

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-87694-0 - 'Think On My Words': Exploring Shakespeare's Language

David Crystal

Frontmatter

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'Think on my words'

'You speak a language that I understand not.' Hermione's words to Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* are likely to ring true with many people reading or watching Shakespeare's plays today. For decades, people have been studying Shakespeare's life and times, and in recent years there has been a renewed surge of interest into aspects of his language. So how can we better understand Shakespeare? How did he manipulate language to produce such an unrivalled body of work, which has enthralled generations both as theatre and as literature? David Crystal addresses these and many other questions in this lively and original introduction to Shakespeare's language. Covering in turn the five main dimensions of language structure – writing style, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and conversational style – the book shows how examining these linguistic 'nuts and bolts' can help us achieve a greater appreciation of Shakespeare's linguistic creativity.

DAVID CRYSTAL is one of the world's foremost authorities on language. He is author of the hugely successful *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (1987; second edition 1997), *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995; second edition 2003), and *English as a Global Language* (1997; second edition 2003). An internationally renowned writer, journal editor, lecturer and broadcaster, he received an OBE in 1995 for his services to the study and teaching of the English language. His previous work on Shakespeare includes two books written with his actor son, Ben, *Shakespeare's Words* (2002) and *The Shakespeare Miscellany* (2005), essay contributions to *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide* and *The Oxford Shakespeare, Pronouncing Shakespeare* (2005), and regular essays for *The Times Educational Supplement* and the theatre magazine, *Around the Globe*.

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Preface

The title of this book means what it says: it is an exploration of Shakespeare's language, not a comprehensive survey. It is an introduction from a particular point of view. Books and anthologies with the words *Shakespeare* and *Language* in the title are numerous, and they represent a coming together of several traditions in theatre, literary criticism, philology, and linguistics. Mine is basically a nuts-and-bolts approach, governed by one basic principle – that one should never examine a linguistic nut or bolt without asking 'what does it do?' And 'what does it do?' means two things: how does it help us understand the meaning of what is said (a semantic explanation), and how does it help us appreciate the dramatic or poetic effect of what is said (a pragmatic explanation)? I have found my own understanding immensely enhanced by the kind of approach I employ. I just hope I have managed to convey something of that insight in these pages.

I have used three First Folio sources: the edition of the plays held at the Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, my copy of the 1910 Methuen facsimile, and the Norton facsimile. For my statistical data, I have used the concordance which was compiled to accompany the *Shakespeare's Words* website (www.shakespeareswords.com). The spelling of quotations is modern in Chapters 1 and 2, but after the description of Elizabethan orthography in Chapter 3, most quotations come from the First Folio or contemporary texts.

Hilda Hulme, my Shakespeare teacher at university, said in her insightful book *Explorations in Shakespeare's Language*: 'it is not easy to argue about Shakespeare's meaning without being excited by it'. Or explore it, even, now that we have such powerful electronic

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search capabilities. Every time I do even the most menial search of my Shakespeare database, I discover something I have never noticed before. It is an excitement open to anyone who wishes to increase their understanding of Shakespeare and his works.

DAVID CRYSTAL

Holyhead, March 2007

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Play and poem abbreviations

<i>Ado</i>	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
<i>Ant</i>	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
<i>AWW</i>	<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>
<i>AYLI</i>	<i>As You Like It</i>
<i>Cor</i>	<i>Coriolanus</i>
<i>Cym</i>	<i>Cymbeline</i>
<i>Err</i>	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
<i>Ham</i>	<i>Hamlet</i>
<i>1H4</i>	<i>Henry IV Part 1</i>
<i>2H4</i>	<i>Henry IV Part 2</i>
<i>H5</i>	<i>Henry V</i>
<i>1H6</i>	<i>Henry VI Part 1</i>
<i>2H6</i>	<i>Henry VI Part 2</i>
<i>3H6</i>	<i>Henry VI Part 3</i>
<i>H8</i>	<i>Henry VIII</i>
<i>JC</i>	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
<i>John</i>	<i>King John</i>
<i>KE3</i>	<i>King Edward III</i>
<i>Lear</i>	<i>King Lear</i>
<i>LLL</i>	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>
<i>Lover</i>	<i>A Lover's Complaint</i>
<i>Luc</i>	<i>The Rape of Lucrece</i>
<i>Mac</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
<i>MND</i>	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
<i>MV</i>	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
<i>Oth</i>	<i>Othello</i>
<i>Per</i>	<i>Pericles</i>
<i>R2</i>	<i>Richard II</i>

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xii List of abbreviations

<i>R3</i>	<i>Richard III</i>
<i>Rom</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<i>Shr</i>	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
<i>Sonn</i>	<i>Sonnets</i>
<i>STM</i>	<i>Sir Thomas More</i>
<i>Temp</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>
<i>TGV</i>	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
<i>Tim</i>	<i>Timon of Athens</i>
<i>Tit</i>	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>
<i>TN</i>	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
<i>TNK</i>	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>
<i>Tro</i>	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>
<i>Ven</i>	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>
<i>Wiv</i>	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
<i>WT</i>	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

a	adjective
adv	adverb
int	interjection
n	noun
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
pr	preposition
v	verb