Shakespeare's Words
David Crystal and Ben Crystal

Part One: Shakespeare's False Friends

I imagine a good number of you have been abroad. If so, you'll know already just how useful it is to have learned something of the country's language. You might be lucky, of course, and find you're in a place where people speak English. But if you're not, then without knowing some words and phrases in the language you're really stuck. A hundred years ago the American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, put his finger on it: 'No man should travel', he said, 'until he has learned the language of the country he visits. Otherwise he voluntarily makes himself a great baby - so helpless and so ridiculous.' So, going to France? Learn some French. Going to Spain? Learn some Spanish. Going to Shakespeare? Learn some ---

What? Shakespearian? Elizabethan English? Early Modern English is the scholar's term for it. And in our book, *Shakespeare's Words*, Ben Crystal and I have collected all the Early Modern English words in the plays and poems that we think are likely to cause something of a problem to the modern reader. There are about 3,000 different words in the glossary, altogether. That may sound like a lot, but in fact, as a proportion of all the different words Shakespeare uses - about 20,000 in all - it's not so many - only 15 per cent. Shakespeare isn't the foreign language that some people think he is. Most of the words in Shakespeare are just the same as the ones we use today.

Of course there's one big exception to that statement. Sometimes the plays do sound like a foreign language because Shakespeare is actually using one. There's quite a bit of French in a couple of the plays, for instance, as well as bits of Latin, Italian, and Spanish. The best-known case is during *Henry V*, when we hear the French princess Katherine talking to her maid all in French, and also at the end of the play. Henry has just soundly beaten the French at the Battle of Agincourt, and while his lords are making peace with the French king, he's making eyes at the French king's daughter. The only problem is that she doesn't speak much English, and he doesn't speak much French. But they get by, in a mixture of the two languages and with some pretty rotten accents. Henry has just spent a whole page telling Kate what a fine chap he is:

HENRY: … And what say'st thou then to my love? Speak, my fair, and fairly, I pray thee.
KATHERINE: Is it possible dat I sould love de *ennemi* of *France*?
HENRY: No, it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate; but in loving me you should love the friend of France, for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it – I will have it all mine: and Kate, when France is mine, and I am yours, then yours is France, and you are mine.
KATHERINE: I cannot tell wat is dat.
HENRY: No, Kate? I will tell thee in French, which I am sure will hang upon my tongue like a new-married wife about her husband's neck, hardly to be shook off. *Je – quand sur le possession de France, et quand vous avez le possession de moi*, - let me see, what then? Saint Denis be my speed! – *donc votre est France, et vous etes mienne*. It is as easy for me, Kate, to conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French. I shall never move thee in French, unless it be to laugh at me.
KATHERINE: *Sauf votre honneur, le francais que vous parlez, il est meilleur que l'anglais lequel je parle.*
HENRY: No, faith, is't not, Kate; but thy speaking of my tongue, and I thine, most truly-falsely, must needs be granted to be much at one. But Kate, dost thou understand thus much English – canst thou love me?

Well, of course, eventually she says yes, and they get married - and Henry VI is the result.

But, did you notice something? Apart from the French, in that extract, did you have any problems understanding what was being said? Perhaps just in two places, though the dialogue went so fast you maybe didn't notice.

HENRY: let me see, what then? Saint Denis be my speed

Saint Denis – Henry offers up a quick prayer to the patron saint of France. Then, *speed*. He's not trying to hurry up. Rather, he's hoping for success, fortune, good luck. That was an early meaning of the word *speed* in English – and you can still hear it used in that sense in some local dialects, but not in standard English.

And what did you make of this?

HENRY: thy speaking of my tongue, and I thine, most truly-falsely

Most truly-falsely. How can you be true and false at the same time? This is a common Shakespearian trick – the first word and second word aren't really opposites at all. These two words are very often used in the plays, but not with the same meanings they have now. *True* – meaning, loyal, honest, faithful, as in modern English 'be true to your promise'. And *false*, meaning anything not honest or faithful, and also anything not genuine, sham, incorrect. So, when Henry says he is speaking 'truly falsely', he means 'I'm speaking in good faith – I mean what I say', but 'I'm not speaking very well, as my French is rotten.' Shakespeare joins the two words together and says neatly in one compound word what I've just said in a dozen. 'Pack as much meaning as you can into a single word' explains an awful lot of what goes on in Shakespeare.

Words like *speed*, *true*, and *false*, with these older meanings, were a part of the English being spoken in Shakespeare's time. As I said before, it isn't all that different from modern English. There are whole chunks of dialogue where you wouldn't have any difficulty following the speech at all, and you can just sit back and enjoy it. Listen to this. Romeo has just met Juliet, and they've had a first conversation together, she on the balcony, he in the garden below. They say goodnight, and she goes in, then comes out again.

JULIET: Romeo!

Luckily, he's still standing there.

JULIET: What o'clock tomorrow
Shall I send to thee?
ROMEO: By the hour of nine.
JULIET: I will not fail. 'Tis twenty year till then.
I have forgot why I did call thee back.
ROMEO: Let me stand here till thou remember it.
JULIET: I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
Remembering how I love thy company.
ROMEO: And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.
JULIET: 'Tis almost morning. I would have thee gone.

Because she knows he's in for it if her kinsmen catch him there. Now that piece of dialogue isn't exactly like Modern English, even though I'm sure you understood all of it. The word *still* is used in the sense of 'always' – and some of the phrasing feels slightly old-fashioned:

JULIET: What o'clock tomorrow
Shall I send to thee?

ROMEO: By the hour of nine.

We'd say these days *What time*, *By nine*. Then there's the phrase, *twenty year* and not *twenty years* – something you'll still hear in local accents in many parts of the country. *I have forgot* – something else still heard in regional dialects. And of course they say *thou* and *thee* to each other. More on that in the third part of this series.

So much of Elizabethan English is just like Modern English – and that's part of the problem, because you're lulled into a false sense of security. You hear a word that sounds like a modern English word, like *speed*, *true*, and *false*, and you assume it has a modern English meaning. That's where you have to be really careful. Of course, if the meaning is only a little bit changed, you might never notice. Here's a case in point. In *Henry VI Part 2*, the rebel Jack Cade is on the run, and he's hiding out in gardens. When he's discovered, he says:

CADE: Look on me well; I have eat no meat these five days, yet come thou and thy five men, and if I do not leave you all as dead as a door-nail, I pray God I may never eat grass more.

Eat no meat? He doesn't just mean 'meat'. *Meat* in those days also had a more general meaning: it meant any kind of food, not just animal flesh. Nourishment. But if you didn't know that, it wouldn't do any harm. Jack Cade might just as well have been clamouring for animal flesh, to feed his hunger. You'd have got the gist well enough.

But I think it would dawn on you that something was odd if you were listening carefully to this exchange, in *King Lear*. It comes at the point when Lear has given away his kingdom to his daughters, and Lear's fool is mercilessly teasing him for doing something so stupid.

FOOL: Nuncle, give me an egg and I'll give thee two crowns.
LEAR: What two crowns shall they be?
FOOL: Why, after I have cut the egg i'the middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg.

He means the two halves of the egg – but did you notice: cut into an egg and eat up the *meat*? Meat in an egg? It can't mean 'animal flesh' here. It must mean, 'the edible part' of the egg.

Linguists have got a term for words which look the same in two languages but don't mean the same. They're called 'false friends', because they seem familiar but are not. You know: *demander* in French doesn't mean 'demand', it means 'request'. There are many false friends between modern English and Shakespeare - like *speed*, *true*, *false*, and *meat* - *Shakespeare's W*ords has over a thousand of them - and some are really misleading. This is where it's a good idea to learn some Elizabethan vocabulary, just as you would for a foreign language. *Bootless*, for instance, sounds as if it means 'without boots'. It could mean that in Shakespeare's time, but the more common meaning of *bootless* was 'useless, pointless, unsuccessful' – it comes from the word *boot*, which is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'good' or 'use' (our word *better* comes from the same root). So if you say that something was *bootless*, it means it wasn't very successful. Here's Miranda, at the beginning of *The Tempest*, responding eagerly to Prospero, who has decided to tell her, at long last, something about her background:

MIRANDA: You have often
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopped,
And left me to a bootless inquisition,
Concluding, 'Stay: not yet.'

