Of Infinite Tongue
The Sam Wanamaker Lecture, 19 March 2003

A performance lecture by David Crystal, with the assistance of Ben Crystal

D: You don't mess with the heavy mob in Globe Education. My letter of invitation said:

B [menacing Eastender]: Gissa lecture about the two great books produced in James' reign

D: Oh, all right. But which two books?

B [menacing Eastender]: bring together the 1611 Bible and the 1623 First Folio in one lecture.

D: Oh, those two books. It took me a little aback, I must say. Not because of the tone of voice - I know Patrick Spottiswoode doesn't really talk like that - but because, as a linguist, I am used to thinking of other books of King James's reign as 'great books', one in particular, which appeared in two editions, and which eventually had much more influence on the English language than either the Bible or the First Folio.

B [Austrian]: There was a third book.

MUSIC: HARRY LIME THEME

D: The allusion, as you perceive, is to *The Third Man*, and to the scene near the beginning of the film when the title is explained. A caretaker is describing the car accident which happened outside his apartment, and tells writer Holly Martins (aka Joseph Cotton) that the man hit by the car, who he believes to be his friend Harry Lime (aka Orson Welles) was killed immediately. Martins had been led to believe otherwise, and is immediately suspicious:

D (as Martins): Why didn't you say all this at the Inquest?
B (as Porter): Uh, it's better not to be mixed up in things like this.
Martins: Things like what?
Porter: I was not the only one who did not give evidence.
Martens: Who else?
Porter: *Three* men helped to carry your friend to the statue.
Martens: Kurtz?
Porter: Yes.
Martens: The Romanian?
Porter: Yes.
Martens: And?
Porter: There was a third man. *He* didn't give evidence.

D: We learn who that third man was later in the film, and you will learn what the third book was too, in the final Act of this Sam Wanamaker lecture, which will actually take place in Southwark sewers. But, to avoid my knee-caps being dealt with by the heavy mob, I begin with my brief, and consider indeed the language of the two great books - books which the great Victorian literary critic George Saintsbury (in his History of Elizabethan Literature, 1887) described in this way:

B: The plays of Shakespeare and the English Bible are, and ever will be, the twin monuments not merely of their own period, but of the perfection of English, the complete expressions of the literary capacities of the language.

D: That is quite a claim. Now, if we were to ask the 'man in the Nancy Knowles Theatre', and the woman too, why, linguistically, this might be so, one answer stands out above all others. Everyone believes that it is because of the extraordinary range of the vocabulary used by Shakespeare and the Bible translators, and the large number of new words that these sources introduced into the English language. Here is a typical quotation, from one of the most influential television series on English in recent years, *The Story of English*.

B: Shakespeare had one of the largest vocabularies of any English writer, some 30,000 words. (Estimates of an educated person's vocabulary today vary, but it is probably half this, 15,000).

D: The problem with Shakespeare is that his literary greatness has led enthusiastic linguistic amateurs to talk absolute nonsense about his contribution to the development of the English language. Both those figures are, I'm afraid, total rubbish. And these authors are not alone. For example, in contributions to an ITV television programme on the bard in January of last year, a variety of extraordinary comments were made, like this one:

B: Shakespeare invented a quarter of our language.

D: Or this one:

B: Shakespeare *is* our language.

D: At another point, Shakespeare was said to have four times as many words as the average undergraduate who - the 'expert' opined - has a vocabulary of 5000 words. But wait a moment, it was 15,000 a few seconds ago. 5,000? 15,000? We'll get 10,000 next. And sure enough, in the trailer to Melvyn Bragg's *Adventure of English*, which began on ITV in December, the average adult vocabulary was said to be 10,000 words. It's obvious, isn't it. People are guessing, off the top of their head, and putting forward their guesstimates with absolute certainty. It's time for a reality check.

And I begin with a simple example, designed to show how poor our intuitions are even about our contemporary language, let alone Early Modern English.

B: If you want something simple, read *The Sun*. The average *Sun* reader has a vocabulary of 500 words.

D: You may well share the views of that TV chatshow comment, especially after reading headlines such as

B [show]: Up yours, Delors.

D: Or this one:

B [show]: Stick it up your junta.

D: Or, a few years later:

B [show]: Stick it up your Limpar.

D: referring to a Swedish footballer. There is a lot of nonstandard English in the pages of *The Sun*, certainly - words like *bruv* for brother, *nosh*, *Mrs* spelled *missus*, *fellow* spelled *fella*, and so on. But just because you use nonstandard English doesn't mean you have a poor vocabulary. You ain't heard nuffin' yet. I did a count, especially for this lecture.

B: Excuse me, you counted all the words in *The Sun*?

D: Yes.

B: All the words, in *The Sun*?

D: Yes.

B: You are one sad linguist.

