

Well, well, well

David Crystal reveals the last word in Shakespeare's Williamisms.

We are used to thinking of Shakespeare's word-creation – what I call Williamisms – in terms of single words, such as *assassination* and *misprized*. Compound words, with two constituent elements, such as *counter-caster* and *down-gyved*, are not so often considered. And compound words which use a very common word in the language, such as *well*, are the least considered of all.

One reason is that they often don't look like compound words, because editors print them without a hyphen. That's a typical problem in English. Take the following three versions of the same word:

flower pot, flower-pot, flowerpot

Despite the differences, they are the same word.

Historically, the tendency is for such compounds to be first written as two words, then – as they become more familiar – to be hyphenated, and finally to be written solid, as a single graphic unit. The Shakespearean coinages by their nature tend to be unfamiliar, so editors often leave the elements spaced. Grammar also enters into the question: *well*-adjectives before a noun (in 'attributive' position) will tend to be hyphenated, whereas those occurring after a verb (in 'predicative' position) will not.

Take *well-derived*. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) the headword is printed *well(-)derived*, showing that it may be used both with or without the hyphen. Shakespeare uses this word four times, and in the Penguin edition of the plays we find it without the hyphen three times (predicative) and with the hyphen once (attributive):

I am, my lord, as well derived as he (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.1.99)

That you are well derived (*Two Gentleman of Verona*, 5.2.23)

Thou art a gentleman, and well derived (*The Two Gentleman of Verona*, 5.4.147)

My son corrupts a well-derived nature (*All's Well that Ends Well*, 3.2.88)

There are sometimes problems of analysis. When Troilus says 'Their loving *well composed* with gifts of nature' (*Troilus and Cressida*, 4.4.76) we could argue that this isn't a single word, 'well-composed', but a sequence of two separate words, as suggested by the possibility of changing the word order: 'composed well with gifts of nature'. This kind of problem keeps linguists happy for hours. But as the mention of grammatical analysis can make readers quickly move on to another article, I won't go into that, but simply say that on this page you will see only those *well*-Williamisms which are recognized as such by the *OED*.

There are a surprisingly large number of *well*-coinages, 40 in all, including *well-derived*, and this is a complete list of them (hyphenation as in the Penguin series):

a *well-accomplished* youth (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 2.1.56; also, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 4.3.13)

it is *well allied* (*Measure for Measure*, 3.2.97)

well-behaved reproof (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 2.1.55)

in mutual *well-beseeming* ranks (*1 Henry IV*, 1.1.14; also *Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.56)

A gentleman *well bred* (*2 Henry IV*, 1.1.26)

Frank nature... hath *well composed* thee (*All's Well that Ends Well*, 1.2.21; and cf. *Troilus* above).

well conceited, Davy (*2 Henry IV*, 5.1.31; also *Julius Caesar*, 1.3.162)

well-dealing countrymen (*The Comedy of Errors*, 1.1.7)

as *well descended* as thyself (*Cymbeline*, 5.5.303)

O *well-divided* disposition! (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.5.53)



Illustration Belle Mellor

you shall be *well desired* in Cyprus (*Othello*, 2.1.98)
well-educated infant (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 1.2.90)
well-entered soldiers (*All's Well that Ends Well*, 2.1.6)
 my *well-famed* lord of Troy (*Troilus and Cressida*, 4.5.173)
well fitted in arts (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 2.1.45)
 then is my pump *well-flowered* (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.59)
well forewarning wind (*Henry VI Part 2*, 3.2.85)
 this glorious and *well-foughten* field (*Henry V*, 4.6.18)
well-labouring sword (*Henry IV Part 2*, 1.1.127)
 not being *well married* (*As You Like It*, 3.3.83; also *Romeo and Juliet*, 4.5.77)
 myself, *well mounted* (*King John*, 5.6.42)
well noted face (*King John*, 4.2.21; also *Love's Labour's Lost*, 4.3.86)
 a law in each *well-ordered* nation (*Troilus and Cressida*, 2.2.181)
 this *well-painted* piece (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 1443; also *Othello*, 4.1.259, *Venus and Adonis*, 212)
 as *well possessed* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.1.100)
well-refined pen (*Sonnet* 85.8)
 some *well-reputed* page (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 2.7.43; also 2.4.55; *Julius Caesar*, 2.1.295)
well-respected honour (*I Henry IV*, 4.3.10)
well-sailing ships (*Pericles*, 4.4.17)
 his youthful hose, *well saved* (*As You Like It*, 2.7.161; also *Coriolanus*, 4.3.11)
 my *well saying* (*Henry VIII*, 3.2.152)
 eyes *well seeing* (*Sonnet* 148.14)
 chaos of *well-seeming* forms (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.1.179; also *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.224)
 your *well-took* labour (*Hamlet*, 2.2.83)
 my noble and *well-warranted* cousin (*Measure for Measure*,

5.1.252)
 it were not possible with *well-weighing* (*All's Well that Ends Well*, 4.3.176)
 a *well-wished* king (*Measure for Measure*, 2.4.27)
 my *well-won* thrift (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1.3.47; also *King John*, 1.1.174)
 exceedingly *well read* (*I Henry IV*, 3.1.160; also *Edward III*, 2.1.53; *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1.2.167)

I make no apology for imposing such a long list on your patience. It is important to appreciate how a single, simple process of construction can be used and adapted by an author in a variety of ways. This is as much part of Shakespeare's linguistic creativity as is his coining of *anthropophaginian* and *appertainment*. Admittedly the concepts expressed are more mundane, but that is no reason for ignoring them. And when people talk about the number of words Shakespeare coined, it is good to remember that the majority of them are not highly imaginative constructions but ordinary everyday usages. It's a simple point, but one well worth making. Fare you well.

David Crystal OBE is Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, Bangor, and the author with Ben Crystal of *Shakespeare's Words*. His book on last year's experiment in the original pronunciation of *Romeo and Juliet* will be published by Cambridge University Press in time for the 2005 theatre season.