A bootless inquisition? She doesn't mean she was asking questions without any shoes on. She means that there was no point in asking, because Prospero wasn't going to tell her. *Bootless* turns up about 20 times in the plays – so it's worth while remembering its meaning.

And once you've got it, then you'll not miss the joke that Hotspur makes in *Henry IV*. The Welsh prince, Glendower, is boasting about how he's beaten Henry Bolingbroke more than once.

GLENDOWER: Three times hath Henry Bolingbroke made head
Against my power, thrice from the banks of Wye
And sandy-bottomed Severn have I sent him
Bootless home, and weather-beaten back.
HOTSPUR: Home without boots, and in foul weather too!
How scapes he agues, in the devil's name!

How does he get away without fevers, agues, says Hotspur, if he's in bare feet! Glendower ignores the pun!

Here are two more false friends, in quick succession, at the end of *King Lear*. Regan, one of Lear's two ungrateful daughters, wonders why her sister's servant hasn't arrived as expected. She thinks something has happened to him, so she says to Edmund, who is her supporter and lover:

REGAN: Our sister's man is certainly miscarried
EDMUND: 'Tis to be doubted, madam.

You won't have any trouble working out the first false friend – *miscarried*. Nowadays, the usual sense is that it is women who miscarry, when something goes wrong with their unborn baby. Our sister's man is not a woman – so if he's miscarrying, the word must mean something else - and so it does: 'something's gone wrong'. But listen again to Edmund's reply.

EDMUND: 'Tis to be doubted, madam.

That sounds as if he's saying 'I don't think so'. But actually he's *agreeing* with her. 'Tis to be doubted, I agree'. And that's because *doubt* in Early Modern English had two meanings: its modern one, and also 'to fear, to be afraid'. Edmund is saying: 'Tis to be feared'. *Doubt* is another false friend.

Listen out for the false friends in these next extracts. In the same play Cornwall and Regan are about to do some fairly horrible things to Glouucester, who has been supporting Lear. She begins by plucking his beard, in a gesture of contempt.

GLOUCESTER: By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done,
To pluck me by the beard.
REGAN: So white, and such a traitor?
GLOUCESTER: Naughty lady,
These hairs which thou dost ravish from my chin
Will quicken and accuse thee.

There, *naughty la*dy. Given the circumstance, this can hardly mean the modern sense of *naughty*, which is all to do with childish wickedness or being a smack-hand tease. No, *naughty* means 'evil, wicked'. That's what the word usually meant, in Shakespeare's time.

Here's another. In *Henry VI Part 2,* the Duke of Gloucester is standing at the side of a street waiting for his wife to pass by. She has been arrested for treason, and is being made to walk through the streets barefoot on her way to exile. This is part of what Gloucester says, as he waits for her to arrive:

GLOUCESTER: Sweet Nell, ill can thy noble mind abrook
The abject people gazing on thy face
With envious looks, laughing at thy shame,

That erst did follow thy proud chariot wheels
When thou didst ride in triumph through the streets.

Envious looks? Why should people envy someone who is being punished? Obviously *envious* can't have its modern meaning, of being jealous. No, in Shakespeare's time, the word meant 'malicious, spiteful'. The people are looking at her with hate, Gloucester is saying.

Now one from a comedy, *Twelfth Night*. Viola has been shipwrecked in Illyria, and has joined Duke Orsino's court, dressed as a man, and calling herself Cesario. The Duke immediately takes a liking to him. At the beginning of Act I Scene 4, one of the Duke's men, Valentine, meets Cesario, and they say this to each other:

VALENTINE: If the Duke continue these favours towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. He hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.
VIOLA: You either fear his humour or my negligence, that you call in question the continuance of his love. Is he inconstant, sir, in his favours?
VALENTINE: No, believe me.

The word that might have struck you is *humour*. Why should Valentine to fear Duke Orsino's *humour*. Today, this would mean that ; but this doesn't mean that heValentine doesn't like his jokes. But in Early Modern English, *hHumour* didn't have that sense; it usually meant 'mood', or 'frame of mind'. Viola is wondering whether the Duke is a moody person.

VIOLA: You either fear his humour or my negligence, that you call in question the continuance of his love.

Now here's a case where the false friend can really cause a problem, because it is such an unexpected word at the end of a speech which is quite clear in what it is saying. It's in the middle of *Hamlet*, when Hamlet has been talking to Ophelia, says he doesn't love her, tells her to take herself off to a nunnery, and storms out of the room, leaving Ophelia to reflect:

OPHELIA: O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite, down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that nobler and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. O woe is me,
T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

Ecstasy is the interesting word. How can someone in such a state be blasted - blighted - with delightful happiness? It makes no sense. And that's because *ecstasy* didn't mean that in Shakespeare's time. If someone is in an ecstasy, in Shakespeare, they can be in a state of anxiety or madness, as well as delight.

And here's a really horrible-sounding one: in *Love's Labour's Lost* Don Armado tells Holofernes that the king would 'with his royal finger thus dally with my excrement, with my mustachio', it sounds awful until you realise that excrement meant an 'outgrowth of hair' as well as – well, you know

Let's listen to a false friend in a bit of detail, to see how it can take you - and sometimes actors - by surprise. It's *revolve*. In *Twelfth Night*, the pompous steward Malvolio is about to get his come-uppance from his enemies, Sir Toby Belch and Maria, who are part

of the lady Olivia's household. They've forged a letter, purporting to come from Olivia, in which she expresses her love for Malvolio, and left it for him to find. He falls into the trap, and reads what is written on the outside of the letter.

MALVOLIO: By my life, this is my lady's hand. These be her very C's, her U's and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's. It is, in contempt of question, her hand.

And he begins to read.

MALVOLIO: 'To the unknown beloved this, and my good wishes.' Her very phrases! By your leave, wax.

He opens the letter, and reads.

MALVOLIO: If this fall into thy hand, revolve.

There, *revolve*. What should an actor do here? Should he physically turn himself around on t he stage? I've often seen actors do that. But *revolve* didn't mean 'turn around' in Shakespeare's time. That sense only developed in English a hundred years later. For Shakespeare, *revolve* meant 'ponder' or 'meditate'. All the actor has to do is look very thoughtful, because what is coming next needs careful thought.

MALVOLIO: If this fall into thy hands, revolve. In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.

Because Olivia will raise him up to be her husband, is the implication.

Let's listen to one more false friend in a bit of detail, because here too it can take you by surprise. It's the word *hope.* Here's an exchange from *Cymbeline*. Cymbeline is the king, and his daughter is Innogen from a former wife. His current wife, the Queen, has had a son, Cloten, from her former husband. Cloten now wants to get off with Innogen – though she's already married to a gentleman of the court, Posthumus. An intricate plot, evidently. But the point is: Innogen doesn't fancy Cloten, and tells him so in no uncertain terms:

INNOGEN: His mean'st garment,
That ever hath but clipped his body

She's talking about Posthumus – she means the most pathetic clothing that he ever wore – his underclothes, probably –

INNOGEN: His mean'st garment,
That ever hath but clipped his body, is dearer
In my respect, than all the hairs above thee,
Were they all made such men.

She's basically saying: I respect his underpants more than I respect you. Well, Cloten is not amused. He's never been compared to underpants before. He's furious.

CLOTEN: 'His garment!'
You have abused me:
'His meanest garment!'
INNOGEN: Ay, I said so, sir:
If you will make't an action, call witness to'it.

Make it an action? That's a legal action. She means, 'Sue me'.

CLOTEN: I will inform your father.
INNOGEN: Your mother too:
She's my good lady; and will conceive, I hope,
But the worst of me. So I leave you, sir,
To th' worst of discontent.
CLOTEN: I'll be revenged:
'His mean'st garment!' Well.

Did you notice the false friend?

INNOGEN: She's my good lady, and will conceive, I hope,
But the worst of me.

Innogen seems to be saying, I *hope* the Queen will think the worst of me. But that doesn't make sense. Why should anyone want someone to think the worst of them? The problem arises because *hope* doesn't here mean 'hope'. It means 'expect' or 'imagine'. Innogen is saying, 'I *imagine* the Queen will, as usual, not think well of me'. It seems they don't get on – and indeed we already know from earlier in the play that the Queen has it in for her.