D: But listen to the result. It has made me a happy linguist. I took just 100 articles, in fact, and counted all the different words - ignoring any differences in word-endings - for instance, I counted *horse* and *horses* as just one word - and I reached a surprising figure - 5,190! Here is a short selection from the beginning of letter A:

B: abandon, abdicate, abdominal, ability, ablaze, abnormal, absence, absinthe - absinthe?

D: Absolutely.

B: absolutely, absorb, abstain, academic, academy, accent ...

D: That's enough. Life is too short to read them all out, and it was too short for me to do the whole newspaper, in fact. I stopped at 100 articles. If I had carried on I would have easily reached 6,000, and probably the real total is nearer 7000.

The King James Bible has around 8000 different words.

It depends a bit on what you count, of course. Do you include all the proper names? And what about compound words? Is *high priest* to be counted as one word or two? But the King James total does surprise people. So few words in such a powerful book? Well, this was not a matter of chance. The translators strove to construct a style which was conservative in character, building on what had gone before. This is what they say in their preface:

B: Truly ... we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one; ... that hath been our endeavor.

D: And they were true to their word. They scrupulously avoided neologisms. If we use the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a guide, and look in there for all the words whose first recorded usage in English is in the King James Bible, we find hardly any - just 55, in fact. Words like these:

B: backsliding, battering-ram, dogmatize, Galilean

D: used as a noun, a Galilean

B: lapful, putrefying, rosebud, way-mark

D: A traveller's guide, that last one. But there aren't very many innovations. One reason why the total is small is because most of the interesting biblical words had already been introduced a century or more before, by John Wycliffe and especially by William Tyndale. The King James translators actually used about 80 per cent of Tyndale's language. Linguistically, it wasn't very innovative at all.

But it *was authorized* for use in all churches, and therefore powerfully influential, and so it had more of an effect on the language than you might have expected from its low total of neologisms. Many of its idiomatic expressions became part of our consciousness. In the St Matthew Gospel alone, we find the origins of these phrases:

B: the salt of the earth, straight and narrow, the signs of the times, out of the mouth of babes, casting pearls before swine, the blind leading the blind, not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

And there are over 40 of them altogether, in just that one Gospel. In this respect, at least, the Bible trounces *The Sun*. Very few Sunnisms have actually entered the language, though one of the rare exceptions was when the General Belgrano was sunk in the Argentinian conflict, and the Sun summed up the occasion in a single word:

B [show]: Gotcha!

We could of course see that as a quotation from Shakespeare. After all, in *Coriolanus* we hear the Messenger advise the tribune Sicinius:

B: Sir, if you'ld save your life, fly to your house,
The Plebeians have gotcha fellow tribune,
And hale him up and down.

D: No? Well, it makes a link, anyway. How does Shakespeare compare with the Bible, in all this counting? Given the nature of an imaginative author's calling, we might expect a considerable difference. If the Bible translators privileged conservativism, we might expect a creative writer to privilege innovation. If the translators looked backwards, respecting tradition, we might expect the playwrights to look forwards, reflecting change - anticipating it, indeed, and even fostering it. And this is what we find.

A good example of the contrast between the two styles is the way they differ in their use of the third-person ending, - *eth* as opposed to -*s*. *Goeth* or *goes*, *sleepeth* or *sleeps*. The -*eth* ending is the oldest one, going back to Anglo-Saxon times. But during that period, an -*s* ending started to be used in the north of England - it isn't entirely clear where it came from, it was probably brought in by the Vikings - and by the time of Chaucer it was establishing its presence in the south. By the time of King James, the two forms were in open competition:
-*eth* was used by older people, and in more conservative styles; -*s* was used more informally, the more modern style. The King James Bible only uses -*eth* endings. Take a word like *see*: in the Bible it turns up 54 times in the third person, and each one is *seeth*, as in this example from John's Gospel:

B: he that seeth me seeth him that sent me

D: Shakespeare, on the other hand, uses the third person of *see* 40 times, and each time it is *sees*:

B: She sees not Hermia

D: says Lysander, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But actually, the Shakespeare situation is more complex and more interesting, for he uses both endings, and not just to contrast a formal and an informal style. He usually uses *hath*, *doth*, and *saith*, rather than *has*, *does*, and *says*. And quite often he uses either one or the other ending depending on the demands of the metre - or both at once, as in this next example. Do you remember the scene in *Henry VI Part 2* where the Duchess of Gloucester is complaining to her husband about how they are in danger from the plotting of Queen Margaret, the Duke of Suffolk, and others, and how they have shamed her in the court? Listen out for how she handles the word *hate*:

B: But be thou mild and blush not at my shame,
Nor stir at nothing till the axe of death
Hang over thee, as sure it shortly will.
For Suffolk, he that can do all in all
With her that hateth thee and hates us all,
And York, and impious Beaufort that false priest,
Have all limed bushes to betray thy wings,
And fly thou how thou canst, they'll tangle thee.

D: With her that hateth thee and hates us all. It would not work as a metrical line the other way round: With her that hates thee and hateth us all.

