Shakespeare's Language
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Introduction

23rd April 2016 marks the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare. We will be marking this important anniversary throughout the year, showcasing the wealth of Shakespearean research we offer via our Discovering Shakespeare hub on our website.

Shakespeare played a major role in the transformation of the English language, and many words and phrases were written down for the very first time in his plays. As a celebration of his language, we bring you this FreeBook, which brings together a selection of chapters from Routledge publications written by a team of experts.

In the first chapter, we’re delighted to share with you an engaging interview with Keith Johnson – a leading scholar and a widely-published author in Applied Linguistics – where he shares how he first became interested in Shakespeare’s language. This leads onto his chapter Using Words, where he provides an illuminating discussion on Shakespeare’s wordplay favourites including puns, historical false friends, and register amongst other gems.

Prosero’s Languages, Caliban’s Voice examines colonial references in Shakespeare’s final play, The Tempest, and looks at the ways in which post-colonial literatures have transformed English to redefine what we understand to be ‘English Literature’.

Next, going back to Shakespeare’s earlier work, Hamlet, Erin Minear discusses the musical-acoustic metaphors and the sonic effects in the play which infiltrate his language. Finally, in Jatinder Verma’s chapter Classical Bilingual, he discusses his approach to Shakespearian theatre (as Director of the British-Asian company Tara Arts) in combining Eastern and Western cultures to create something entirely new.

Note to readers

As you read through this FreeBook, you will notice that some excerpts reference other chapters in the book – please note that these are references to the original text and not the FreeBook. Please also note that references from the original chapters have not been included in this text. For a fully-referenced version of each chapter, including footnotes, bibliographies, references and endnotes, please see the published title. Links to purchase each specific title can be found on the first page of each chapter.

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CHAPTER 1

Keith Johnson on Shakespeare’s Language
1. Keith Johnson on Shakespeare’s Language


In this short interview, he shares with us where his fascination for Shakespeare’s language came from.

1. Where did your interest in the language of Shakespeare begin?

When I was an undergraduate studying English Literature and Language, one of the courses I followed involved a linguistic study of Othello. The lecturer took us through the text, drawing attention to interesting pieces of language and explaining them. I enjoyed this course more than any other. It brought together two great interests, Shakespeare and language. Just before the course exam, when my head was full of a mass of academic facts, I remember going to the cinema with a friend to see Lawrence Olivier’s film of Othello. Today, like everyone else, I see the play as a moving tragedy about jealousy, deception, death. But on that day, it was just a collection of linguistic examples. When my friend asked me what I thought of the film, all I could do was mention some of the play’s fascinating linguistic features. At that time, Othello was little more than a collection of nouns and verbs to me. That was many years ago, and now my view of the play is a more normal one. But I’m still fascinated with those linguistic features – those nouns and verbs – and with how Shakespeare manages to use them to express such profound human thoughts and passions.

2. Shakespeare’s influence on the modern English language was extensive, with the first written usage of many words and phrases being found in his work. He contributed more than 1700 words to the language. While many people are aware that he had some impact on the language, to many more he is just a very famous writer of plays. Do you think more should be done to make people aware of his linguistic legacy?

Though Shakespeare’s linguistic legacy has sometimes been exaggerated in the past, he certainly was a great linguistic innovator, and has indeed had a great impact on today’s language. As well as making people aware of his linguistic legacy, we can do much to
increase understanding and appreciation of his work, by increasing awareness of his language. How much of Shakespeare's language, you may ask, do you need to understand the plays? Because his version of English is quite similar to today's, you can grasp a lot of what is going on, even though you may not understand anything like every word. I'm always astonished by the extent of this. I watched the Globe Theatre's excellent production of The Comedy of Errors on DVD recently, and was struck at how sometimes the audience was laughing heartily at jokes which I knew they did not understand, because they were based on now-obsolete words or obscure pieces of word play. You don't have to understand all Shakespeare's language to enjoy his plays. But – and here's the important point – the more you do understand the language, the more your understanding and appreciation will grow, I believe.

3. Why do you think Shakespeare's use of language had such a lasting impact on the English language? What made his usage so important and impactful?

Because he is such a great writer. English literature is full of excellent writers, and Shakespeare's own time had many of them. But whenever I see or read a non-Shakespearean Elizabethan play, I always come away thinking how much better Shakespeare is! His genius is to capture, in vivid language, so much of human life. No wonder we use so much of his language in our lives today.


My book is based on two principles. The main one is that it is activity-based. Rather than telling readers what Shakespeare's English is like, I try to show them through examples, in such a way that they will be able to work things out for themselves. Each chapter has an Activity section and a corresponding Answer section, and the text itself is full of questions for readers to answer. As a simple example of my activity-based approach: the section dealing with the different uses of thou and you doesn't begin with an explanation. That comes later. Readers are first given a series of thou/you examples from Shakespeare, and are invited to work out the differences for themselves. The other principle is that, even though many readers (perhaps a majority) will speak English as their first language, I want all readers to see 'Shakespeare as a Foreign Language'. This is because we all take our own first tongue for granted, rarely studying its 'nuts and bolts' or thinking about its linguistic rules. But when you study a foreign
language, all your capacities for linguistic analysis come to life – you analyse words and sentences more, you look for rules, you search for meanings in what you read or hear. This is a very healthy approach for looking at a historical version of English, which is what Shakespeare's language is. I'm reminded of what L. P. Hartley said at the beginning of his book The Go-Between: 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' ‘Past English’ is, in many ways, a foreign language; they spoke and wrote differently there. It's beneficial for all to study Shakespeare’s English in this way.