False friends are one of the difficulties that have to be overcome when we are listening carefully to a Shakespeare play. As I said before, there aren't that many of them, and only a few turn up really often. So the more we can develop our linguistic intuitions about them in Early Modern English, the more we'll not be distracted by a misleading nuance, and we'll get more out of what's being said.

But false friends aren't the only kind of vocabulary problem found in the plays. At least false friends sound familiar, when you hear them. There is another group of words which cause a problem because they don't sound familiar at all. We'll look at these in the next part of this series.

Part Two: Fire-New Words

People often talk about Shakespeare as a great word inventor, and indeed he was very ready to make up a new word when he needed one. What we have to remember, though, is that this wasn't an unusual occurrence, in Elizabethan times. The English language was going through one of its periods of great expansion. People were inventing words all the time. We still do, of course – think of some new words that have come into the language recently – Internet words such as *dotcom* and *cybercafe*. But in Shakespeare's time, far more new words were being invented. And all the writers did it. Some, such as his contemporary John Marston, made up far more new words than Shakespeare did. And people argued about the new coinages, discussing whether they were good ones or not - as they still do. In those days, of course, there were no English dictionaries around, to act as an authority. And without a dictionary, you can never be sure whether a word is already in the language or not. Basically the same word might be invented several times over, with just slight changes. People tried out new words, when they needed them, to see if they worked. Sometimes these new words caught on. Sometimes they didn't. Shakespeare coined several hundred – or, at least, he is the first person we know to have used them in writing. Some of his words that did catch on include *accommodation*, *assassination*, *courtship*, *excitement*, *fancy-free*, *laughable*, and *submerged*. Some of the ones that didn't include *persistive*, *condolement*, and *cadent*.

One of Shakespeare's favourite ways of making a new word was to take an old word and change the job it did in a sentence - change its part of speech. In particular, he would take a noun and use it as a verb. Linguists call this kind of thing *conversion* – one part of

speech is being 'converted' into another. It's something we all do. Take this little scene, at bed time:

LITTLE BOY: But I'm hungry. Why can't I have another biscuit?
MOTHER: I'll biscuit you if you don't get off to bed straight away!

There we are: *I'll biscuit you* – a noun has been used as a verb, and it adds real extra impact to the message. Shakespeare actually has an example very like that one in *Henry V*. Pistol has managed to take a Frenchman prisoner, and because he doesn't understand French he asks the boy to find out his name.

PISTOL: Come hither, boy: ask me this slave in French. What is his name?
BOY: Ecoutez: comment etes-vous appele?
FRENCHMAN: Monsieur le Fer.
BOY: He says his name is Master Fer.
PISTOL: Master Fer! I'll fer him, and firk him, and ferret him. Discuss the same in French unto him.
BOY: I do not know the French for fer, and ferret, and firk.

*D*id you spot the conversion? *I'll fer him*. The poor French soldier's name has been used as a verb.

Virtually any noun could be used in this way. Take the parts of the body. *Ear, eye, lip, nose, mouth, knee, foot*. Shakespeare verbs them all. And more abstract nouns too – such as *scandal* and *word*. Some of these conversions are now a regular part of the language. I can eye you warily. You can leg it. You'll hear many like that in Shakespeare. Here's Hamlet, telling a group of actors how to utter their lines:

HAMLET: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.

Shakespeare is one of the first to use the word *mouth* in this way, to mean 'declaim' or 'utter pompously'. Then, a little later on, after Hamlet has killed Polonius, there's another one. Claudius asks him:

CLAUDIUS: Where is Polonius?
HAMLET: In heaven. Send thither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i'th' other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

The conversion is *nose* this time – a rather more evocative description than the everyday word *smell*, it seems to me.

And one more example: at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the victorious Caesar has spent a couple of speeches trying to win Cleopatra round to him, but she sees through him, and says to her maids:

CLEOPATRA: He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not
Be noble to myself.

He words me. She means 'ply with words'- 'sweet-talk' I suppose we would say nowadays.

Another way Shakespeare makes up new words is by adding a prefix or a suffix - just as we still do today. We take a word, such as *nation*, and we can build up a whole family of words by adding bits at the beginning and end. *National, nationalize, nationalization, denationalization, antidenationalization*. Shakespeare loved to make up words beginning with *un-*, for instance. Sometimes they are words which have come into our everyday

language. *Uncomfortable* is an example. This is first recorded in English in *Romeo and Juliet*, when Old Capulet discovers the supposedly dead Juliet:

CAPULET: Despised, distressèd, hated, martyred, killed!
Uncomfortable time, why camest thou now
To murder, murder our solemnity?

As you can probably sense, *uncomfortable* had a much stronger meaning in Early Modern English than it has today: it meant 'comfortless, heartbreaking'. It's another one of those false friends that I was talking about in the previous part of this series.

Here's another everyday word that Shakespeare was the first to use, *unfrequented*. The evil Moor, Aaron, uses it in *Titus Andronicus*, when he is telling Chiron and Demetrius how they can seize Titus's daughter, Lavinia.

AARON: My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;
There will the lovely Roman ladies troop.
The forest walks are wide and spacious,
And many unfrequented plots there are,
Fitted by kind for rape and villainy.

Words like *uncomfortable* and *unfrequented* are familiar today. But many of Shakespeare's word creations with the *un-* prefix are not part of everyday speech, now - nor were they ever - and they have a vivid, dramatic ring about them. Take this one, from *Macbeth*. Malcolm has been sounding out Macduff to see if he can be trusted. The way he decides to do it is to denigrate himself, telling Macduff that he, Malcolm, is the worst possible ruler for Scotland, a man of no integrity or grace. Macduff is horrified, and when Malcolm sees that his reaction is genuine, he reveals his true character:

MACDUFF: Fare thee well.
These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself
Hath banished me from Scotland. O, my breast -
Thy hope ends here!
MALCOLM: Macduff, this noble passion,
Child of integrity, hath from my soul
Wiped the black scruples, reconciled my thoughts
To thy good truth and honour. Devilish Macbeth
By many of these trains hath sought to win me
Into his power, and modest wisdom plucks me
From over-credulous haste; but God above
Deal between thee and me, for even now
I put myself to thy direction and
Unspeak mine own detraction, here abjure
The taints and blames I laid upon myself
For strangers to my nature.

Unspeak mine own detraction. Unspeak. It's a much more vivid way of putting it than saying 'I take it back'. Shakespeare liked this way of putting things. It's even more vividly put towards the end of Coriolanus, when the Senators call everyone to welcome back Volumnia and the other ladies who have visited the banished Caius Martius Coriolanus to persuade him not to attack Rome.

SENATOR: Behold our patroness, the life of Rome!
Call all your tribes together, praise the gods,
And make triumphant fires; strew flowers before them.
Unshout the noise that banished Martius,
Repeal him with the welcome of his mother,

Cry 'Welcome, ladies, welcome!'

And so they do, shouting welcome together. But this is a new shouting. It doesn't literally remove the shouting that had earlier in the play sent Coriolanus into banishment. To *unshout the noise that banished Martius* is physically impossible. *Unshout* is a figure of speech, and a highly effective one.

He does it again in *King Edward III* - a play that scholars have in recent years begun to add to the canon of Shakespeare's plays, on the grounds that he wrote a significant part of it. One of the scenes which people think was definitely by Shakespeare is Act 2 Scene 1, when Edward is persuading Warwick to act as a go-between to Warwick's daughter, the Countess, to help him seduce her. He asks Warwick to swear he will help, and Warwick agrees - but Edward isn't sure that he will keep his word.

EDWARD: Thou wilt not stick to swear what thou hast said,
But, when thou knowest my grief's condition,
This rash disgorgèd vomit of thy word
Thou wilt eat up again, and leave me helpless.
WARWICK: By heaven, I will not, though your majesty
Did bid me run upon your sword and die.
EDWARD: Say that my grief is no way medicinable
But by the loss and bruising of thine honour.
WARWICK: If nothing but that loss may vantage you,
I would account that loss my vantage too.
EDWARD: Thinkst that thou canst unswear thy oath again?
WARWICK: I cannot, nor I would not if I could.