So, given this forward-looking dynamic in Shakespeare, we will expect to find far more innovation in his vocabulary. But is it as high as people have said? What is the truth about Shakespeare's word-counts? Well, sort-of truth. The real truth is that we can never know how many words he used, because there are too many uncertainties. Do we include all of *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Edward III*? And what about all the other joint-authorship plays? How much of *Henry VIII* is by Fletcher? How much of *Pericles* is by Wilkins? Or again: Do we include all the editorial emendations, made by generations of editors? How do we decide what to count when the Folio reading isn't clear? What in *Hamlet* was smote - or is it smitten? - on the ice in Act 1 Scene 1 - *Pollacks* or a *poleaxe*? Which of these do we count as the Shakespearean word - or do we count both? And even if we restrict ourselves to the First Folio, how do we decide about nonsense words? Do we count as separate words all of Mistress Quickly's malapropisms - incidentally, used long before Mrs Malaprop was ever conceived? - or the ones Dogberry uses:

B: our watch ... have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons

D: Comprehended, aspicious. And what about compound words? How many words are there in this phrase from *King Lear* when the disguised Kent berates the steward Oswald as being a:

B: three suited, hundred pound, filthy worsted stocking knave

D: Eight? The Penguin edition says just four, as there are hyphens between *three* and *suited*, *hundred* and *pound*, and *filthy-worsted-stocking* is taken as a single unit. But Wells and Taylor in their edition say five, because they take *filthy* as a separate word. And in the Arden edition, *three-suited-hundred-pound* is completely hyphenated, all four bits as a *single* word.

So, don't expect precise answers to the question of how many different words there are in Shakespeare. The figure is something under 20,000. Ignore the 30,000 total mentioned earlier, by the way, as that included all the different word-forms - *horse* and *horses* were counted as separate words, as were *take*, *takes*, *taken*, *took*, *tak'st*, *taking*, and so on. That is no guide to an author's vocabulary. One respected source says 17,677. More than twice as many as the King James Bible. But only three times as many as *The Sun*.

Of course, we can't seriously make a direct comparison of Shakespeare and this Sun of - Wapping. The English language today has over three times as many words as it had in King James's time. There are the best part of a million words in English now, whereas Jacobethan English probably had only around 150,000. So, proportionately, *The Sun* uses only a tiny, less-than-one per cent of Modern English words whereas Shakespeare was using an impressive 12% of Early Modern English. If we translated that percentage into Modern English, 12% of a million would give us all an active vocabulary of 120,000 words - in other words, we would know all the words in a dictionary of a couple of thousand pages. (In fact, we use about 50,000 - which is still quite impressive, much more than is suggested by the popular estimates I mentioned earlier.)

And there's another way in which Shakespeare stands out, when we do some counting. Let me return to the question of how many words in the canon are Shakespearisms. Williamisms, if you are an *Around the Globe* reader. There are actually 2035 words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* whose first use is assigned to Shakespeare, but it would be wrong to conclude that he therefore invented all 2035 words. Many of them were in general use at the time. Believe it or not, the swear-words *'sblood* and *'slid* (God's eyelid) have no usage recorded earlier than Shakespeare, but they must surely have been in widespread use. They are assigned to Shakespeare for two reasons only: the *OED* editors did a really thorough job of extracting words from his plays and poems; and they didn't do a similarly thorough job on other authors at the time, especially the non-literary authors. As historical lexicography progresses, we are continually finding instances of supposedly innovative Shakespearian words which were actually in general Jacobethan usage, and the third edition of the *OED*, now in preparation, will no doubt show this. As a result, the real total of Shakespearian innovations is going to be much less: my count is about 1700. That includes all the famous cases, such as *assassination* and *accommodation*, *anthropophaginian* and *exsufflicate*, as well as all the interesting word-formations where we do begin to develop a sense of his personal creative energy: *out-Herod*, *outfrown*, *outpray*, *outswear*, *outvillain* ...

Not bad, really. 1700 out of nearly 20,000. That's ten per cent. Ten per cent of Shakespeare's vocabulary was innovative. And 1700 was certainly far more than any other author of the Jacobethan period. So, a highly creative lexical innovator, indeed. But, from the point of view of the later history of the language, the picture is not so dramatic. For not all of these new words actually stayed in the language. In fact, over half of them died out soon after they were first used - words like *adoptious* and *agued*, *annexment* and *aidance*. There are really only about 800 Williamisms still in common use today - words like *abhorred*, *abstemious*, *accessible*, *accommodation*, *acutely*, and *assassination*. 800. You can see how exaggerated some of the claims have been.

Of course, most of us would be very happy if we contributed even one word to the future of the language, let alone 800. Most writers do not contribute any at all. But what we need to note is that this doesn't make such writers any the less creative. Linguistic creativity lies not in the words people make up, but elsewhere. It's not *what* you use but the way that you use it, as Holofernes well knew, in addressing Constable Anthony Dull:

D (as HOLOFERNES): Thou hast spoken no word all this while.