5. Over the past few years there have been an increasing number of performances of Shakespeare's work in the original pronunciation. Do you think there is value in these productions? Do they help us gain a better understanding of Shakespeare's works and writing processes?

For many, including me, a main justification for Original Pronunciation (OP) is that it satisfies our desire for authenticity. This is a desire that theatres like The Globe satisfy in many other respects, with its costumes, its staging and its settings. Why not with its pronunciation too? In addition to this, there are specific ways in which OP performances can enlighten audiences. Rhymes that have since disappeared reappear again when OP is used. Lost puns also come to light. An example often given is the pun which makes Jaques in As You Like It laugh for an hour – no mean feat because he is one of Shakespeare's most melancholic characters. It hinges round the words hour and whore which were pronounced similarly in Shakespeare's time. So when the jester Touchstone says: And so from hour to hour we ripe, and ripe, And then from hour to hour we rot, and rot, there is a double meaning. The joke will be lost to us today, unless we know something about OP.

6. Of all the words Shakespeare invented, which is your favourite and why?

Here are a few favourites:

snow-broth used to describe the blood of cold-hearted Lord Angelo in Measure for Measure.

mouth honour: what Macbeth thinks he will get from people in his old age – people who pay him honour by their words, but do not mean it. under-honest: Agamemnon apparently invents this word to describe Achilles in Troilus and Cressida. I can think of one or two of today's politicians it could be used to describe.
But if I had to choose an overall favourite, a definite candidate would be one that comes from the lips of Don Adriano de Armado – the Spaniard in Love’s Labour’s Lost, famed for his linguistic extravagance. He wants an expression to describe what, he says, the ‘the rude multitude call the afternoon’. His expression is the posteriors of this day.
Using Words: The Fatal Cleopatras
2. Using Words: The Fatal Cleopatras


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3.1 Playing with words

3.1.1 Artifice; self-consciousness about language

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was, according to some, Shakespeare’s first play. In Act 2, Scene 4, Silvia witnesses an exchange of word-play between her two suitors – Valentine (one of the title’s ‘two gentlemen’), whom she comes to love, and the dull, conventional Thurio, whom her father wants her to marry – the first of many Shakespearean situations where child and parent come into conflict over choice of a partner. Since Silvia is present, Valentine and Thurio are out to impress her with their wit, while at the same time belittling each other with clever insults. It is a little piece of theatre, with Silvia as audience, and she shows her appreciation at the end with a compliment: *A fine volley of words, gentlemen, and quickly shot off* (2.4.32). In the BBC DVD production of the play the audience is enlarged to include a group of onlookers, who clap when particularly witty remarks are make – rather as today one would applaud a particularly funny joke of a stand-up comedian, or even (as one meaning of the word ‘volley’ suggests) an exceptional volley in a tennis match.

This element of ‘performance’ was characteristic of the Renaissance attitude towards language use. An important keyword of the time was *artifice*. Today we tend to look down on artifice, associating it with artificiality and hence lack of true feeling. But in the Renaissance, it was ‘not a term of opprobrium … but of praise … Readers and playgoers were expected to notice and to admire the skill with which artistic materials were arranged and presented’ – just as Silvia noticed, admired – and commented on – the performance of Valentine and Thurio.

We will look in detail at Renaissance ideas about good writing in Chapter 6, which focuses on rhetoric. In 6.3, we will note that the Renaissance saw the emergence of a large number of rhetorical handbooks, largely based on classical models, which provided guidance on how to write well. In these, the notion of artifice is central. There was an old classical proverb, of uncertain origin, which said *orator fit, poeta nascitur* (‘the orator is made, the poet born’), suggesting that poetry was a natural thing, produced
without artifice. But one of the rhetorical handbooks from classical times, mentioned in 6.3, the anonymous Rhetorica ad Herennium, put forward another point of view. It stated that the poet is formed by ‘art, imitation, exercise’. By ‘art’ is meant ‘artifice’ or ‘theory’. The handbook was one of the most popular in Renaissance England, and a number of writers took up the idea. George Puttenham, whose 1588 Arte of English Poesie was another influential book, put it like this: ‘Speech is not natural to man . . . as to the form and action of his speech, it cometh to him by art and teaching, and by use or exercise’. Likewise Sir Philip Sidney in his Defence of Poetry urges poets to use ‘art, imitation and exercise’: Ben Jonson says as much in relation to Shakespeare. He wrote a poem which appeared at the beginning of the First Folio, entitled To the memory of my beloved, the author Mr William Shakespeare: and what he hath left us. In it, he says: For a good poet’s made, as well as born/And so wert thou. Later in the same poem he praises Shakespeare for his well turned, and truly-filed lines.

Often the artifice which the poet uses may be well concealed, and indeed Chapter 25 of Puttenham’s book is entitled: That the good poet or maker ought to dissemble his art; and in what cases the artificial is more commended that the natural, and contrariwise. But even when disguised, it is still there. Your enjoyment and understanding of Renaissance writing will be increased if you can come to terms with their attitude towards artifice. A look through the collection of Renaissance literary criticism in Vickers (1999) will help to develop that understanding.