Unswear. There's that *un-* prefix again, reversing the meaning. It's a very Shakespearian trait, and one of the reasons why I think it's right to include *Edward III* - following the other addition of recent times, *Two Noble Kinsman* - as the 39th play.

Although some of Shakespeare's new words turn up in prose, the majority are part of a line of poetry, and this raises another interesting angle on his word-creation. Many of the unfamiliar words and pronunciations in Shakespeare are there because the rhythm of the poetic line, the metre, calls out for them. A good example is in the Chorus at the beginning of *Henry V*. The Chorus is telling us we have to use our imaginations. You'll hear part of the speech in a moment; I'll just clarify the meaning of some false friends first.

The players were putting on their play in a small circular-shaped theatre, shaped like the letter O, a *wooden O*. The Chorus calls it a *cockpit*. Cockpit isn't an aeroplane cockpit. The word originally meant a place for cock-fighting – and Shakespeare is the first to use it for the pit of a theatre. The poor players have to present the battle of Agincourt in this little space. What chance! So wouldn't it be great, he says, if some wonderful source of poetic inspiration – *a Muse of fire* – could give us all a powerful *invention* – that's not a new machine, but the 'power of inventiveness', 'imagination'. That would help us to see these marvellous events, and famous people like King Harry, in a proper light. Harry would appear like Mars – *assume the port of Mars – port* means 'bearing', the way you hold yourself, as in the modern word *deportment*. Mars was the mythical God of War. It all sounds good, but, sorry, he says, all you've got is a troop of actors and a struggling playwright - *flat unraised spirits*, he calls them – a dull, uninspired lot, he means – putting the story across on an *unworthy scaffold* – that's not a gallows, or scaffolding, but a platform built to act as a stage. There are a couple more unusual words, too, but let's hear the speech.

CHORUS: O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,

Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?

Now there are three unusual words in those last two sentences – *casques*, *vasty*, and *affright*. The only one you might not have understood was *casques*, which simply means 'helmets' – it's spelled *c a s q u e*, but it's the same word as *cask* – *c a s k* – meaning any wooden vessel, such as for holding beer, and of course, *casket*. You shouldn't have had any real problem with the other two, *vasty* and *affright*. You would have interpreted *vasty* to mean 'vast', I imagine, and *affright* to mean 'frighten', because the modern words are just like them – and in these cases they aren't false friends, so you'd be right.

The interesting question is: why didn't Shakespeare use *vast* and *frighten*? He could have done. *Vast* was already a word at that time. In fact he uses it in *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet asks Romeo:

JULIET: By whose direction foundest thou out this place?
ROMEO: By love, that first did prompt me to inquire.
He lent me counsel, and I lent him eyes.
I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore washed with the farthest sea,
I should adventure for such merchandise.

There you are, *As that vast shore*. So why *vasty fields* in the Chorus speech? Here's the clue: in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Shakespeare is actually the first person recorded as using this word in English. He seemed to like the word, as he uses it several times in the plays. And he uses it whenever he needs an extra syllable to make the metre work well. The rhythm has been bouncing along very regularly, remember. 'The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dared / On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth / So great an object'. Shakespeare's making his pitch, getting the audience on his side. He doesn't want his point to be spoiled, and the wrong emphasis brought in – which it would be if he used *vast* and thus disrupted the rhythm: 'Can this cockpit hold the vast fields of France'. Doesn't work so well. So, the answer is simple: if you want to use the word *vast* because it's got just the right meaning for what you want to say, and it doesn't fit the rhythm, well, don't let that stop you – make up a new word. Add an extra syllable. *Vast* – *vasty*. Problem solved.

Shakespeare is always doing this. He does it two lines later with *affright*.

CHORUS: Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?

He could have used *fright* here. Indeed, at the end of the play, when Henry is wooing Katherine – in bad French – he says at one point, showing off his military image

HENRY: Now beshrew my father's ambition! He was thinking of civil wars when he got me; therefore was I created with a stubborn outside, with an aspect of iron, that when I come to woo ladies I fright them.

I fright them. Not *affright* them. But in the Chorus speech we have: 'the very casques / That did affright the air at Agincourt?' *Fright* wouldn't work well here; just as with *vast*, it would

break up the regular movement of the rhythm: 'the very casques / That did fright the air at Agincourt' This time, Shakespeare needs an extra syllable at the beginning of the word, rather than at the end. So he chooses *affright*. He isn't the first to use the word, this time. Both words *fright* and *affright* were already available in English. But that's why the less familiar word is there – to make the metre work.

There are hundreds of examples of innovations in word structure like this. That *-y* ending, as in *vasty*, is another favourite of Shakespeare's. In *Edward III* again, in the same scene when Warwick is trying to persuade the Countess to do Edward's bidding, he says:

WARWICK: What can one drop of poison harm the sea,
Whose hugy vastures can digest the ill
And make it lose his operation?
The king's great name will temper thy misdeeds
And give the bitter potion of reproach
A sugared, sweet, and most delicious taste.

Hugy vastures - 'huge vastness', he means. But he needs *hugy* to make up the rhythm of the line.

There are several examples of this kind. In *Antony and Cleopatra* he doesn't refer to the god of wine as *plump Bacchus*; he calls him *plumpy Bacchus*. In *Timon of Athens*, he doesn't talk about a *steep mount*, but a *steepy mount*. All because of the rhythm.

But, going back to *vasty*, for a moment, you might be thinking: why did Shakespeare go for the word *vast* in the first place? Why did he have to invent a new word to fit the rhythm. Couldn't he have chosen an already-existing word with the right two-beat rhythm with the meaning of 'vast'? Well, no. There wasn't one, you see. What words existed in Early Modern English with the meaning of 'very big'? There was *large*, and *huge*, which had both been in the language since the 13th century, and *great*, which had been around since Anglo-Saxon times. But these were boring everyday words, not very imaginatively expressive - not very suitable for capturing the enormity of the dramatic scene the Chorus is painting. And with just one syllable they had the wrong rhythm. The words *immense* and *enormous* also existed, but they had the wrong rhythm, too. The word *massive* also existed – that had the right rhythm, but unfortunately the wrong meaning. *Massive* expresses the idea of concrete size upwards – as in a *massive building* - not the idea of a flat expanse. *Vast* was the only word which had the right meaning, and it was sufficiently unusual to make a poet want to use it. Giving it a new ending was the easy solution.

The demands of the metre were a major influence on the way new words were formed, and they also affected the grammar of the language too. In the present tense of a verb, for example, there were two endings still in use for the third person: there was *I read*, for the first person, *thou readest* would be the second person, but for the third person there would be a choice of two endings *he readeth* or *he reads*. The *-th* ending was the older ending, and it was dying out of use by Shakespeare's time; but with most verbs there was still a choice. So, what would lead Shakespeare to choose one form and not the other? One factor is that the *-s* ending seems to have conveyed a more colloquial tone - it is the normal form when characters are speaking prose. The *-th* ending was more formal - it is often used in the 'official' language of stage directions, for instance. But that explanation will not do for the many cases in the poetry where we find both endings together. Once again it is the presence or absence of the extra syllable which can motivate the choice. Listen to this example from *Henry VI Part 2*, where both endings are found on the same verb in the same line. The Duchess is bemoaning to her husband 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:

DUCHESS: 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.

With her that hateth thee and hates us all. Only that sequence preserves the regular rhythmical beat. It certainly wouldn't work so well the other way round: *With her that hates thee and hateth us all.* That would be a very jerky rhythm. Having two endings, one with an extra syllable, is extremely useful to a poet.

We hear the role of the extra syllable in making up the rhythm of a line in many places, and with different types of word. Here's an example where the past tenses are affected. The usual way of making a past tense is to add an *-ed* ending*: I walk - I walked, I jump - I jumped*, and so on, and this is how it was in Early Modern English too. But the difference is that at that time it was possible to pronounce the ending as a separate syllable - *walkèd, jumpèd*, and this allows the poet to make use of that extra syllable in completing a line. A good example is in *Romeo and Juliet,* where Friar Laurence has just told Romeo that he has been banished for killing Tybalt:

FRIAR: Hence from Verona art thou banishèd.
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.
ROMEO: There is no world without Verona walls
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
Hence banishèd is banished from the world
And world's exile is death.