B (as DULL): Nor understood none neither, sir.

That's the trouble with counting neologisms: you end up just regurgitating long lists of obscure words, most of which are pretty unintelligible out of context. Dull, you remember, has been listening to Don Armado:

B (as ARMADO): Sir, it is the King's most sweet pleasure and affection to congratulate the Princess at her pavilion in the posteriors of this day, which the rude multitude call the afternoon.
D (as HOLOFERNES): The posterior of the day, most generous sir, is liable, congruent, and measurable for the afternoon. The word is well culled, choice, sweet, and apt, I do assure you, sir, I do assure.

D: We need better ways of capturing creativity than word-counts. We need better metaphors to talk about it. And, as usual, we can find what we want in Shakespeare himself. Henry V, in his down-to-earth wooing of Princess Katherine, describes himself as not at all like:

B: these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours.

D: Of infinite tongue. An ideal metaphor for language creativity, which is why I chose it for the title of my talk. Shakespeare was the greatest tongueman (not one of his coinages, that, but one from another Jacobethan playwright, Thomas Nashe). And what is it that makes a tongue infinite? It is something actually inherent in the nature of language. Language makes infinite use of finite means. The point is that there are only a few dozen sounds in English, a few hundred kinds of syllable, and only a couple of thousand ways of forming grammatical constructions, yet we learn enough by the time we're adult to be able to express anything we want. Language is really quite a 'little room', yet, as Marlowe said, even a little room can provide infinite riches. Or, to return to our author of the moment

B: I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count myself a king of infinite space.

D: says Hamlet. The potential is genuinely infinite. There is no such thing as 'the longest sentence', for instance. Whatever the longest sentence is that you can think of, I can always make it longer by adding an *and*, and carrying it on, and on, and on.... Similarly, there is no limit to the vocabulary of a language: dozens of new words come into English every day. The process, as Dylan Thomas said of his childhood, has no order and no end.

Literary language comes closest to this 'infinite space', because there so many dimensions in which it can be exploited, so many ways in which we can be creative with words. Coining new words is indeed one way, using affixes, making compounds, and so on, but as we have seen this is not such a big deal. Making old words new is much more important, and there are several ways of doing this.

The first way taps into the basic premise of what literature is all about - the fact that it is mimetic of all human experience, affairs, characters, actions. I mean: there is no subject-matter which is beyond its pale. And this means we must expect to find all linguistic life there too. This is the first place we must look, if we want to find the linguistic creativity of Shakespeare. This is much more than a matter of the social range of his characters: the fact that we see everyone from kings to peasants in the plays is a theatre-goer's delight, but there is nothing especially creative, linguistically, by putting appropriate words into a character's mouth. It simply means you have a good ear. If I want to portray a clergyman, or a pedant, or a lawyer, or a housewife, and make them talk like a clergyman, a pedant, a lawyer, and a housewife, then I am a good listener, and that's all. A tape-recorder could do just as well. Things start to get interesting when you portray a housewife and make her talk like a lawyer, or vice versa. Some of you may remember that we discussed cases like that in the lawyers' season here last year.

Take the scene in Act IV of *Merry Wives*. A disguised Falstaff has just been beaten out of the house by Frank Ford, who thinks he's having an affair with his wife. Falstaff has indeed been making advances to both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, much to their disgust, and at this point in the play they have already found two successful ways to humiliate him. Mistress Ford then wonders whether they have done enough:

B: What think you - may we, with the warrant of womanhood and the witness of a good conscience, pursue him with any further revenge?

D: And Mistress Page replies using a legal figure of speech.

B: The spirit of wantonness is sure scared out of him. If the devil have him not in fee-simple, with fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of waste attempt us again.

D: There are three legal expressions exploited here, in fact, and we need to disentangle their senses in order to work out what the sentence means. *Waste* meant 'damage to property by a tenant'. Mistress Page is basically saying that, if she and Mistress Ford are thought of as pieces of property, then Falstaff will never try to harm them again. But this will happen only

B: if the devil have him not in fee-simple.

D: *Fee-simple* meant a private estate belonging to an owner and his heirs for ever; so, *in fee-simple* meant 'in permanent leasing' or 'in full possession'. She is saying: 'We're safe as long as the devil doesn't have a permanent hold on Falstaff'. But there is more. What sort of hold might the devil have?

B: With fine and recovery

D: two terms to do with transferring property. *Fine* refers to an agreement to transfer land possession; *recovery*, a procedure for transferring property into full ownership. Put the two terms together, and the meaning is essentially 'with everything transferred to him'. In modern idiom, Mistress Page is saying that if the devil doesn't own Falstaff lock, stock and barrel, so that he can never stop being wicked, they are safe enough.