A related key concept, whose importance you will have picked up in what has been said so far about language attitudes (and which is well shown in both the Two Gentlemen of Verona example, and the last chapter’s extracts from Love’s Labour’s Lost) was ‘self consciousness about language’. In the Renaissance, language was something you thought about, talked about, explored and experimented with. And it was something to be played with, knocked around rather like a kitten knocks around a ball of wool. Word-play was important to the Renaissance and to Shakespeare. Two aspects of this which we shall concentrate on in the following sections are puns and malapropisms.

3.1.2 Puns

What is a pun? Before looking at the definition below, try to come up with your own. Think of an example of a pun to illustrate your definition.

Here is what the OED says: ‘The use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words’. As the box below shows, puns have slipped in and out of
fashion over time.

**Puns in and out of fashion**

Puns were a common feature in Shakespeare's day, used by many poets and prose writers. John Donne (1572–1631, sometimes called the 'Monarch of Wit') is a good example. He even punned on his own name, about his marriage to Anne which had a disastrous effect on his career: 'John Donne, Anne Donne, Un-done', he wrote.

But only fifty years after Shakespeare's death puns were out of fashion, and attempts were made to 'banish' them. In 1670, John Eachard, an English divine and satirist, wrote a book entitled *The Ground and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy*. He wanted to drive puns from the pulpit, wondering 'whether or no punning . . . and such other delicacies of wit . . . might not be very conveniently omitted'. In his 1656 poem, *Ode to Wit*, the poet Cowley asks the question 'what kind of thing is Wit?' Here is a negative part of his answer: *Tis not when two like words make up one noise; /Jests for Dutch men, and English boys. ('Dutch man' sometimes just meant 'foreigner'; and 'double Dutch', incidentally, meant 'very foreign', when applied to a language – i.e. gibberish).

As we are about to see, the eighteenth-century critic, Dr Johnson, saw the pun as Shakespeare's weakness. According to his biographer, Boswell, he had a 'great contempt for that species of wit', and a 'general aversion to a pun'. They hindered, he thought, 'what is taken to be the function of language: the clean transmission of a pre-existing, self-sufficient, unequivocal meaning.' Every idea had a word to fit it, and double meanings were something to be fought against, rather than admired.

Despite such views, we find in the eighteenth century some memorable examples of puns. Here is an example from Pope's poem, *The Dunciad* (4: 201–2). In these lines, the poet is ridiculing Richard Bentley – scholar, critic, and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge from 1700. Bentley had a reputation for being turbulent, but also, as the pun on the word port suggests, led a somewhat sleepy existence, possibly involving the use of alcohol on occasions:

> Where Bentley late tempestuous went to sport  
> In troubled waters, but now sleeps in port.

Empson (1977) characterises the nineteenth-century view of verbal ambiguities by looking at the editors of Shakespeare's works. When a word in the text has
multiple meanings, they assiduously list and discuss these in their notes, weighing up what chances each has of being the meaning Shakespeare intended. They do not take on board the notion that multiple meanings may have been deliberate.

The twentieth century embraced wordplay vigorously. One writer who particularly comes to mind in this respect is James Joyce, whose novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake* are celebrated for their word inventions, many of which are portmanteau words (discussed in 2.3.6). Here is the view of puns of the twentieth-century writer Anthony Burgess: ‘plurality of reference is in the very nature of language, and its management and exploitation is one of the joys of writing.’ A view diametrically opposed to the eighteenth-century one stated earlier.

Shakespeare loved puns, so much so that the aforementioned Dr Johnson describes them (or quibbles as he called them), as if they were some kind of drug to which Shakespeare was addicted. Here is what Dr Johnson famously said in his *Preface to Shakespeare*:

‘A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind... A quibble was for him the fatal Cleopatra for whom he lost the world, and he was content to lose it.’

There are certainly very many ‘fatal Cleoptras’ in the plays. Mahood (1957) – a book entitled *Shakespeare’s Wordplay* – counts over 100 in *Much Ado About Nothing* and in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, 150 in each of the *Henry IV* plays, and over 200 in that play which is all about linguistic excess – *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. The average for all the plays is 78. Before reading the next paragraph, consider which characters in the plays that you know well pun the most (NP).

The biggest punner of them all is Hamlet. Falstaff probably comes next. Villains do it a lot – Iago in *Othello*, and Richard III for example. So do lovers, particularly the women. Juliet and Cleopatra pun, and Beatrice outpuns Benedick (in *Much Ado About Nothing*). Not surprisingly, fools and clowns – like Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and Touchstone in *As You Like It* – also do a lot of punning. That is partly how they earn their living. Puns are indeed everywhere. Take a look perhaps at a few speeches made by one of the characters just mentioned, and see how far you have to read before coming across a pun. For more examples, look at Activity 1 (*Some fatal Cleopatras*) which provides the opportunity to identify some double meanings.
One sign of how deep in the Elizabethan psyche puns are lodged is Shakespeare’s use of them in sad, tragic situations, where serious-minded critics like Dr Johnson regard them as inappropriate. So as Antonio in The Merchant of Venice is preparing to let Shylock take his pound of flesh (from the heart area), he says: *I’ll pay it presently with all my heart* (4.1.278). And as

Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet lies bleeding to death, he comments: *Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man* (3.1.97). But perhaps the best example of all comes in Richard II when the man whose name is made for punning – John of Gaunt – is dying. He delivers a long speech (almost his final words) playing on his name and the gauntness associated with illness and death. *Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as a grave,* he concludes (2.1.82). So noticeable is this morbid word-play that King Richard, witnessing the scene, is moved to comment: *Can sick men play so nicely with their names?*

As mentioned earlier, high on the list of punners are men and women flirting with each other. Mahood (1957: 29) has a phrase which captures this banter of lovers, flirters (or just good friends for that matter). She speaks of the ‘wordplay of good company’. The banter is often quite extended and involves puns and images that are developed at great length. It is a clear characteristic of Shakespeare, and you may be able to think of examples of it yourself. Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing do it all the time. The example below is from Love’s Labour’s Lost (2.1.114). To appreciate the passage, you do not need to know anything about the situation except that the man (Berowne) is flirting, the woman (Rosaline) is resisting, and that both are wearing masks. Their banter involves a comparison between wit and riding/hunting, and puns are right at the centre of it. Identify the lines in which this comparison is developed, and what puns are involved. But identification and comparison aside, do not fail to enjoy the play of wit which runs through the passage as a whole:

Berowne: *Did I not dance with you in Brabant once?*
Rosaline: *Did I not dance with you in Brabant once?*
Berowne: *I know you did.*
Rosaline: *How needless was it then to ask the question!*
Berowne: *You must not be so quick.*
Rosaline: *’Tis long of you that spur me with such questions.*
Berowne: *Your wit’s too hot, it speeds too fast; ’twill tire.*
Rosaline: *Not till it leave the rider in the mire.*
Berowne: *What time of day?*
Rosaline: *The hour that fools should ask.*
Berowne: *Now fair befall your mask!*
Rosaline: *Fair fall the face it covers!*
Berowne: *And send you many lovers!*
Rosaline: *Amen, so you be none.*
Berowne: *Nay, then will I be gone."

Just as with the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* scene described at the beginning of this chapter, you can here imagine a group of onlookers applauding this display of wit.

If you want a more extended example, take a look at *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3.1.273 on. Launce and Speed, both described as 'clownish servants', are talking about the milkmaid Launce claims to love. The wordplay comes thick and fast.

Mahood (1957: 51) lists some of the most common words Shakespeare uses to pun with. Here are some of them: *dear, heart, son, bear, light, blood, bond, arms, stomach.* In the case of the first four of these, the pun is based on words pronounced the same way, but with different spellings, like *dear* and *deer.* Give the alternative spellings for the other three (of the first four). For the rest of the list, identify the possible alternative meanings that make them usable as puns (AS).

### 3.1.3 Malapropisms: ‘misplacing language’

Another of Shakespeare's wordplay favourites is the **malapropism**. The *OED* defines this as the ‘ludicrous misuse of words’. The name comes from the character of Mrs Malaprop in Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals*, first performed in 1775. Here are a couple of examples from Mrs Malaprop herself. You can probably guess what words were intended for the underlined malapropisms:

*She's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile*
*He is the very pineapple of politeness*

The words Mrs Malaprop was looking for here are *alligator* and *pinnacle*. Another name for malapropisms is *dogberryisms*, after Constable Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* – perhaps a fairer name, given that Dogberry was using them over 170 years before Mrs Malaprop came on the scene. You might also call the practice ‘misplacing language’, a term used in *Measure for Measure* in relation to one of Shakespeare's other major users of malapropisms, Elbow (also, one notes, a constable – perhaps this says something about Shakespeare's views of the police). *Do you hear how he misplaces?* Escalus says (2.1.85).

Talking of major users, Schlauch (1965), in a paper devoted to the topic, has (in rough chronological order of the plays): Moth, Armado, Holofernes, and Dull (all in
Love's Labour's Lost), The Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, Gobbo (The Merchant of Venice),
Slender, Shallow, Nym in The Merry Wives of Windsor, Mistress Quickly (Henry IV, Parts 1
and 2 and Henry V), Pistol (Henry IV, Part 2), Fluellen (Henry V); Dogberry in Much Ado
About Nothing, the first gravedigger (Hamlet), Elbow (Measure for Measure), the third
servant in Coriolanus. As this list suggests, their use is mostly in the earlier plays.

Here are some Shakespearean malapropisms, with the ‘misplaced words’
underlined. You are invited to work out what the intended words were – not always
that easy:

a) Constable Dogberry (in MA 3.5.42) reports that he has made some arrests
One word, sir: our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious
persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

b) Malapropisms clearly run in families. Here, Shylock's servant Launcelot wants to
work for Bassanio. Launcelot and his father Gobbo approach Bassanio (MV 2.2.126):
Launcelot: In very brief, the suit is impertinent to myself, as your worship
shall know by this honest old man, and though I say it, though
old man, yet poor man, my father.
Bassanio: One speak for both. What would you?
Launcelot: Serve you, sir.
Gobbo: That is the very defect of the matter, sir.

(c) Here the other constable – Elbow in Measure for Measure (2.1.46) – is
reporting an arrest, again with a malapropism. Notice also the play on the name
Elbow (to do with leaning):
Elbow: If it please your honour, I am the poor Duke's constable, and my
name is Elbow. I do lean upon justice, sir, and do bring in here
before your good honour two notorious benefactors.

(d) Juliet's Nurse is looking for Romeo, and finds him (RI 2.4.124). Romeo's friend,
Benvolio, makes fun of the Nurse's malapropism by using one of his own:
Nurse: If you be he, sir, I desire some confidence with you.
Benvolio: She will endite him to some supper.

