

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

The road to a modern re-telling

SHAKESPEARE'S EFFECT ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The Oxford English Dictionary credits Shakespeare with introducing nearly 3,000 words into the language between 1500-1650. (*Hamlet* alone has 600 new words).

For example:

Bloody, hurry, generous, impartial, road, critical, frugal, dwindle, extract, horrid, vast, excellent, eventful, assassination, lonely, suspicious, indistinguishable, well-read, zany, countless

SHAKESPEARE'S PHRASES ARE NOW OUR CLICHÉS

- into thin air
- in a pickle
- budge an inch
- flesh and blood
- foul play
- cruel to be kind
- pomp and circumstance
- catch a cold
- heart of gold
- method in his madness
- too much of a good thing
- break the ice
- good riddance
- love is blind
- wear my heart upon my sleeve
- wild-goose chase
- for goodness' sake

IN PERSPECTIVE

Scholars estimate Shakespeare's vocabulary at between 25,000 and 29,000 words, nearly twice that of the average college student. The normal working vocabulary of a speaker of English is around 5,000 words.



ONE SINGULAR SENSATION

In the words of Louis Marder, "Shakespeare was so facile* in employing words that he was able to use over 7,000 of them—more than occur in the whole King James version of the Bible—only once and never again."

*working with ease



COMMON CONTRACTIONS

Shown below are a few of the most common contractions found in Shakespeare.

'tis = it is

ne'er = never

ope = open

e'er = ever

o'er = over

e'en = even

gi' = give

i'=in

oft = often

a'=he

Shakespeare's language uses literal contractions (see above), but also "contracts" ideas through concise word choice for different purposes.

SPECIAL VOCABULARY: CONTRACTIONS

Some readers complain about these “poetic” contractions used to create the correct number of syllables in a line. But consider this exchange overhead in the hallway (along with their possible translations):

“Goin’ to class?”

Are you going to class?

“Already been.”

I have already been to class.

“And?”

And how was it? (or And did you enjoy it? or happened in class? etc.)

“Whatever.”

What business is it of yours? Or It was a most enjoyable class, perhaps the best of my academic career, etc.

SYNTAX: HOW WORDS ARE ARRANGED

Take the simple sentence “I ate the sandwich.” The sentence can be rewritten by changing the order of the words, but not the meaning of the sentence.

I ate the sandwich.

Ate I the sandwich.

I the sandwich ate.

The sandwich I ate.

Ate the sandwich I.

The sandwich ate I.



INVERSION

In modern English, the most common sentence pattern is:

subject (S), verb (V), object (O)

OR

I (S) ate (V) the sandwich (O).

Shakespeare used inversion to create specific dramatic and poetic effects. Inversion can be used to emphasize key words, to create specific poetic rhythms, to give a character a specific speech pattern or for a variety of other purposes.

SHAKESPEARE'S STYLE

Examples:

"Round about the cauldron go; in the poison entrails throw."

"Else the Puck a liar call."

"For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered."

"I like him not."

Do these examples sound familiar?

A long time ago, in a galaxy
far, far away...

YODISH: YODA'S SPEAKING STYLE

Usual pattern: subject (S), verb (V), object (O)

Yoda speaks using: object (O), subject (S), verb (V)

Yoda: "Much to learn you still have."

Today, we say: "With this ring, I thee wed."



RHETORICAL DEVICES

Alliteration: repetition of the same initial consonant sound throughout a line of verse
 "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought...." (Sonnet XXX)

Anaphora: repetition of a word or phrase as the beginning of successive clauses
 "Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!" (King John, II, i)

Antithesis : juxtaposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction
 "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more." (Julius Caesar, III, ii)

RHETORICAL DEVICES CONTINUED

Metaphor: implied comparison between two unlike things achieved through the figurative use of words. "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York." (Richard III, I, i)

Onomatopoeia: use of words to imitate natural sounds
"There be moe wasps that buzz about his nose." (Henry VIII, III, ii)

Simile: an explicit comparison between two things using "like" or "as" "My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease" (Sonnet CXLVII)

SO...WHAT ARE SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE TRICKS?

Personification

Metaphor

Simile

Classical allusions

Reversed word, thought or sentence structure (inversion)

Antithesis

Contractions

Rhetorical devices

21ST CENTURY *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Brainstorm important events from the play.

Use the summary to decide what is vital to include in your re-telling.

The *language* is the point—so how can you take an idea and say it for today's audience (your peers)? What is the language of your audience?

Remember it's a play so try and visualize what you say.

MODERN LANGUAGE: IN TRANSITION

ACRONYMS

FOMO = "Fear of Missing Out"

Ex: "I have to go to that party! I have severe FOMO!"

SLANG

"**fleek**" (on-point or very good) → "snatched"

Ex: "Your words are always on fleek!"



MODERN: VISUAL LANGUAGE

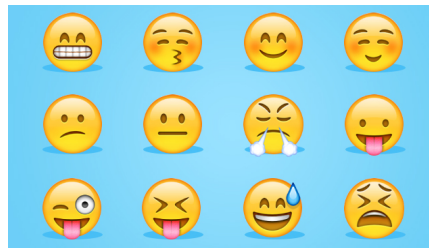
HASHTAG

= creating a label that can be grouped and searched electronically

[#thisisahastag](#)

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EMOJI



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