 The greatest creativity in an author's exploitation of a linguistic variety comes in such contexts - not when its language is being used in its normal setting, but when it is used in unexpected situations. If a lawyer appears professionally on stage, we expect legal language to be part of the characterization, as in the courtroom climax of *The Merchant of Venice*. But we do not expect legal language to be used by a Windsor housewife, so that when we find it there the ingenuity and subtlety of the allusions adds an intellectual layer of enjoyment to our general appreciation of the humour. We laugh at two levels. Law words used by a Windsor housewife? The nearest you get to this is when the pseudo-women in Monty Python sketches start talking about Nietsche and Schopenhauer.

 That's one source of Shakespeare's linguistic creativity. Putting old words in new contexts. Another way is to put old words in new constructions - to use them in new grammatical ways. This is a real Shakespearian trait. It's technically called *functional shift* or *conversion* - you're converting one part of speech into another. I suppose the most famous case comes just after Henry Bolingbroke tries to explain himself directly to the Duke of York instead of using Lord Berkeley as a messenger:

B (as BOLINGBROKE): I shall not need transport my words by you.
Here comes his grace in person. - My noble uncle! (*he kneels*)
D (as YORK): Show me thy humble heart, and not thy knee,
Whose duty is deceivable and false.
B (as BOLINGBROKE): My gracious uncle -
YORK: Tut, tut, grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle.

This is a really important means of word-creation - changing a word from one word-class (part of speech) into another. It's something which many Jacobethan authors experiment with, and some constructions - such as the one used by the Duke of York - are repeatedly encountered:

B: Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no proud

D: says Old Capulet, in *Romeo*.

B: Virgin me no virgins

D: says one of Philip Massinger's characters.

B: Vow me no vows

D: says one of Beaumont and Fletcher's. And the usage threads its way through later English literature:

B: Petition me no petitions

D: That turn up in Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb*.

B: Diamond me no diamonds.

D: And that one is from Tennyson, in the Idylls of the King. And it continues to be used today. There's actually a Web site collection of poetry called:

B: *Poem Me No Poems*.

D: And in 2001 a new punk rock group was formed, called:

B: *But Me No Buts*.

D: On their Web site, the group try to explain where their name came from.

B (as punk): Our name comes from a line that i read in a book i have long since forgotten (possibly by Clive Barker)

D: No, it was Shakespeare actually.

Nobody has ever shifted words round like Shakespeare did. Ben and I had to devote a whole three pages to cover all the different kinds of examples when we compiled *Shakespeare's Words*. He childed as I fathered. Dost dialogue with thy shadow? Even proper names are used in this way - people can be Phoebe'd and Kated - even surnames, which is most unusual. Do you remember the scene in Henry V, when Pistol has managed to take a Frenchman prisoner, and because he doesn't understand French he asks the boy to find out his name.

D (as Pistol): Come hither, boy: ask me this slave in French. What is his name?
B (as Boy, across to other side of D): Ecoutez: comment etes-vous appele?
D (as Frenchman): Monsieur le Fer.
B (back to other side of D): He says his name is Master Fer.
D: Master Fer! I'll fer him, and firk him, and ferret him. Discuss the same in French unto him.
B: I do not know the French for fer, and ferret, and firk.

D: *I'll fer him.* The poor French soldier's name has been used as a verb. The English language has a particular facility for changing parts of speech in this way - but it's a facility which has to be drawn to our attention - which is what Shakespeare, and other Jacobethan writers - did. I believe it to be a really important part of the linguistic legacy of the time.

Then there is a third aspect of Shakespearian creativity which, for many people, is the most important influence on the English language - the way he can take a set of old, familiar words - certainly, for the most part, not ones he invented himself - and combine them to make expressions that were not only memorable but seemed to fill a gap in what people wanted to say. There are over a hundred present-day idioms and semi-proverbial expressions deriving from Shakespeare. To illustrate them, I give you an extract from my forthcoming thriller, *The Murderer of Venice*, which will be given a staged reading by the Globe in 2011, in which the entire dialogue is dependent on Shakespearian expressions which have entered the English language. This is from Act 5 Scene 18, when a descendant of Constable Dull reveals who dunnit. I will interpolate the play sources. I know it will reduce the poetic quality and the dramatic impact, but you will have to put up with that. Here he is talking to a journalist about the chief constable:

B (as stage policeman): Our lord and master (*All's Well*) has seen better days (*As You Like It*). Says he hasn't slept a wink (*Cymbeline*). Found a woman's body in his office last night, he did.
D: A murder?
B: Without a doubt, foul play (*Hamlet*). Dead as a door-nail (*Henry VI*). Horrible sight it was. Beggared all description (*Antony*). Really set my teeth on edge (*Henry IV*).
D: Any theories about who dunnit?

B: Well I thought it was early days (*Troilus*), but as good luck would have it (*Merry Wives*), we got the murderer - caught him myself, as a matter of fact.

D: Really?