(e) In The Merry Wives of Windsor (1.1.161), Bardolph expresses the view that
Slender had had too much to drink:
Bardolph: Why, sir, for my part, I say the gentleman had drunk himself out of
his five sentences.
Bottom is acting Pyramus in a play (in MND 5.1.283). His love, Thisbe, has been killed by a lion. He laments:

O wherefore, nature, didst thou lions frame,
Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear?

If you enjoy deciphering malapropisms, there are some more in Activity 2 (Classifying malapropisms). If you are going to look at this, now is the time to do so, since the following paragraph includes the ‘answers’ to part of that Activity.

Schlauch (1965) classified malapropisms according to which part of the word has been ‘misplaced’. She identifies three main types. The most common is making a mistake with the prefix. There are a number of examples in Activity 2, for example when Dull says collusion and pollution instead of allusion. The second type is when a suffix is mistaken, as when Mistress Quickly says infinitive for infinite. Another example in the Activity is the Welshman Evans’ virginity for virgin – a common type of mistake for him and others in Shakespeare whose first language is not English (an issue discussed in 3.5 below). It often, as in this case, comes down to using the wrong noun, or (on other occasions) the wrong part of speech. The third type is when the roots of words are confused, as when Elbow uses cardinally for carnally, or Mistress Quickly indite for invite.

3.2 ‘Kitchen diction’

Part of the definition of the word ‘diction’ in the OED is ‘choice or selection of words and phrases; wording; phrasing; verbal style.’ Here is a passage from a poem which was highly influential in Elizabethan times, and which was written in a type of diction common then. The poem was Spencer’s Faerie Queene, published in 1590, and the diction was a highly ‘artificial’, poetical one. Identify a few words in the stanza that exemplify this poetic diction. Phoebus is the sun, and what is being described here in such florid terms is what we today more mundanely call ‘dawn’:

At last the golden oriental gate
Of greatest heaven gan to open fair,
And Phoebus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair
And hurls his glistening beams through dewy air
Look now at this passage from Shakespeare's early play, *Henry VI, Part 3*. As in the Spenser passage, it is dawn that is being described (though you may be puzzled by the notion of morning saying 'farewell' to the sun at dawn; the idea is that Aurora, the goddess of dawn, is saying goodbye to the sun as it begins its journey round the skies). Parts of Shakespeare's description are also clearly poetic in their diction, and again you are invited to identify words and phrases which show this:

- *See how the morning opes her golden gates,*  
- *And takes her farewell of the glorious sun!*  
- *How well resembles it the prime of youth,*  
- *Trimmed like a younker prancing to his love!*

But there are at least two words in this passage which strike a chord quite different from the Spenserian world of Phoebus and his 'glistening beams.' You may be able to identify them, even though one is no longer in use. It is the word *younker*, meaning a 'fashionable young man.' The other word is *prancing*. These examples are used by Bland (1951) to show that Shakespeare had 'a fondness for the “ordinary” word, and an ability to put it to effective use that is outside the usual canons of Elizabethan prosody.' Indeed, Bland goes on to say, Shakespeare's 'poetic speech derives strength from common speech to a degree that far surpasses anything that, say, Wordsworth tried to do.' To capture this notion of common speech, we will use the term 'kitchen diction' (some writers prefer the term 'household words').

Shakespeare's use of 'kitchen diction' made him unpopular with critics who felt that poetry should use its own special 'elevated' means of expression (poetic diction). Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth-century disliker of puns, was one of these. He took particular exception to one famous speech of Lady Macbeth's (which we have already seen in 2.1) where she is gearing herself for evil deeds. Here are the concluding lines. You may be able to guess which words gave offence to Johnson (though again this is made more difficult by the fact that not all the words are used much today):

- *Come, thick night,*  
- *And pall thee in the dullest smoke of hell,*  
- *That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,*  
- *Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark*  
- *To cry, 'Hold, hold!'*  

(Mac 1.5.48)

In the journal called *The Rambler* which Johnson published from 1750 to 1752, he took exception to three words/phrases. First there was *dun* (meaning 'dingy brown') which, he said, was 'an epithet now seldom heard but in the stable'. Then Johnson complained that the 'sentiment is weakened by the name of an instrument used by butchers and
cooks in the meanest employments’ — the word *knife*. As for the phrase which many today see as a highly creative and exciting one — *peeping through a blanket* — Johnson can only ask: ‘who, without some relaxation of his gravity, can hear of the avengers of guilt *peeping through a blanket*?’ Just about a century later, Coleridge, in his 1849 book *Shakespearian Criticism*, agreed with Johnson. In fact, he went so far as to suggest that Shakespeare could not have intended the ‘kitchen diction’ word *blanket* at all. He suggests it should be *blank height* instead.

In Activity 3 (Spotting ‘kitchen diction’) you can see more examples of ‘ordinary words’ upsetting the flow of poetic diction in a way that was characteristic of Shakespeare. The example below shows another unexpected ‘kitchen touch’ carried in an image. In the passage, Macbeth is having doubts about whether to kill Duncan. If he does, the spirit of pity will never let him forget. Notice the poetic diction of the first three lines. In contrast, the image in the fourth line is the everyday one of ‘getting something in your eye’.

