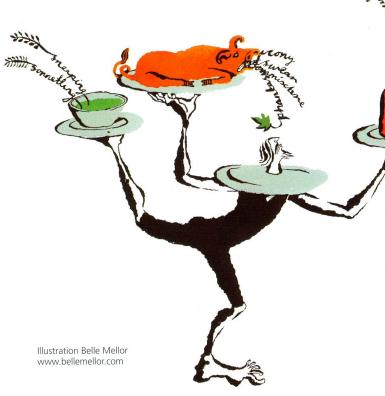
David Crystal sits at the banquet of words in Love's Labour's Lost.

Linguistic feasting



anguage is on everyone's mind, in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Whatever your rank or role, at some point you start to talk about it. Characters are defined by it: Armado is 'a man of fire-new words'). Holofernes and Armado impress with it ('They have been at a great feast of languages'). Costard ruminates about it (*remuneration* - 'that's the Latin word for three farthings'). Holofernes decides that 'posterior of the day' for the afternoon is 'well culled, choice, sweet, and apt'. The reflections are everywhere. How can we best use words to describe our feelings? What are the most appropriate words to use ('Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief')? *Word* and *words* turn up in this play 48 times – far more than in any other of Shakespeare's plays.

With such a theme you'd expect Shakespeare to be at his most lexically inventive. Williamisms – first recorded usages in the *Oxford English Dictionary* – should abound. And they do. There are several original un-forms – three of them from the Princess:

Their several counsels they unbosom shall ('disclose', 5.2.141) as pure / As the unsullied lily (5.2.352)

In so unseeming to confess receipt (2.1.156)

Berowne gives us another:

love is full of *unbefitting* strains (5.2.770)

And Holofernes gives us a whole list:

after his undressed, unpolished, uneducated, unpruned, untrained, or rather, unlettered, or, ratherest, unconfirmed fashion (4.2.17)

The two italicized words are first-time usages in this play.

There are new compounds with well, out, and over:

A well-accomplished youth (2.1.56)

Define, define, well-educated infant (1.2.90)

Well fitted in arts (2.1.45)

Methinks I should *outswear* Cupid (1.2.62)

a little o'erparted ('having too many parts', 5.2.580)

Are we betrayed thus to thy *over-view*? ('inspection', 4.3.173)

I will overglance the superscript ('heading', 4.2.130)

That last sentence of Holofernes has two Williamisms. And in fact there are several places in the play where two novel usages come in quick succession. Here is another example from Holofernes:

You find not the *apostrophus*, and so miss the accent. Let me *supervise* the canzonet. ('apostrophe', 'look over', 4.2.119)

One from Armado:

Do you not *educate* youth at the *charge-house* on the top of the mountain? ('provide schooling for', 'boarding school' (5.1.77)

One from Costard:

most *incony* vulgar wit; / When it comes so smoothly off, so *obscenely* as it were, so fit. ('delicate', 'offensively', 4.1.143) And one from Boyet:

Fair ladies masked are roses in their bud;/ *Dismasked*, their damask sweet *commixture* shown, / Are angels vailing clouds ('unmasked', 'complexion', 5.2.296)

Mote manages three in this speech:

to jig off a tune at the tongue's end, canary to it with your feet, humour it with turning up your eyelids. (3.1.10)

The three new verbs add action to the nouns: 'to sing or play a jig', 'to dance the canary', i.e. in a lively way, and 'find enjoyable'. Holofernes also uses *humour* as a verb:

to humour the ignorant, call I the deer the Princess killed a pricket.' (4.2.51).

There the meaning is 'indulge'.

As quite often in the plays, when Shakespeare uses a neologism, he uses it twice. Armado seems to enjoy the word juvenal ('youth', 1.2.7, 13). Costard likes incony ('delicate', 3.1.133, 4.1.143). Boyet and Holofernes both like phantasim ('a fantastic being', 4.1.99, 5.1.18). The Princess likes short-lived (2.1.54, 4.1.15). And Shakespeare, it seems, likes words of the short-lived type, judging by the following coinages in this play:

Pay him the due of honey-tongued Boyet (5.2.334)

That low-spirited swain (1.1.250)

Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three-piled hyperboles ('of the highest quality', 5.2.406)

I get the impression that Shakespeare is having a great time creating words, just for the joy of it, in this play. There's a lot of neologism in Troilus and Cressida too, but there it is more abstract, reflecting the political nature of the dialogue. Here many of the lexical creations are concrete, vivid or pictorial:

the tender hornes of cockled snails ('furnished with a shell', 4.3.314)

The *preyful* Princess ('preying, 4.2.56)

Our court shall be a little academe. ('academy', 1.1.13)

A domineering pedant ore the Boy (3.1.179)

So sweet a kiss the golden sun gives not... / As thy eye-beams ('glance of the eye', 4.3.24)

Saint George's half-cheek in a brooch ('face in profile', 5.2.614)

Although not valued to the money's worth (2.1.137)

lady-smocks all silver-white (5.2.905)

Berowne is like an envious *sneaping* frost ('biting', 1.1.100) Then will she get the *upshoot* by cleaving the pin (upshot',

4.1.137)

None but minstrels like of sonnetting (4.3.156) some slight zany ('comic performer', 5.2.463)

That he was well aware of what he was doing I think is apparent from the comments he puts into some of his characters' mouths.

Nathaniel warmly approves of Holofernes' creations:

He is too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd, as it were, too peregrinate, as I may call it. ('mannered', 5.1.12)

NATHANIEL: 'A most singular and choice epithet.'

Less warm is Dull, who has been listening to Holofernes,

Nathaniel, and Armado for some time:

HOLOFERNES: Via, goodman Dull! Thou hast spoken no word all this while.

DULL: Nor understood none neither, sir.

The line always gets a great laugh, as do most of the linguistic jokes in the play. There are large numbers of them. I don't know why he didn't call it Love's Labour's Language.

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A revival of the 2007 production of Love's Labour's Lost opens at the Globe on 25 September.