B: Oh yes. When you hear it, you'll laugh yourself into stitches (*Twelfth Night*). You might say it was a foregone conclusion (*Othello*).

D: Why, who was it?

B: The chief constable himself.

D: I don't believe it.

B: Oh yes we got him, at one fell swoop (*Macbeth*). I said to him, the game is up (*Cymbeline*). Tell truth and shame the devil (*Henry IV*). Well, to give the devil his due (*Henry V*), he knits his brows (*Henry VI*), says ah, what the dickens (*Merry Wives*), I'd better make a virtue out of necessity (*Two Gentlemen*), I see you have hoist me with my own petard (*Hamlet*). Well, I just stood there, with bated breath (*Merchant*). Why did you do it, I asks him? There was neither rhyme nor reason, he says (*As You Like It*), I've been in such a pickle (*Tempest*), I'm a blinking idiot (*Merchant*), playing fast and loose (*King John*), living in a fool's paradise (*Romeo*), wanting too much of a good thing (*As You Like It*). The more fool you, I says (*Shrew*). Surely you know, in the end, truth will out? (*Merchant*) Then he breaks down. All his excuses just melt into thin air (*Tempest*). Love is blind, he says (*Merchant*). That's my downfall - green-eyed jealousy, (*Merchant*). She was a tower of strength to me (*Richard III*). I had to be cruel only to be kind (*Hamlet*). It was more in sorrow than in anger (*Hamlet*).

D: Sounds as if he was more sinned against than sinning (*Lear*). (I like to spread the good lines around my characters.)

B: Be that as it may (*Henry VI*), he was a devil incarnate (*Titus*). He didn't fool me. He knows how to keep a good tongue in his head (*Tempest*). I was having none of that. Good riddance, I says (*Troilus*). I don't stand on ceremony (*Julius Caesar*), don't like all that pomp and circumstance (*Othello*). I've been dancing attendance here for too long, I says (*Richard III*), I'm not budging an inch, I says (*Shrew*). You've made us all a laughing-stock, I says (*Merry Wives*), that's the be-all and end-all of it (*Macbeth*). I hope he stays in jail till the crack of doom (*Macbeth*).

D: Jolly good show.

B: Well fair play (*Troilus*), I am to the manner born, as you might say.

D: And with that Hamletian observation we leave our play within a play - I could have gone on, with another forty or so expressions available to me, but brevity as you know is the erm - .

B & D: soul of wit

And one more way of being linguistically creative: you take words with different ranges of meaning, associate them, and let their meanings interpenetrate each other. It's not quite like a simple pun, because typically in a pun, one word does two jobs at the same time. An example. In *Comedy of Errors*, Antipholus of Syracuse has just beaten his Dromio for jesting out of turn.

B (as Dromio): Well, sir, I thank you.

D (as Antipholus): Thank me, sir, for what?

Dromio: Marry, sir, for this something that you gave me for nothing.

Antipholus: I'll make you amends next, to give you nothing for something. But say, sir, is it dinner-time?

Dromio: No, sir. I think the meat wants that I have.

Antipholus: In good time, sir. What's that?

Dromio: Basting.

Boom, boom! *Basting* - two meanings in one word - moistening a meat joint and cudgelling. We make puns like this all the time. They're funny - or, at least, they make you groan. But they are really a very simple kind of creativity. There are much more subtle ways of word-playing, more complexly creative, where many factors have to be taken into account to see the complexity, and this is what Shakespeare is really good at. Let me illustrate this one through a thought experiment (a gedankenexperiment). Imagine you are Shakespeare just beginning *Henry IV Part 2*. You have reached line 19 of your Induction, where Rumour is addressing the audience. You have a line in your head about the way people change their minds so easily when they hear a rumour. You have thought up a great image - rumour is seen as a pipe on which people play different tunes - fickle people, who change their minds at the drop of a hat and who are always disagreeing with each other. So far you've written this:

B: Rumour is a pipe
Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,
And of so easy and so plain a stop
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
Can play upon it.

D: Ah, but wait a moment. That blunt monster needs filling out a bit - you mean the people - how to bring in the point about them changing their minds and being always full of disagreement. What words do you have available? There is a good well-established word for people, which has been in the language since Middle English, *multitude*, so you opt for that. Then *wavering multitude*, another good Middle English word. The combination makes an excellent iambic rhythm too - **wav'ring multitude**. That captures the changing-minds point. Now, how to bring in a wavering multitude that's always full of disagreement. How to say 'always'? - Plenty of choice here: *ay, alway, still, ever, forever* have been in the language for centuries. Plenty of words for 'disagreement' in the language too - *factious, contentious, dissentious, wrangling*. You have two 'beats' or 'feet' of metre to play with. 'The tum-te tum-te wav'ring multitude'. *Ever-wrangling* would fill the bill. So would *still dissentious* or *ay contentious*. *Alway factious* is good, too - nicely alliterative. Nah. Sort of thing Tom Middleton would go for. You are Shakespeare. You have an even better idea, which is more enticing because it is more difficult. What was that line I used in the *Dream*, Hippolyta ...?