*And pity, like a naked new-born babe,*
*Striding the blast, or heaven’s Cherubins, hors’d*
*Upon the sightless couriers of the air;*
*Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye*
*That tears shall drown the wind.*

Mac 1.7.21

One nineteenth-century critic, Andrew Becket, was moved to comment: ‘the images . . . have more of the ludicrous than the effecting in them, and should not here find place’.

### 3.3 ‘Never broken chain of imagery’

Activity 1 (*Some fatal Cleopatras*) contained an ‘extended pun’ passage from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, joking about Falstaff’s large stomach (*I am in the waist two yards about*). Shakespeare liked to develop images in this extended way. Coleridge talks about it in his *Biographia Literaria* where he says Shakespeare has ‘a never broken chain of imagery, always vivid, and because unbroken, often minute [detailed]. It is almost as if he is thinking in terms of images. They ‘take over’.

The Sonnets are full of examples; very often an entire poem is constructed around one central image. It is possible to turn to almost any sonnet to find an example of this, and you might wish to do just that. Or here are two to look at: Sonnet 135 (*Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will*) involves an extended play on the name *Will*, while 127, one of the ‘Dark Lady’ sonnets (*In the old age black was not counted fair*), plays with the notion of blackness (and fairness) from beginning to end. The example
below is not from a sonnet, but from *Antony and Cleopatra*. Antony has returned from the wars defeated, and he thinks that Queen Cleopatra has abandoned him. In a desperate condition he talks to his knave (boy) Eros about a sense of having lost his identity (a 'body' no longer holding its 'visible shape'). The word *knave* does not just mean 'boy'. It also refers to the playing card called a 'jack'. Using this word leads Shakespeare into extended playing card imagery. There is *triumph* which can mean 'trump', and *pack* with the possible meaning of 'shuffle'. Read through the passage tracking how the card images develop (do not let *Queen* and *heart* escape your attention):

> My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
> Even such a body. Here I am Antony,
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
> I made these wars for Egypt; and the Queen –
> Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine,
> Which, whilst it was mine, had annexed unto't
> A million more, now lost – she, Eros, has
> Packed cards with Caesar, and false-played my glory
> Unto an enemy’s triumph.
> (AC 4.14.12)

For some, the extended episodes of wordplay in Shakespeare can be a little tedious – and obscure for us when they involve words carrying meanings that they no longer hold today. The 'shoe scene' in 1.2's extract from *Beyond the Fringe* parodies this characteristic of Shakespeare. Here is another similar parody, based on the Gravediggers Scene in *Hamlet*, which will be discussed in 5.5.2. It is by the early twentieth-century English essayist, Max Beerbohm:

**Second Policeman:** *Canst tell me of this prize-fight? Is't within the law?*

**First Policeman:** *Aye! To't. For what does a man prize highest? A fight. But no man fights what he prizes, else he is no man, being not manly, nor yet unmann'rly. Argal, if he fight the prize, then is not the prize his, save in misprison, and 'tis no prize-fight within the meaning of the act.*

**Second Policeman:** *Marry, I like thy wit . . .*
3.4 Words then and now: historical false friends

How difficult are Shakespeare's words for us today? How much do they impede our understanding? Crystal (2008) argues that the database on which the Crystal and Crystal (2002) glossary is constructed has 47,365 examples of words which either existed then and are no longer used today, or which still exist but with a change in meaning. But with a total of 884,647 words in Shakespeare, he argues, this represents only just over 5%. You also have to bear in mind that many of the meaning changes are really very small. Crystal's examples are words like morn for 'morning' and plumpy for 'plump'. Nevertheless, there are hard words in Shakespeare. Some are difficult because they express complex ideas, and others because they bear no obvious resemblance to PDE words (words like scroyle which meant 'ruffian'). But in this section we will concentrate on another set of words: ones that are difficult precisely because of the (misleading) resemblance that they do have to PDE words.

Here are two examples. In 1608 John Chamberlain, a celebrated letter writer, wrote to a friend saying 'I am sorry to hear Sir Rowland Lytton is so crazy.' To us today, 'crazy' means 'mad', but the older meaning was 'damaged' (retained in the expression 'crazy paving' which we still use), and it could refer to physical as well as mental health. The same use of the word is found in Henry VI, Part I (3.2.89), where Talbot talks about 'crazy age'. In his book on the language of English Renaissance literature, Ronberg (1992) gives a second example of a student who had trouble with some lines of Queen Elizabeth in Richard III. She is grieving:

Give me no help in lamentation.
I am not barren to bring forth complaints.
All springs reduce their currents to mine eyes,
That I, being governed by the wat'ry moon,
May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world.

(R3 2.2.66)

The student's problem is with the word reduce. It does not seem to make sense in the context. The Queen is talking about 'plenteous tears', yet at the same time apparently mentioning a reduction in tears. The explanation is that the word reduce at that time did not mean 'lessen', but 'bring back'.

These words crazy and reduce are what are called false friends – words which you think you know but you do not, because they have an unexpected meaning. Such 'weasel words' are a real problem when you are learning a foreign language. The French noun front, for example, is a false friend. It looks as if it should mean the same
as ‘front’ in English, but in fact the meaning is ‘forehead’ or ‘brow’. So the English learner of French who uses the word when talking about the ‘front of a building’, will mystify native French speakers because he is in fact speaking about the ‘forehead of the building’.