Hence banishèd is banished from the world - the two pronunciations are needed to make the metre work.

Many of the word changes in Shakespeare are for the same reason. The texts are full of apostrophes, marking a place where a letter has been left out, and usually this is for metrical reasons as well. Adjectives, for example, can add an *-est* ending, if you want to express the 'most' of something - grammars call this form the superlative - as in *big, bigger, biggest*. Now that *-est* ending is often reduced, by leaving out the *-e* - eliding the -e - to make the line's rhythm work. Here's an example from *Henry IV Part 1*, where Prince Hal is having an uncomfortable interview with his father, the King, for not having behaved like a king's son should. At one point King Henry says:

KING HENRY: And what say you to this? Percy, Northumberland,
The Archbishop's grace of York, Douglas, Mortimer,
Capitulate against us, and are up.
Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
Which art my near'st and dearest enemy?

Capitulate is another of those false friends: it does not mean, 'surrender', but 'sign articles of agreement'. The rebels are up in arms. But then he calls Harry *his near'st and dearest enemy.* Note he didn't say *nearest and dearest*, as you might expect. That wouldn't work: *Which art my nearest and dearest enemy* is metrically very awkward. The first word has to have the shortened ending.

And here's one other kind of example, where the needs of the rhythm make the actual word order in a sentence change. This is Antony, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, talking about a proposed fight against Pompey:

ANTONY: I did not think to draw my sword 'gainst Pompey,
For he hath laid strange courtesies and great
Of late upon me.

Strange courtesies and great is an odd word order - one adjective goes before the noun and the other one afterwards. What he means is 'strange and great courtesies', but to put both adjectives before the noun in this way would mess up the rhythm completely.

So, when we start thinking about the new words which Shakespeare created, and why we created them, we find ourselves considering much more than their meaning. Words have to be pronounced, and that leads us into thinking about their rhythmical structure. But words are also a part of a dialogue. We use language to talk to each other. And part of the unfamiliarity of Shakespeare's language is the way in which the conversational conventions in Early Modern English are different from those we use today. I'll be talking about some of these in the third part of this series.

Part Three: Admirable discourse

Shakespeare didn't just write words, or lines, or sentences. He wrote discourses. Words, lines, and sentences are the building blocks of conversation. And when we look at the way Shakespearian conversations work, we find that they are somewhat different from the way we talk to each other today. The way we greet each other differs. Here is a selection of Shakespearian greetings. Sometimes, then as now, people enquire about health.

MALE: Mistress, what cheer?
FEMALE: How dost thou, sweet lord?
MALE: How do you, pretty lady?
FEMALE: How fares my lord?

Sometimes there is a divine invocation:

FEMALE: God save you, sir.
MALE: Save you, sweet lady.

MALE: God 'a' mercy, fellow.
MALE: God bless your worship!

FEMALE: Neighbours, God speed!
MALE: You are well met, ladies.

Sometimes it's a greeting for the time of day - perhaps morning:

MALE: Good dawning to thee, friend.
MALE: The good time of day to you, sir.

MALE: Good morrow, my lady..
FEMALE: Give you good morrow, sir.

MALE: Good even, Audrey.
FEMALE: God ye good even, William.

Farewells had their distinctive language, too.

FEMALE: Adieu, adieu.
Farewell
MALE: Fare you well.

FEMALE: Give you good night.
MALE: God keep you!
FEMALE: Rest you merry.

Often, the language was quite flowery, with kind regards being sent:

FEMALE: I commend my duty to your lordship.
MALE: I commend you to your own content.

And sometimes it was quite abrupt.

MALE: Go thy ways.
FEMALE: There lies your way.

In other words, on your way!

But one of the most distinctive features of Shakespearian English turns up on every page of every play, and that's the use of the second-person pronouns, *thou* and *you*, along with their variant: *thee*, *thy*, *thyself*, and *thine*. What was happening here? Why the one and why the other? To see what is happening, we have to go right back to Old English, 500 years before Shakespeare.

In Old English, *thou* was singular and *you* was plural. But during the 13th century, *you* started to be used as a polite form of the singular – probably because people copied the French way of talking, where *vous* was used in that way. English then became like French, which has *tu* and *vous* both possible for singulars. So now there was a choice. The usual thing was for *you* to be used by inferiors to superiors – such as children to parents, servants to masters, and so on; and *thou* would be used in return. But you'd also use *thou* when you wanted special intimacy, such as when addressing God. *Thou* was also used when the lower classes talked to each other. The upper classes used *you* to each other, as a rule, even when they were closely related.

So, when someone changes from *thou* to *you*, or the other way round, in a conversation, it must mean something. It will express a change of attitude, or a new emotion or mood. It could be anything - a sign of extra affection, or of anger. It could be a piece of playfulness, or an insult. To say *thou* to someone could be to insult him. There's a nice example of this in *Twelfth Night*, when Sir Toby Belch is advising Sir Andrew Aguecheek how to write a letter to his enemy:

SIR TOBY: Challenge me the Count's youth to fight with him, hurt him in eleven places. My niece shall take note of it; and assure thyself, there is no love-broker in the world can more prevail in man's commendation with woman than report of valour.
FABIAN: There is no way but this, Sir Andrew.
SIR ANDREW: Will either of you bear me a challenge to him?
SIR TOBY: Go, write it in a martial hand, be curst and brief. It is no matter how witty so it be eloquent and full of invention. Taunt him with the licence of ink. If thou 'thou'st' him some thrice, it shall not be amiss.

In other words, call him thou a few times and it will really insult him. Gentlemen would normally say *you* to one another, in polite conversation.

Let's listen to the way *thou* and *you* come and go in this scene from *Much Ado about Nothing*, and I'll comment on what's going on as they speak. Beatrice and Benedick are a famous warring couple. They harangue each other at every opportunity, though it turns out that they fancy each other too. The pronouns show the way the relationship is going. Beatrice you'll hear uses *you* throughout. That shows she isn't going to be easily won over. She's keeping her distance. Benedick is not so cautious. In this next scene, when they meet, he starts off by using *you* to her, because he is talking about a general issue, and a serious one

– her cousin, Hero, has been wronged - she is sure, by Claudio - and she's been crying about it. But he soon changes.

BENEDICK: Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?
BEATRICE: Yea, and I will weep a while longer.
BENEDICK: I will not desire that.
BEATRICE: You have no reason; I do it freely.
BENEDICK: Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.
BEATRICE: Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her!
BENEDICK: Is there any way to show such friendship?
BEATRICE: A very even way, but no such friend.
BENEDICK: May a man do it?
BEATRICE: It is a man's office, but not yours.
BENEDICK: I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
BEATRICE: As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you; but believe me not, and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing. I am sorry for my cousin.
BENEDICK: By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

There you are: he's made his play now, switching to *thou* But Beatrice isn't impressed.

BEATRICE: Do not swear, and eat it.
BENEDICK: I will swear by it that you love me; and I will make him eat it that says I love not you.

He's been rebuffed, and it knocks his pronouns off balance – back to *you* - but only for a moment.

BEATRICE: Will you not eat your word?
BENEDICK: With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.
BEATRICE: Why, then, God forgive me!
BENEDICK: What offence, sweet Beatrice?
BEATRICE: You have stayed me in a happy hour. I was about to protest I loved you.

She means, 'you've caught me at a good time' – but it's still not a very strong protest, if she stays with *you.*

BENEDICK: And do it with all thy heart.
BEATRICE: I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.
BENEDICK: Come, bid me do anything for thee.
BEATRICE: Kill Claudio.
BENEDICK: Ha! Not for the wide world.
BEATRICE: You kill me to deny it. Farewell.
BENEDICK: Tarry, sweet Beatrice.
BEATRICE: I am gone, though I am here. There is no love in you. Nay, I pray you, let me go.
BENEDICK: Beatrice -
BEATRICE: In faith, I will go.

And she then gives Benedick a good talking to, at the end of which Benedick is convinced. He has to kill Claudio. And notice what happens to the pronouns then. To begin with, he still uses *thee* to her. But then he switches back.

BENEDICK: Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee.
BEATRICE: Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.
BENEDICK: Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE: Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.
BENEDICK: Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you.

