



Illustration Belle Mellor

There's a speech in Act 3 Scene 1 of *Henry IV Part 1* which is stylistically rather distinctive. It's when Hotspur explodes, talking about Glendower:

Sometime he angers me  
With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant,  
Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies,  
And of a dragon and a *finless* fish,  
A *clip-winged* griffin and a *moulten* raven,  
A *couching* lion and a ramping cat,  
And such a deal of *skimble-skamble* stuff  
As puts me from my faith.

The italicized words are all first-recorded word uses in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Williamisms, as I call them). It seems that when Hotspur gets explosive he resorts to using new words. And, as he's regularly explosive, it's not surprising to find more of this vocabulary elsewhere in his speeches.

A few lines earlier in the scene we find 'these same metre *ballad-mongers*' and 'the forced gait of a *shuffling* nag'. A few lines later we get 'a good *mouth-filling* oath'. In Act 4 we get 'the *fire-eyed* maid of smoky war' and 'a poor unminded outlaw *sneaking* home'. In Act 1, when he tries to defend his actions to the King, we hear him use 'pouncet-box', 'neglectingly', 'blood-stained', 'down-trod', and 'disdained'. A third of all the neologisms in this play come from Hotspur. And even if some of these turn out not to be Williamisms at all (with new research throwing up earlier instances) it's still an impressive number.

David Crystal explores the novel vocabulary of *Henry IV*.

## Lexical explosions

One of his usages seems to have left a lasting impression. In 4.1.94, Hotspur talks dismissively about Prince Hal:

Where is his son,  
The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales  
And his comrades that *daffed* the world aside  
And bid it pass?

*Daff* is a variant form of *doff*, which in turn is a collapsed version of *do off*. It's a solid, mouth-filling northern form, meaning 'put off' or 'thrust aside', and Shakespeare seems to have had a liking for it. All but one of the Early Modern English citations in the *OED* are his. It turns up again in *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, when Cleopatra helps Antony don his armour, and Antony says 'He that unbuckles this, till we do please / To *daff* for our repose, shall hear a storm'. Then there's a gap of over 200 years before the word is spotted again – in Keats, one of several 19th-century authors for whom the thought of 'daffing the world aside' evidently held great appeal.

I wasn't expecting Hotspur to be so prominent, when I first explored this play. I was expecting more neologisms to be in the street language of Falstaff and his cronies. But the few items that they do come out with are interesting. The *OED* hasn't yet found any earlier instances of Falstaff's use of Latin words in an English context: at one point he compares Bardolph's face to 'a death's head, or a *memento mori*' (3.3.30); at another he says '*ecce signum*' (2.4.163), 'behold the evidence', pointing to the way his sword has been hacked about. Gadshill uses a piece of Latin too

(2.1.96): '*homo* is a common name for all men'. That hasn't yet been found in an earlier English sentence. The examples reflect the pervasive nature of Latin words in the culture of the time. Even robbers used them.

Then there's Falstaff's piece of explosive wordplay during the robbery: 'You are grandjurors, are ye? We'll jure ye' (2.2.90) meaning 'when we're through with you, you'll have good reason to sit on a jury'. This is a favourite linguistic trick of Shakespeare's

– turning a person's name into a verb. We

see it, for example, in *Coriolanus*, when Menenius talks about being 'fidiused' (from Aufidius, 2.1.125), and in *Henry V* (4.4.29), when Pistol says, of the captured Monsieur Le Fer, he will 'fer him'.

Falstaff's other neologisms are an interesting mix:

I am as melancholy as... a *lugged* bear (1.2.740) [pulled by its ears]

There is nothing but *roguery* to be found in villainous man (2.4.121)

Call you that *backing* of your friends? (2.4.145)

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a thousand *blue-caps* more (2.4.350) [i.e. Scots, wearing a blue head-dress]

I do not like that *paying back* (3.3.177)

Do I not *dwindle* (3.3.2)

ostlers *trade-fallen* (4.2.28) [bankrupt]

The two most interesting ones, to my mind, are *backing* and *paying back*. Here we see Falstaff turning verbs into nouns – actions into states. This makes a nice contrast with Hotspur, whose neologistic vocabulary is highly active in character.

There are some highly effective neologisms in *Henry IV Part 1*, such as Vernon's description of Prince Hal, 'He made a blushing *cital* of himself' (5.2.62, 'recital'), and some of Hal's own coinages:

thou art *uncolled* (2.2.38) [deprived of a horse]

since the old days of goodman Adam to the *pupil age* of this present twelve o'clock at midnight (2.4.93)

greasy *tallow catch* (2.4.224) [tub of tallow]

And Shakespeare seemed to be in an *im-* mood. There are only five instances in the plays of this form of the prefix (a variant of *in-* used before words beginning with *b*, *m*, and *p*) being used

to make up a new verb, and four of them are in *Henry IV Part 1* (the other one, *impede*, is in *Macbeth*). We find Poins telling his associates that they have cases of buckram 'to *immask* our noted outward garments' (1.2.178). King Henry at the beginning of the play announces to everyone that 'We are *impressed* and engaged to fight' (1.1.21) and at the end angrily tells Worcester that insurrection never lacked 'Such water-colours to *impaint* his cause' (5.1.80). And Hotspur tells Blunt that there 'be *impawned* / Some surety for a safe return again'. Hotspur again. *Im-/in-* in this sort of use is a very dynamic prefix, typically expressing onward motion, sometimes of a quite intensive kind. I'm not surprised to see them in a play full of such explosive relationships.

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