Studying ‘historical false friends’ leads one into the fascinating world of word sources (etymology), into which we will take a short digressionary step. The Elizabethan meaning of reduce makes perfect sense when you realize it comes from the Latin reducere, where ducere means ‘lead’, and re- means back. This meaning is still found in a medical context where ‘reducing a dislocated shoulder’ means putting it back to its proper position. Chantrell’s *Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories* (2002) describes the change to modern meaning like this: reduce came to mean ‘bring to a different state’, then ‘bring to a simpler or lower state’, and finally ‘diminish in size or amount’. Activity 4 (*Friends, oh so false*) identifies historical false friends in Shakespeare. Now is the time to do part (i).

Linguists like Ullmann (1964) have classified the way words change their meaning over time. One of the most common movements is restriction. This is where a meaning becomes ‘narrower’, or more specific. For example, according to the *OED*, in Old and Middle English the word worm referred to ‘any animal that creeps or crawls; a reptile; an insect’. Shakespeare often uses it to refer to a snake or dragon. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, Cleopatra calls the asp snake which poisons her a worm. Now of course we use the word only to refer to a specific type of creeping creature, one which would have done Cleopatra no harm at all. The contrary movement, extension, is less common. It is where a meaning widens, becomes more general. The word bird, for example, originally meant a ‘young bird’ or ‘chick’, and this is how Lavinia uses it in *Titus Andronicus* (2.3.153): *Some say that ravens foster forlorn children / The whilst their own birds famish in their nests*. Now of course the word refers to the same creature, but of any age. More common is where a word changes for the worse, becomes pejorative. An example is cunning, which in Shakespeare’s time could mean ‘knowledgeable’, ‘skilful’. In this meaning it is related to the PDE verb can, and you can still find remnants of this meaning in phrases like ‘*you ken John Peel* (=‘know’), and the phrase *beyond our ken* (= ‘understanding’). Today cunning has pejorative overtones, but these were not present when Suffolk in *Henry VI*, Part 2 (4.1.34), talking of a fortune teller, says *A cunning man did calculate my birth*. Words can also change meanings in the opposite direction, becoming ameliorative. In Shakespeare, nice could have various pejorative meanings. One is ‘lascivious’ (Moth in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* talks of *nice wenches*). Another is ‘trivial’, as when Cassius (JC 4.3.8) says: *In such a time as this it is not meet / That every nice offence should bear his comment*. It is true that something close to this second meaning can still be found today (we can talk of a nice distinction for example); but now the word’s main meaning carries positive senses: kind, friendly, pleasant.
Part (ii) of Activity 4 asks you to classify false friends using the above categories.

3.5 Register, and other levels of variation

Section 3.2 focused on one particular variety of English – poetic language. Linguists use the term register to describe a variety of the language associated with some particular use, or with a group of people sharing some specific area of interest. As well as having a poetic register, English also has a military register, a legal register, a nautical register, and a computer register – among many others. It is particularly in relation to lexis that these areas differ – they all have their own specialised vocabularies which are likely to be baffling to the outsider. But there will be other linguistic features involved as well, such as syntax.

A register which frequently gets discussed in relation to Shakespeare is the legal one. One play where legal English is particularly prominent is The Merchant of Venice, because it includes a lengthy court scene, where Shylock’s claim to take a ‘pound of flesh’ from his debtor Antonio is put to legal test. But there are other plays where legal language abounds. Coriolanus, for example, is full of discussion about the affairs of state, and the legal technicalities associated with electing representatives to power in Roman times. One particular scene steeped in law is 3.3. Coriolanus has been accused of various misdemeanours, and he wants to have these treated in a legal manner – as if he were on trial. Tanselle and Dunbar (1962) is a study devoted to the legal language of Coriolanus. They find no fewer than 194 legal words and phrases used in the play. They also show that the areas of law covered are diverse, including criminal law, civil law, procedural law (dealing among other things with the procedures followed in court cases), and even commercial law. Legal imagery fills the play, they argue, even when specifically legal matters are not being discussed. For example, at one point in the play Coriolanus decides to launch an attack on Rome. Two of the Roman characters – Menenius and Sicinius – fear for their lives, because they know just how good a soldier Coriolanus is. Menenius expresses this fear by using legal terms: Our throats are sentenced, he says (5.4.7), and stay upon execution.

But there is a great deal more legal register in Shakespeare than is found in just The Merchant of Venice and Coriolanus. In 2000 Sokal and Sokal produced a book entitled Shakespeare’s Legal Language: A Dictionary. It is 400 pages long. Their conclusion: ‘it is our view, derived from cumulative evidence, that . . . Shakespeare shows a quite precise and mainly serious interest in the capacity of legal language to convey matters of social, moral, and intellectual substance.’ (2000: 3). Indeed, there is so much ‘law’ in Shakespeare that it raises a very Big Question indeed. Here is a box which discusses it:
Stratfordians versus Oxfordonians

The Big Question that Shakespeare’s use of legal language raises is eloquently posed by Mark Twain, in an article entitled ‘Is Shakespeare dead?’ Here is what he says: ‘The man who wrote [the plays] was limitlessly familiar with the laws, and the law-courts, and law-proceedings, and lawyer-talk, and lawyer-ways—and if Shakespeare was possessed of the infinitely-divided star-dust that constituted this vast wealth, how did he get it, and where, and when?’

