

## The Lexical Expansion of the Renaissance: Exuberance and Restraint II

### 1. Shakespeare

#### 1.1 Basic facts

- greatest author
- \*1564 Stratford-on-Avon
- †1616 Stratford-on-Avon
- actively writing between 1591 and 1611
- 37 plays, all major genres, such as comedy, tragedy and history
- romance (sort of a mixture between tragedy and comedy) invented by him
- no classical education, but attended grammar school

#### 1.2 What makes Shakespeare extra-ordinary?

- although Shakespeare only wrote literary texts, his words represent all major features of the contemporary lexicon, especially a high range of registers
- therefore, his language can be regarded as an example of the contemporary development in the lexicon
- lexicon of about 30,000 words, which is very remarkable for his time (cf. Milton: 8,000)
- all of his plays show linguistic originality
  - neologisms (e.g. *incarnadine*, *assassination* and *assubjugate*)
  - affixations (e.g. *unseminared*, *discandy*, *unprovoke*)
  - conversions (e.g. [to] *companion*, *beggared*, *palates*)
- Shakespeare's uniqueness in this regard acknowledged by contemporaries
- in 1602, 17.2 per cent of all new words were contributed by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, i.e. 43 out of 250 (as listed in the CED [Chronological English Dictionary])
- all in all about 10%
- steady increase in originality

#### 1.3 Originality

- creating characters that like to play with words
- a) Nonce-words
  - great number of nonce-words (e.g. to *unprovoke*, which is only to be found in *Macbeth*)
  - meaning established by relation to existing words (*provoke*) but also by a kind of explanation: 'Lechery, Sir, it *provokes* and *unprovokes*: it *provokes* the desire but it *takes away the performance*'
- b) Neologisms
  - more than 600 Latinate neologisms
  - about one fifth of them have become common words, e.g.:  
*accommodation*, *addiction*, *amazement*, *assassination*, *discontent*, *counterpart*, *mimic*, *obscene*, *survivor*, *useful*, *hostile*, etc.
- c) Exotic language
  - use of exotic words, often in a satirical fashion, i.e. the words were not invented by Shakespeare, but his usage may have had a major impact, e.g. *cannibal*, which is mentioned in *Othello* as "Cannibals that each other eat, The anthropophagi[...]"
  - also *basta*, *hurricane*, etc.
- d) Foreign words
  - direct introduction of Latin terms – much more rarely than by many more-learned contemporaries, which adds to their dramatic effect, cf. the famous "Et tu, Brute?" in *Julius Caesar*—some of them have survived, like *ergo*, *iota*, also *exit*, which before only existed as stage direction
- d) Others
  - also many common, more native terms are first recorded in Shakespeare's plays
  - idioms, e.g. *it's Greek to me*
  - but also common words, such as *to do* [to copulate], *to puke*, *to leak* (urinate), *weird*

## 1.4 Puns

- bawdy language restricted by censorship  
→ circumvention through word-play
- e.g.: *Much Ado About Nothing*
  - *nothing* - an O thing (i.e. vagina)  
"With a good leg and a good foot, uncle, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world, if 'a could get her good will."
  - *Leg* → penis
  - *Foot* ~ Fr. *foutre* (to fuck)
  - *Will* → sexual appetite
- average number of puns in a Shakespeare play: 78

## 2. Lexical Diversity in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies

### 2.1 Moving from the bloody stage to the theatre of mind

- in order to achieve dramatic impact early Elizabethan plays were based on stage violence rather than linguistic originality
- progress referring to the action and the language from Shakespeare's early plays to his last ones
  - *Titus Andronicus* (1592-94) is a medley of rape, murder, suicide and cruelty
  - *Timon of Athens* (1605-08) is technically without action but is filled with verbal "energy"
- In later tragedies a precise distinction of the hero's psyche replaced the so called "bloody stage"  
→ instead of a brutal action the focus was put on language in order to express emotions

### 2.2 Hamlet

- it shows Shakespeare's great command of lexical diversity of Early Modern English
  - Hamlet's role as the hesitating avenger of the revenge tragedy is very complex
  - his language reflects many contraries → he combines a whole range of styles
- Hamlet is a character of many talents which is emphasised by an unique lexicon
- On the one hand it is predominantly academic and high-register but on the other hand Shakespeare matches scholarly words with common and crude ones
- linguistic richness can also be shown with the diversified speech of the other characters
- examples:
  - beetle → nonce-word by him (reference to eyebrows) [low register]
  - chapless → without the lower chap / jaw [middle register]
  - coinage derived from F coin, word existed before, but Shakespeare was the first who used it with the meaning of "invention" [high register]
  - precurse (n.) → from Latin *praecursus* (means forerunning) [high register]
- ghost/ elder Hamlet: emphasis on the horrors of Purgatory (Fegefeuer)
- last line (p.195) consisting of three words, which represent religious rituals and were not used elsewhere by Shakespeare
  - Unhouselled → housel → husla ON means to administer the Eucharist
  - Unanealed → anele → oleum L means to give extreme unction to dying
  - Disappointed → apointer OF means to arrange
- Coinages would have had a remarkable impact on contemporaries

### 2.3 Macbeth

- this so called "mature" tragedy can be seen as inspiration for Wagnerian conceptions of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' because it is combining language and imagery into an organic whole
  - with the help of key words and patterns of imagery  
→ blood and bloody is used more than 40 times embodying a very complex pattern as the word is the base for a diversity of symbolic meanings, for instance death, life and kinship
- alone in the speech of the hero are more than 50 new words and semantic extensions of existing terms
- metaphorical density is perhaps the most striking
- there is also a reflection of the supernatural represented by key terms like "weird" and "equivocation"
  - word weird was virtually resuscitated by Shakespeare → term is originally an Anglo-Saxon noun "wyrd" meaning fate (had fallen into disuse in the MEP; the recent sense of strange or unusual did first appear in the poetry of Keats and Shelley)
  - equivocation has Latin origin *aequivocationem* and Shakespeare's meaning is "use of words that are susceptible of a double signification, with view to misled"

- in addition Shakespeare used vocabulary consisting of strange negatives like
  - unbend:
    - died out, term in this meaning was invented by Shakespeare → to slacken or weaken
    - “You do unbend your Noble strength”
  - unmake:
    - to undo
    - “that their fitnessse now Do’s unmake you”
  - unsex:
    - to deprive of sex
    - “Come you spirits, that tend on mortall thoughts, unsex me here.”
  - Unreal, unsafe invented by Shakespeare
  - Undivulged → adopted from Latin