruttish*, and the pretentious *facinorious* ('extremely wicked') and *transcendence*, as he tries to find learned words to keep up with Lafeu:

He... hugs his kicky-wicky here at home (i.e. 'girlfriend, wife', 2.3.278)

a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish (i.e. 'lustful', 4.3.210)

he's of a most facinorious spirit... great power, great transcendence (2.3.28, 34)

The King comes next, with ten coinages that are rather more elegant and sophisticated in character, such as:

the congregated college (i.e. 'assembled', 2.1.117)

her inaidible estate (i.e. 'helpless', 2.1.119)

the bravest questant (i.e. 'one who quests', 2.1.16)

a dropsied honour (i.e. 'inflated, as if with dropsy', 2.3.127)

He also has nice examples of *necessity* and *prologue* used as verbs for the first time in English:

if her fortunes ever stood / Necessitied to help (5.3.86)

he his special nothing ever prologues (i.e. 'introduces', 2.1.92)

What's especially interesting is that four-fifths of the Williamisms in *All's Well* are formed by the addition of an ending. I've illustrated several already. Here are a few more: Parolles' *offendress*, Bertram's *admiringly*, the First Soldier's *expertness*, the first Lord's *militarist*, Helena's *torch*. But the most striking ones are the adjectives. Over half the neologisms in this play are adjectives, and I'll be surprised if any other play has such a large proportion.

It's never possible to say for certain whether a first recorded usage is a Shakespearean imaginative coinage or not, but several of the adjectives do feel like genuine creations. Along with *facinorious* we have *adoptions*, *auspicious*, and *lustrous*; along with *dropsied* we have *uncropped*, *honoured*, *unquestioned*, *warranted*,



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and *well-entered*; along with *inaudible* we have *inaudible* and *intenable*. Several adjectives end in *-ing*:

I ... sent him forth / ... with camping foes to live (3.4.14)

I give / Me and my service ... / Into your guiding power
(2.3.103)

His arched brows, his hawking eye (1.1.93)

well-weighing sums of gold to corrupt him (4.3.176)

And we mustn't forget the vivid *doughy*, in Lafeu's dismissive description:

the unbaked and doughy youth of a nation (4.5.3)

That has to be Shakespeare coining.

All but two of the adjectives have endings, and the two that don't are puzzles. When the Clown talks about a *quatch buttock* (2.2.17) he seems to mean 'plump', and when Diana talks about Frenchmen being *braid* (4.2.73) she seems to mean 'deceitful' (perhaps a derived sense from *braided* in its figurative sense of 'tangled'). But neither expression is clear. All other cases are readily interpretable. In this play it seems that adjectives are well if they end well.

David Crystal is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, and the author with Ben Crystal of *Shakespeare's Words* (and its accompanying website www.shakespeareswords.com) and of *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language*. His most recent book, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language*, is published by Oxford University Press (2010).

All's Well That Ends Well opens at the Globe on 27 April; *Much Ado About Nothing* on 21 May.

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