Why does he change to 'you', after so many *thous*? It's a change of mood. It's to show Beatrice that he's serious in wanting to help her. He isn't speaking now as her lover, but as a supporter. In other words, the use of *thou* is bound up with the way people feel about each other, and if you monitor the way people use their *thous* and *yous* you'll get a good barometer of their relationships. In fact, Beatrice never addresses Benedick as *thou* anywhere in the play, except once, when she's talking to herself, fantasising about him in her mind. I wonder how long that relationship will last?

A switch from *you* to *thou* or vice versa always means something, so look out for them. Here's another example. At the beginning of *King Lear*, the King has decided to divide his land into three parts and give one part each to his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. His first two daughters flatter him, and he gives them their portions. But Cordelia doesn't flatter him, and he gets angry with her. What's interesting is to see the way Lear changes his pronouns to reflect his feelings. You'd expect him to use *thou* to his daughters, and they to use *you* to him. And that's how it starts off. Goneril speaks first, with *you*.

GONERIL: Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter,
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour,
As much as child e'er loved, or father found,
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable,
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

Lear is taken in by that. He gives her and her husband the Duke of Albany a third of his kingdom, using *thee*.

LEAR: Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champaigns riched,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady. To thine and Albany's issues
Be this perpetual.

Then it's Regan's turn.

LEAR: What says our second daughter?
Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall?
REGAN: I am made of that self mettle as my sister,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;
Only she comes too short, that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys
Which the most precious square of sense possesses,
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.

Felicitate – a really oily word. It means 'make happy'. But it's too learned a word to convey any emotion. Still, it takes Lear in too, and he *thee's* her back.

LEAR: To thee and thine hereditary ever
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,

No less in space, validity, and pleasure
Than that conferred on Goneril.

Now, here's the interesting bit. Lear turns to his favourite daughter, Cordelia.

LEAR: Now our joy,
Although our last and least, to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interessed, what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters?

What can you say? You? To his favourite daughter? Why didn't he *thou* here, like the others? Plainly, *you* is now being used as a special marker of affection. If *thou* is normal for 'ordinary' daughters, then *you* takes on an extra value; it becomes special. So he waits for Cordelia to answer, expecting as much praise as the other two gave. But of course she doesn't reply in the way he's expecting.

LEAR: Speak!
CORDELIA: Nothing, my lord.
LEAR: Nothing?
CORDELIA: Nothing.
LEAR: How, nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.
CORDELIA: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less.
LEAR: How, how, Cordelia. Mend your speech a little,
Lest you may mar your fortunes.
CORDELIA: Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me.
I return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters
To love my father all.
LEAR: But goes thy heart with this?
CORDELIA: Ay, my good lord.
LEAR: So young and so untender?
CORDELIA: So young, my lord, and true.
LEAR: Well, let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower.

And he writes her off. And at the point where he switches from being nice to nasty, did you notice he changes pronouns? *But goes thy heart with this*? *Thy truth then be thy dower.* Here, his *thou* forms are being used not as a marker of affection, but of anger.

So, we have to be careful when we're interpreting *thou* and *you*. It all depends on who's saying what to whom, and where and why. Context is everything. Here are a couple more examples, from Hamlet. At the very opening of the play, the soldiers meet on the battlements.

BARNARDO: Who's there?
FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

Yourself. A formal usage perhaps to show you don't know, or can't see who you're talking to.

BARNARDO: Long live the King!
FRANCISCO: Barnardo?
BARNARDO: He.
FRANCISCO: You come most carefully upon your hour.

Again, professional observation. The *you* of courtesy.

BARNARDO: 'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

Ah, they must be pals. Intimate tone. Get *thee* to bed.

FRANCISCO: For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.
BARNARDO Have you had quiet guard?

Now there's the interesting one. Why the *you*, when he was saying *thou* to him a second before? Well, perhaps this is the professional soldier speaking now, not the friend. Francisco is sick at heart, so maybe there's been some trouble. He's checking it out, officially. He could have said, 'Hast thou had quiet guard?', but that would have been much more akin to a casual chatty remark, more like 'Had a nice time, dear?' Totally inappropriate.

And there's a very famous instance of thou/you switching later in the play, between Hamlet and Ophelia, where the pronouns switch as the mood changes. Ophelia only uses *you* to Hamlet throughout, and Hamlet begins with *you* in return, for it is an awkward meeting, and he is after all telling her he did not love her. But then the fencing stops, he suddenly switches to *thou*, and the dialogue takes on a much greater emotional intensity.

HAMLET: I did love you once.
OPHELIA: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
HAMLET: You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.
OPHELIA: I was the more deceived.
HAMLET: Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?
OPHELIA: At home, my lord.

There, notice the switch. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father? From intimacy to suspicion, and the pronoun switches, as sharp as a railway signal.

A final example. Let's listen to the way *thou* and *you* come and go in part of the opening scene of *The Merchant of Venice*. Bassanio needs to borrow some money from the merchant, Antonio, to travel to Belmont to see the lady he loves. The whole dialogue at this point uses *you*. After all, it's a bit awkward, isn't it, asking a friend for a loan - another loan, actually, as he's borrowed from him before. Antonio begins by asking him about the lady.

ANTONIO: Well, tell me now what lady is the same
To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage,
That you today promised to tell me of.

Bassanio doesn't reply at first, but explains to Antonio why he needs the money.

BASSANIO: 'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,
How much I have disabled mine estate
By something showing a more swelling port
Than my faint means would grant continuance.

He's spent more than he's got, in other words. You probably know the feeling. But Antonio's a good friend, so he replies warmly,

ANTONIO: I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it
And if it stand as you yourself still do,
Within the eye of honour, be assured
My purse, my person, my extremest means
Lie all unlocked to your occasions.

The *you* here is part of a polite, well-mannered reply. Antonio is still a bit lost in his own thoughts. Yes, of course you can have the money. But Bassanio doesn't get to the point; instead, he goes into a long rigmarole about how he's going to mend his ways.

BASSANIO: In my schooldays, when I had lost one shaft,
I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
The self-same way, with more advised watch,
To find the other forth; and by adventuring both
I oft found both. I urge this childhood proof,
Because what follows is pure innocence.
I owe you much, and like a wilful youth,
That which I owe is lost; but if you please
To shoot another arrow that self way
Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
As I will watch the aim, or to find both
Or bring your latter hazard back again
And thankfully rest debtor for the first.

Antonio is evidently a bit irritated by this long-winded reply.

ANTONIO: You know me well, and herein spend but time
To wind about my love with circumstance;
And out of doubt you do me now more wrong
In making question of my uttermost
Than if you had made waste of all I have.

So Bassanio finally opens his heart to him.

BASSANIO: In Belmont is a lady richly left,
And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,
Of wondrous virtues. Sometimes from her eyes
I did receive fair speechless messages.
Her name is Portia.

And he explains how many suitors come to woo her. But, he concludes, wooing costs money.

BASSANIO: O my Antonio, had I but the means
To hold a rival place with one of them,
I have a mind presages me such thrift,
That I should questionless be fortunate!

ANTONIO: Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea,
Neither have I money, nor commodity
To raise a present sum. Therefore go forth;
Try what my credit can in Venice do,
That shall be racked, even to the uttermost,
To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia.

And he's won Antonio over. How do we know? The clue is the change of pronoun. *Thou* know'st ... furnish *thee* to Belmont. Once Bassanio has opened his heart, it really moves Antonio, and the chief way you can see that he is moved is by the way he changes his pronoun, from *you* to *thou*.

So, there's plenty going on, as we listen to Shakespearian conversations. And the more we notice these little linguistic winks and nods, the more we'll get out of them. In the fourth part of this series, we'll look at some of the other nuances which are there, waiting to be spotted, in the language of Shakespeare's plays.

