

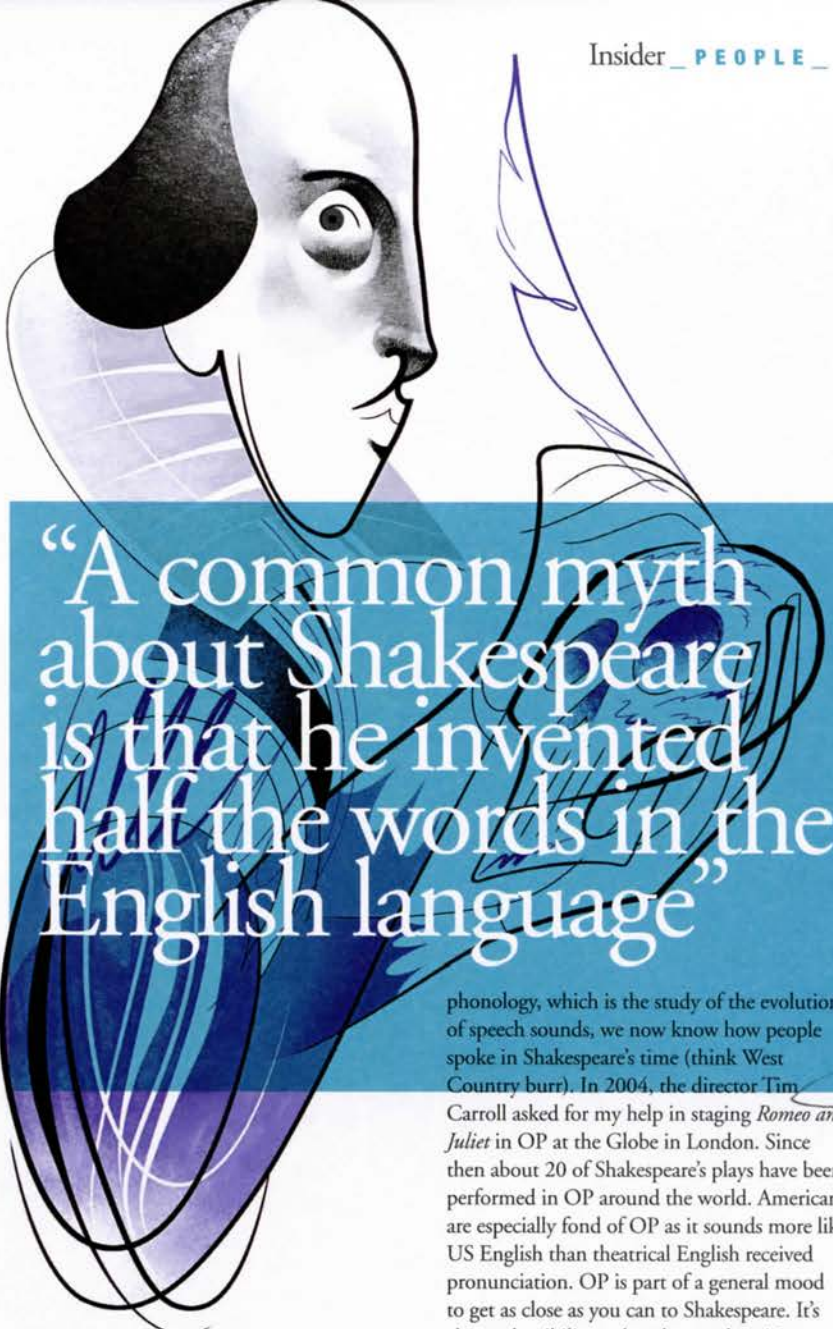
Think you know Shakespearean language? Meet Professor David Crystal, who's cataloguing all of Shakespeare's words

People say there's nothing new to be said about Shakespeare. What rubbish. Until recently there'd been too much focus on the biography and relatively little application of linguistics. For example, the previous glossary of Shakespeare was compiled in 1911. However, there is a movement to try and bring Shakespeare's language studies up to date.

My Shakespeare project began life as a Penguin book back in 2002. Although 676 pages long, *Shakespeare's Words* covered only a fraction of his word usage – hence the move online to a fully searchable resource with every example of a word that Shakespeare used. Using Penguin's paperback editions, I read through each play highlighting words that I thought audiences would not understand or that had changed their meaning. Then my son, Ben, (who is an actor, director and co-founder of the website) did the same. Even this process highlighted generational differences with words that I assumed people still knew. For example, in *Titus Andronicus*, there's the army of the Goths, but Goths means something quite different today. In the last year we added a thesaurus so that now you can find what words Shakespeare had in mind when he wanted to express the notion of love, for example, or walking down the road.

A common myth around Shakespeare is that he invented half the words in the English language. He knew and used about 18,000 words, average by today's standards, but a vocabulary far bigger than any of his peers. Research now shows that other people had invented many of those words before him. Shakespeare can claim around a thousand new words, but he wasn't the only one influencing vocabulary. Studies of his contemporaries such as Nashe and Middleton show that they too invented huge numbers of words. It was all the rage. We think that Shakespeare did it more than anybody else because he wrote about all social classes and occupations, exposing himself to a vast area of vocabulary.

Next year, we're adding audio to the website by recording every word in the glossary in its original pronunciation (OP). Via historical



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phonology, which is the study of the evolution of speech sounds, we now know how people spoke in Shakespeare's time (think West Country burr). In 2004, the director Tim Carroll asked for my help in staging *Romeo and Juliet* in OP at the Globe in London. Since then about 20 of Shakespeare's plays have been performed in OP around the world. Americans are especially fond of OP as it sounds more like US English than theatrical English received pronunciation. OP is part of a general mood to get as close as you can to Shakespeare. It's about plausibility rather than authenticity; understanding how the plays would have been performed and how they would have sounded. Rhymes and puns that don't work in modern English suddenly do when spoken in OP.

There's still a wish list of things to do with the website. At some point I will step back and Ben will take over. As he's an actor, not a linguist, I can imagine the website developing in all manner of fascinating directions.

*Professor David Crystal OBE (English 1962) spent a research year at UCL's Survey of English Usage with Baron Randolph Quirk and is a UCL Fellow. Visit David's website at [shakespearewords.com](http://shakespearewords.com)*

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