B (to D): I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

D: That's it, *discord*, brilliant. A word that means both 'disagreement' and 'lack of musical harmony'. You are comparing Rumour to a musical pipe, remember. Splendid. To say that the people are full of discord says two things at once: they disagree with each other and they are out of tune. A lovely piece of word-play, with one part of the meaning referring back to the musical pipe, and the other part referring forward to wavering. This is the really creative thing, this two-way allusiveness. So now all you need is an adjective from *discord* and you're home and dry. With the right rhythm: *The still te-tum-te wavering multitude*. Is there an adjective from *discord* in the language? You can't think of one. So you'll look it up in the dictionary? Damn, dictionaries haven't been invented yet. You'll have to make one up. *Discordful? Discordous? Discordish? Discordive? Discordly? Discordant?* Discordant.

B & D together: The still discordant wavering multitude.

D: Got it!

B: Rumour is a pipe
Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,
And of so easy and so plain a stop
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
The still discordant wavering multitude
Can play upon it.

D: And of course, other authors were going through the same experience at the time. Spenser had found himself in the same pickle in *The Faerie Queene*, but he opted for *discordful*. In the same decade, the writer of *Satires*, Bishop Hall, wanted the word too, and he went for *discordous*. And the priest James Dalrymple opted for *discording*. *Discordful* would have been the obvious choice for 'full of discord', we might think. But it was Shakespeare's *discordant* which won the day. That is what we say now.`

It is time to take stock. There is plainly a contrast between our two great books. The King James Bible teaches us to respect linguistic tradition. Shakespeare via the First Folio teaches us how to break from linguistic tradition. The Bible shows us a conservative temperament at work; the First Folio an innovative temperament. But the innovation is not so much in the new words, which as we have seen do not amount to very many - only a thousand or so new words, and a few hundred idiomatic expressions - that is certainly a contribution to the mosaic which is the English language, but it is quite a small contribution really. No, it is not the words themselves, but how we use the words - the novel combinations and juxtapositions - which is Shakespeare's main linguistic legacy to us. He teaches us more than any other author - until James Joyce, anyway - how to be linguistically daring. Shakespeare shows us how to dare, with language.

There isn't time to go through all the ways in which Shakespeare is creative with words. I've illustrated four of them - the taking of words from one setting and using them in another (that was the *lawyer* example), the use of conversion (*uncle me no uncle*), the expression of memorable phrasings (*The Murderer of Venice*), and the association of word-senses (as in the *discordant* example). There are other ways - such as the fresh juxtaposing of words (this is where *candied tongues* and *pregnant hinges* come into it). And there's the way he gives words new senses - making *confident* mean 'trustful' and 'impudent' and 'certain' as well as 'self-reliant'. But a full examination of Shakespeare's creativity is not what this lecture is about. My talk is not about Shakespeare's extraordinary creativity as a writer of great power and imagination. That is more for literary critics. I am just a linguist, and my take on the King James period has been to determine just how much influence these two major books had on the future form of the English language. And my answer has been: not a lot. Take all the Early Modern English writers together, from 1500 to 1700, and we *do* get a lot: the size of the English vocabulary doubled between that period, from around 100,000 words to 200,000. But taken by itself the King James period was not so distinctive, linguistically, really - certainly not compared with the century before. Apart from one thing. There was the third book.

MUSIC: DRAMATIC THIRD MAN CHORDS

The third book, which in terms of its ultimate influence on the formal shape of the English language far exceeded the combined effects of Shakespeare and the Bible. And here it is. A facsimile, unfortunately. There is just one original copy, in the Bodleian in Oxford. A slim volume, by comparison, containing just 2449 words and a preface. It appeared in 1604 and was reprinted in a slightly expanded second edition in 1616. It is Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall*. It was the first English dictionary.

Such a small book. Such a stunning event. It is one of the most significant moments in English language history. But you really have to imagine hard to realize it.

Today, we take the dictionary for granted. We treat it with special respect. We assign it special authority. We keep it by our beds (well, some of us do). For some people the dictionary is the ultimate authority. If it's in the dictionary, it's in the language. If it isn't, it isn't. We can let it rule our lives, guide our behaviour. Decide between winners and losers. Winners and losers? If you're playing Scrabble, and you put down a word, and your partner disputes it, what do you do? Look it up in the dictionary. If it's there, you win. If it isn't, you lose.