Part Four: Speaking the Speech

If Shakespeare's language is a huge forest, then what Ben Crystal and I have been doing in our book *Shakespeare's Words* is looking at some of the trees within it - individual words, individual bits of grammar, individual rhythm patterns, the nature of individual exchanges, such as *thou* and *you*, and so on. I suppose the more trees you are able to think about, the better. At the same time, it's crucial to step back, from time to time, and consider the forest as a whole. That's what happens when you listen to one of the plays, of course. You don't sit there thinking about each difficult word, or each bit of effective rhythm, or spotting *thou* and *you*. You just enjoy the play, as best you can. The more you understand the linguistics of it, of course, the more you'll understand what's being said and appreciate it. But I doubt whether anybody, not even the most well-versed Shakespearian linguist, would be able to pay attention to every little nuance. The groundlings in the Elizabethan theatres wouldn't have understood a lot of what was being said either. But they'd have enjoyed the sound of the language, nevertheless.

So, when you're listening, don't feel guilty if you find yourself missing the occasional word. Catch the gist, and let the language flow over you. Feel the poetry. Let it carry you with it, especially as a fascinating image unfolds. For the most part, there isn't a problem. In some passages, you can listen for quite a while before encountering a difficult word. Try it now, with this exchange from *Romeo and Ju*liet between Friar Laurence and Romeo. While you're listening, try to make a mental note if you're unsure of any of the words. The friar is telling Romeo of the prince's judgment upon him for killing Tybalt.

FRIAR LAURENCE: Not body's death, but body's banishment.
ROMEO: Ha, banishment? Be merciful, say 'death',
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death. Do not say 'banishment'.
FRIAR LAURENCE: Hence from Verona art thou banishèd.
Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.
ROMEO: There is no world without Verona walls
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
Hence banishèd is banished from the world
And world's exile is death. Then 'banishèd'
Is death mistermed. Calling death 'banishèd'
Thou cut'st my head off with a golden axe,
And smil'st upon the stroke that murders me.
FRIAR LAURENCE : O deadly sin, O rude unthankfulness!

Thy fault our law calls death, but the kind Prince,
Taking thy part, hath rushed aside the law
And turned that black word 'death' to banishment.
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.
ROMEO: 'Tis torture, and not mercy. Heaven is here
Where Juliet lives, and every cat and dog
And little mouse, every unworthy thing
Live here in heaven and may look on her,
But Romeo may not.

And he harangues the friar for another dozen lines or so. He's upset - and so might the audience be, if they are sympathizing with him - but not because they can't understand his vocabulary. For what words are there here that are different from what could be found today? There are some archaic words, of course, such as *hence, hath, thy, thou art*, and *thou seest* , but all of these can be heard in many a modern Church or read in a children's comic book about knights and dragons. *Banishèd* is odd, of course, because of the rhythm of the line. But apart from this, there were only two words that could pose a problem. *Without Verona walls* might cause a hesitation, for *without* meaning 'outside, beyond' has been largely replaced these days by the sense of 'lacking, in the absence of'. Even so, that old meaning is still widely heard in many regional dialects today. And the other example that isn't 100% clear is '*rush aside'* - the prince hath *rushed aside the law*. We don't say that any more, but we do say 'put aside' or 'brush aside', which mean more or less the same thing. So it's unlikely that this would have caused much of a problem either. The context would have carried you through.

Context is crucial. If you do encounter a difficult word at the beginning of a speech, or a piece of dialogue, never write it off as incomprehensible straight away. If you hold on, you will often find that Shakespeare himself will help you out. Here's an example, at the beginning of *Othello*. Othello and Desdemona have secretly got married, much to her father Brabantio's fury. After the lovers explain themselves, the Duke tries to calm Brabantio down:

DUKE: Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence
Which, as a grise or step may help these lovers
Into your favour.

A *grise*? That is certainly an unfamiliar word. It's an Old French word - the same root as in the word *degree*, actually - and it means 'step' or 'stair'. But you already knew that, because Shakespeare himself has told you. *As a grise - or step*.

Here's a longer example. In the middle of *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Laurence is advising Juliet how to escape from her dilemma of having to marry Paris when she's already married to Romeo. It is a crucial part of the plot, with the mood urgent, so the language needs to be grasped quickly; but the unfamiliar words and phrasing can produce a dip in the level of comprehension just when we do not want it.

FRIAR LAURENCE: Take thou this vial, being then in bed,
And this distilling liquor drink thou off,
When presently through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour; for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease.

Every line has at least one word which is a little unfamiliar - a *vial* is a small bottle; *distilling* means 'infusing', the liquid will spread through her whole body; *presently* means 'immediately'; *humour* here means a 'fluid'; and *surcease* is an emphatic way of saying 'cease, stop'. So, with all this to take in, the result is a temporary uncertainty. But it is only temporary, because later in the speech there is a passage which makes it perfectly clear what is to happen.

FRIAR LAURENCE: And in this borrowed likeness of shrunk death
Thou shalt continue two-and-forty hours,
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep.

That's plain enough. People who argue that Shakespeare is unintelligible and inaccessible tend to quote the difficult bits and ignore the easier ones. We should always listen to the whole of a speech before worrying about the difficulties found in a part of it.

The same point applies to some of the most vivid language in the plays - the put-downs – the insults. It's a kind of language which we've largely lost now. In some modern languages, you'll still hear long and complicated insult-exchanges, with rhymes and alliteration and powerful rhythms, but people don't seem to do that any more in English. They seem to get stuck when they're shouting abuse at each other. Shakespeare does it far better. Let me pull together a few choice insults from various plays.

Actually, the first one isn't choice at all; it's genteel, but I choose it because it addresses the question of swearing explicitly. In *Henry IV Part 1*, Hotspur tries to persuade his wife to sing.

HOTSPUR: Come, Kate, I'll have your song too.
LADY PERCY: Not mine, in good sooth.
HOTSPUR: Not yours, in good sooth! Heart, you swear like a comfit-maker's wife:
'Not you, in good sooth!' and 'As true as I live' and
'As God shall mend me!' and 'As sure as day!';
And giv'st such sarsanet surety for thy oaths
As if thou never walk'st further than Finsbury.
Swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art,
A good mouth-filling oath, and leave 'in sooth'
And such protest of pepper gingerbread
To velvet-guards and Sunday citizens.

A *sarsanet surety* is refers to the lightweight nature of her oaths, as flimsy as silk. *Velvet-guards* were people who wore velvet trimming on their clothes.

Hotspur would have approved of the mouth-filling stuff in *Troilus and Cressida*. One of the Greek lords, Ajax, has commanded Thersites to tell him about a proclamation that has been made, and Thersites won't, and that starts off a lively exchange, with Ajax hitting Thersites every now and then for good measure:

AJAX: Thou bitch-wolf's son, canst thou not hear? (*Beating him.*) Feel, then.
THERSITES: The plague of Greece upon thee, thou mongrel beef-witted lord!
AJAX: Speak then, thou unsifted leaven, speak. I will beat thee into handsomeness.
THERSITES: I shall sooner rail thee into wit and holiness. But I think thy horse will sooner con an oration than thou learn a prayer without book. (*Ajax strikes him*) Thou canst strike, canst thou? A red murrain o' thy jade's tricks!

A red plague on your horse's tricks, he means.

AJAX: Toadstool, learn me the proclamation.
THERSITES: Dost thou think I have no sense, thou strikest me thus?
AJAX: The proclamation!
THERSITES: Thou art proclaimed a fool, I think.
AJAX: Do not, porcupine, do not. My fingers itch.
THERSITES: I would thou didst itch from head to foot. An I had the scratching of thee, I would make thee the loathsomest scab in Greece.
AJAX: I say, the proclamation!
THERSITES: Thou grumblest and railest every hour on Achilles, and thou art as full of envy at his greatness as Cerberus is at Proserpina's beauty, ay, that thou barkest at him.

AJAX: Mistress Thersites!
THERSITES: Thou shouldest strike him.
AJAX: Cobloaf!

That's a nice one, from the shape of a small loaf; he's calling him a lumphead.

AJAX: Cobloaf!
THERSITES: He would pun thee into shivers with his fist, as a sailor breaks a biscuit.
AJAX: (*Beating him*) You whoreson cur!

Spelled w h o r e s o n … 'whore's son'. A bastard, in other words. A very common insult in the plays.

AJAX: You whoreson cur!
THERSITES: Do! do!
AJAX: Thou stool for a witch! (*He strikes Thersites*)
THERSITES: Ay, do, do! Thou sodden-witted lord, thou hast no more brain than I have in mine elbows. An assinnico may tutor thee ...

That's a little ass, a donkey.

THERSITES: An assinnico may tutor thee. Thou scurvy valiant ass, thou art here but to thrash Trojans, and thou art bought and sold among those of any wit, like a barbarian slave. If thou use to beat me, I will begin at thy heel, and tell what thou art by inches, thou thing of no bowels, thou!
AJAX: You dog!
THERSITES: You scurvy lord!
AJAX: (*Beating him*) You cur!
THERSITES: Mars his idiot! Do, rudeness! Do, camel; do, do!

Then Achilles comes in and stops the fight. For the most part, these are perfectly ordinary everyday words that are being used. The groundlings would have used words like *scurvy*, *whoreson*, and *cur*. On the other hand, some of the insults are pure poetry. And you can hear it in this next example, too, one of the exchanges between Falstaff and Prince Hal in *Henry IV Part 1*. Falstaff has been telling a string of lies about how, after committing a robbery, he and his fellow-robbers lost all their takings because they were set upon by another gang of robbers. To save face, Falstaff keeps adding to the number of assailants he fought with and killed. The Prince knows all along what really happened, of course, as it was he and Poins in disguise who really set upon Falstaff, frightened him to death, and made him run away. And after listening to the lies getting larger and larger, he eventually loses patience:

PRINCE HAL: These lies are like their father than begets them - gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool, thou whoreson obscene greasy tallow-catch -
FALSTAFF: What, art thou mad? Art thou mad? Is not the truth the truth?

Knotty-pated – blockheaded, he means. *Tallow-catch.* That's a tub or pan to catch candle-grease in. Falstaff wriggles, and tries to get out of trouble, but fails, and the Prince lets forth another barrage, but this time gets a salvo back in return.:

PRINCE HAL: I'll no longer be guilty of this sin. This sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-backbreaker, this huge hill of flesh -
FALSTAFF: 'Sblood, you starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat's-tongue, you bull's pizzle, you stock-fish. - O, for breath to utter what is like thee!- you tailor's yard, you sheath, you bow-case, you vile standing tuck -

PRINCE HAL: Well, breathe awhile, and then to't again.

In reply to the Prince's uncomplimentary remarks about his size and weight, Falstaff picks on the Prince's slim physique. An eel-skin, a bull's pizzle, a bow-case, and the others are all long thin things. A *neat*'s tongue? *Neat* is an old word for an ox. A *tuck* was a long rapier-like sword. And st*ock-fish* was dried cod.

It wasn't just the men who were good at insulting. Women did it very well too. Here's the prostitute Doll Tearsheet putting down Falstaff's ensign Pistol in *Henry IV Part 2*:

PISTOL: God save you, Sir John.
FALSTAFF: Welcome, Ensign Pistol. Here, Pistol, I charge you with a cup of sack. Do you discharge upon mine hostess.
PISTOL: I will discharge upon her, Sir John, with two bullets.
FALSTAFF: She is pistol-proof, sir, you shall not hardly offend her.
MISTRESS QUICKLY: Come, I'll drink no proofs, nor no bullets. I'll drink no more than will do me good, for no man's pleasure, I.
PISTOL: Then to you, Mistress Dorothy! I will charge you.
DOLL: Charge me? I scorn you, scurvy companion. What, you poor, base, rascally, cheating, lack-linen mate!

A *lack-linen mate*? A slovenly fellow.

DOLL: Away, you mouldy rogue, away! I am meat for your master!

She means she's a dish reserved for Falstaff.

PISTOL: I know you, Mistress Dorothy.
DOLL: Away, you cutpurse rascal, you filthy bung, away! By this wine, I'll thrust my knife in your mouldy chaps an you play the saucy cuttle with me. Away, you bottle-ale rascal, you basket-hilt stale juggler, you!

Now we're getting somewhere. A *cutpurse*: a thief. A *bung*: a pickpocket. Mouldy *chaps*? They're cheeks. *Cuttle*? That was a type of knife. A *cuttle-bung* was a knife a thief used for cutting purses, which in those days were money bags worn somewhere about the body. And then, *basket-hilt stale juggler*. *Juggler* first: that's a trickster. *Stale* – she means antiquated. She's saying he's 'a worn-out old fraud'. And then the interesting *basket hilt*. That was a sword hilt which had steel basketwork around it to protect the hand. The suggestion is that you were a bit pathetic, if you used such a thing. Definitely a term of contempt. Doll is saying that Pistol is 'a namby-pamby worn-out old fraud'. Not bad. Doll had quite a way with insults. There's another sequence towards the end of the play, when she harangues the beadles who are taking her off to prison:

BEADLE: The constables have delivered her over to me and she shall have whipping-cheer, I warrant her. There hath been a man or two killed about her.
DOLL: Nut-hook, nut-hook, you lie! Come on, I'll tell thee what, thou damned tripe-visaged rascal, an the child I go with do miscarry, thou wert better thou hadst struck thy mother, thou paper-faced villain.

Insult sequences like these show us two things. They tell us, firstly, what a lot of Elizabethan English was like – the audiences would have used such words as *rogue*, *rascal*, and *whoreson* themselves. But they also show us Shakespeare at work. *Tripe-visaged rascal* is a fine image, isn't it? So is *paper-faced villain*, and some of the other sequences. There's real imagination here. There's poetry in the insults, even if they're usually written as prose. It's the rhythm that does it, too, reinforcing the images like a series of punches: *damned tripe-visaged rascal*. Pow, pow, pow. *Basket-hilt stale juggler*.

The thing about insults is that you can understand the force of them even though you might not know exactly what all the words mean. Even if you didn't know what a *basket-hilt stale juggler* was, you'd not fail to notice that it mustn't be very nice. And that's the most important thing of all to remember, whenever you start taking an in-depth look at Shakespeare's language. You get enormous help from the context. The occasional word which causes difficulty is usually lost sight of among the words which carry the bulk of the meaning. There are nearly a million words in the whole of Shakespeare's plays, and only about 5 per cent of these actually cause a problem of any kind. The more we understand that 5 per cent, of course, the more our appreciation of the plays and poems will grow. That is why Ben and I compiled *Shakespeare's Words* in the first place. But don't let that 5 per cent get in the way of the other 95 per cent. In fact it should be the other way round. Use that 95 per cent to help you with the words you don't know. Let the poetry win.

Try it now, with this famous speech from *Richard II*. There are a handful of difficult words in the speech, but they don't really interfere with our general comprehension. Richard has been deposed by Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV, and finds himself in prison, and in a long lamenting soliloquy, he reflects on his plight. It's a speech which Professor Frank Kermode, one of our greatest Shakespearian scholars, has called simply 'wonderful'. He says in his book, *Shakespeare's Language*, 'No other speech in Shakespeare much resembles this one, for its quiet meditation'.

RICHARD: I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world;
And, for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.
My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father, and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts,
And these same thoughts people this little world,
In humours like the people of this world;
For no thought is contented.

The speech goes on a while, and then is interrupted by the sound of music. Richard uses the music to launch himself into a splendid extended image, comparing himself to a clock, and probing the analogy in a dozen different ways. I've heard this read dozens of times, and each time I get something new out of it.

RICHARD: Music do I hear?
Ha, ha! Keep time – how sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string;
But for the concord of my state and time,
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke:
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me;
For now hath time made me his numb'ring clock;
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
Now sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
Are clamorous groans which strike upon my heart,
Which is the bell – so sighs, and tears, and groans,
Show minutes, times, and hours. But my time

Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,
While I stand fooling here, his Jack o' th' clock.
This music mads me. Let is sound no more;
For though it have holp mad men to their wits,
In me it seems it will make wise men mad.
Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me,
For 'tis a sign of love; and love to Richard
Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world.

A strange brooch – a strange jewel, he means. Indeed, that's a good metaphor for the whole of Shakespeare's language, isn't it? There's some wonderful, powerful, rich, moving language in the plays – and sometimes its strangeness gets in the way. So: one of the things you need to do is get rid of some of the strangeness. Just as you would learn a basic vocabulary of common words and phrases when you're learning French, it's possible to do the same with Shakespeare's language, Early Modern English. That's what this series of four talks has been about, and that's why we wrote *Shakespeare's Words*.