Now imagine a world without dictionaries, in an age when people were coining new words as never before. Nowhere to look words up. Nowhere to check if a word already exists - as in the *discordant* example. Nowhere to check whether a word which you think means X actually does mean X. Nowhere to look for words to expand your linguistic horizons. Or to monitor your own linguistic intuitions. Is it *indescribable* or *undescribable*? What's the exact difference between *forceful* and *forcible*? Can you say *flutist* as well as *flautist*? We all know today just how much we rely on our dictionary, if we are writing something, to make sure we don't say something we don't mean to. I did it myself the other day. I had written 'in the aftermath of the concert', and then I paused - it didn't feel right. I looked it up. The definition ran: 'a period immediately following a usually ruinous event'. That was it - *aftermath* always suggests a previous disaster. The concert I was talking about hadn't been a disaster, and I didn't want to suggest that it was. I rephrased my sentence. Dictionaries exist as an aid to failed intuitions.

Cawdrey's was the first real dictionary in English. What do I mean by a 'real dictionary'? It has to have two essential features. The words have to be in alphabetical order, and each word has to be given a meaning. Modern dictionaries give you a whole lot else as well, such as a guide to pronunciation and usage, and probably illustrative examples too. But the two essential features are order and meanings. And Cawdrey was the first to put this combination together. B.C - before Cawdrey - there had been word-lists without meanings, telling you how to spell, for instance, and there had been bilingual glossaries, giving you the equivalent of say a Latin word in English, dating back to Old English. But these weren't in alphabetical order as we know it today. In those Anglo-Saxon glossaries, for instance, you had words beginning with A followed by B followed by C, but within each letter there was no order. Everything was jumbled up. All the C's, for example, in any old order. By Cawdrey's time, the idea of alphabetical order was still a new one. Indeed, in his preface, Cawdrey has to explain to his readers how to do it:

B: If thou be desirous (gentle Reader) rightly and readily to understand, and to profit by this Table, and such like, then thou must learn the Alphabet, to wit, the order of the Letters as they stand, perfectly without book, and where every Letter standeth.

D: Not content with this, he adds an illustration:

B: as B near the beginning, N about the middest, and T toward the end.

D: And in case even this was not clear, he gives two examples of the method:

B: Now if the word, which thou art desirous to find, begin with A then look in the beginning of this Table, but if with V look towards the end. Again, if thy word begin with CA look in the beginning of the letter C but if with CU then look toward the end of that letter. And so of all the rest. &c.

D: And away we go. And what we get is - well, not quite a dictionary in the modern sense, but a dictionary of hard words. The title page explains why he compiled it:

B: A Table Alphabeticall, containing and teaching the true writing and understanding of hard usual English words, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or French, &c.
With the interpretation thereof by plain English words, gathered for the benefit & help of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilful persons,
Whereby they may the more easily and better understand many hard English words, which they shall hear or read in Scriptures, Sermons, or elsewhere, and also be made able to use the same aptly themselves.

D: He had a point. A large number of learned words had entered the language during the previous half-century, and it seemed like a sound educational proposition. The book proved to be popular, going through four editions, and several other 'dictionaries of hard words' would soon follow in its footsteps.

As dictionaries go, *A Table Alphabeticall* was not very large. As I said, it contained only 2449 defined words. And the notion of 'hard words' has to be taken with a pinch of salt. The book did include many Latinate words which by any definition would have to be considered arcane:

B: dilacerate, ebulliated, falcinate, ignominie, illiquinated, refulgent, salubritie, unguent

D: But there were some easy words too

B: alarum, all hail, boat, bonnet, centre, halleluia, helmet, idiot

And one wonders why exactly the ladies, gentlewomen, and other unskilful persons would have needed these:

B: concubine, eunuch, genitals, incest, buggery

But it was a start. And what a start. The concept of the dictionary grew and grew. A hundred and fifty years later we find Dr Johnson putting together the first real dictionary, aiming to include all words, not just hard ones, and giving lots of illustrations. And where did Johnson get his illustrations from? This is what he says in his Preface:

B (as Johnson): I have fixed Sidney's work for the boundary, beyond which I make few excursions. From the authors which rose in the time of Elizabeth, a speech might be formed adequate to all the purposes of use and elegance. If the language of theology were extracted from Hooker and the translation of the Bible; the terms of natural knowledge from Bacon; the phrases of policy, war, and navigation from Raleigh; the dialect of poetry and fiction from Spenser and Sidney; and the diction of common life from Shakespeare, few ideas would be lost to mankind, for want of English words, in which they might be expressed.

D: The time of Elizabeth? Well, and King James too. Hooker was dead by the time James came to the throne, as was Sidney and Spenser. But all of Francis Bacon's work was in King James's reign. Raleigh's History of the World was 1614. And, of course, we have the Bible and Shakespeare falling

firmly within our period. Which is where we all came in. Thanks to Johnson's Dictionary, which directly or indirectly has influenced all later English dictionaries, these authors have indeed exercised a continuing influence on our language. As Harry Lime might have put it:

B: You know what the fellow said ... In England, for twenty years under King James they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed - they produced Shakespeare, the Authorized Version of the Bible, and the first English dictionary. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce ....? The cuckoo clock.
So long, Holly.

D: So long, Harry. And so long, Sam. Until next year.