Shakespeare, as we all know, received a sound education in Stratford, but is that enough to give him the kind of legal knowledge that is displayed? One group of people who answer ‘no’ are the so-called ‘Oxfordonians’. They argue that Shakespeare’s plays were not written by the man from Stratford, but perhaps by Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, who lived from 1550 to 1604. It seems that he may have received legal training at Gray’s Inn, and only such training, it is argued, can be behind the massive legal knowledge found in the plays.

The ‘Stratfordians’ (who believe that Shakespeare was Shakespeare) counter with two very different arguments. One is to suggest that the plays’ legal knowledge is in fact a little vague and occasionally shaky. But this is not, as we have seen, Sokal and Sokal’s conclusion. The other argument was put forward by the eighteenth-century Irish scholar Edmond Malone (himself a lawyer). He argued that Shakespeare worked as a lawyer’s clerk during one of those periods in his life when nothing is known about his movements.

Legal knowledge is of course only one part of the ‘authorship issue’. Oxford is not the only candidate, and a major problem with his claim is that he died so early, long before some of the plays were supposedly written. The authorship debate will, of course, run and run . . .
French. It is when the English soldiers, including King Henry V, are in France and the local ladies are probably brushing up on their English in case possible suitors should present themselves. One such lady is Katherine, the French king's daughter no less. In Henry V (3.4), Katherine asks her lady-in-waiting, Alice, to help her learn some English, starting with the parts of the body. Katharine's efforts produce comedy (she says *bilbow* for 'elbow', and *sin* for 'chin', for example), and it is a language-learning strategy which is guaranteed to end up in innuendo and a suggestion of vulgarity – which is just what happens. There are also occasional instances of invented foreign languages being spoken. In All’s Well that Ends Well, for example, the rogish Paroles is captured by some mischievous individuals who blindfold him and pretend to be foreign soldiers (Muscovites, Paroles imagines) who plan to kill him. The situation provides Shakespeare with the opportunity to indulge in exuberant linguistic creativity. Here are some of the lines illustrating the nonsense words that the individuals invent to convince Paroles of their foreign origins (from AW 4.1 and 3):

- **Bosko chimurchno**
- **Portotatarossa**
- **Throca movousus, cargo, cargo, cargo**
- **Manka revania dulche**
- **Bobilindo chicurmurco**
- **Boskos thromuldo boskos**
- **Oscorbidulchos volivorco**

The French scene in *Henry V* is perhaps the best example of a comic theme which Shakespeare plays on more than once: foreign or non-standard English speakers trying to speak English. Sometimes (as with French speakers) the level of variation is language, but only occurs at another level of variation: dialect. The Welsh are a common target, particularly in *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but the Scottish and the Irish do not escape. Shakespeare's accents, it has to be admitted, were not always very accurate, as some of the examples in Activity 5 (*English as she is (sometimes) spoken*) may suggest. There is often an element of ridicule in Shakespeare's representations – he is making fun of people who speak in an odd way. One instance where there is no ridicule involved occurs in *King Lear*, where Edgar uses a West Country accent to disguise his identity. In 4.6 he is asked to let go of blind Gloucester's arm. His response (4.6.235): *Ch’ll not let go, zir, without vurther ’cagion.* (*'Cagion' means 'occasion', or, in this context, 'cause*) The line illustrates one very salient feature of British West Country dialects, using 'z' for 's' and 'v' for 'f' at the beginning of words – in linguistic terms replacing initial unvoiced consonants with their voiced equivalents.

A further dimension of variation deals with personal character, and is known as idiolect. It is one person's individual way of speaking – a 'personal style' which separates that person off from the next. Shakespeare has a memorable array of
characters with their own idiolects – verbal characteristics which contribute significantly to making them fully-rounded, as opposed to cardboard, characters. One that is sometimes discussed in this respect, because he is particularly distinctive, is Pistol – Falstaff’s rumbustious companion who appears in Henry IV Part 2, Henry V, and The Merry Wives of Windsor. Here is part of a scene from Henry V which illustrates some important characteristics of Pistol’s idiolect. Try to identify what these characteristics are before you read the paragraphs following the passage. To set the scene: two followers of Falstaff – Nym and Pistol – are quarrelling, because Pistol has married the person Nym had designs on, Mistress Quickly. When Pistol enters, Nym draws his sword to fight, and Bardolph, another of Falstaff’s crew, tries to separate them with a threat. Drawing his own sword, Bardolph says (2.1.60): he that strikes the first stroke, I’ll run him up to the hilts, as I am a soldier. Nym and Pistol sheathe their swords, and Pistol is ready to shake hands (or ‘fists’). He says:

Give me thy fist, thy forefoot to me give; Thy spirits are most tall.

But Nym is not so sure he wants to be pacified. He says: I will cut thy throat one time or other, in fair terms, that is the humour of it. This is Pistol’s reply:

‘Couple a gorge!’

That is the word. I thee defy again!

O hound of Crete, think’st thou my spouse to get?

No, to the spital go,

And from the powdering tub of infamy

Fetch forth the lazar kite of Cressid’s kind,

Doll Tear sheet she by name, and her espouse.

I have, and I will hold, the quandam Quickly

For the only she; and – paucia, there’s enough.

Go to!

(NP)

Like much of Pistol’s speech, exactly what he is saying is difficult to follow. But here are some characteristics:

- Like some of the outlandish characters in Love’s Labour’s Lost, there is a love of foreign expressions, not always used correctly. Couple a gorge is Pistol’s version of the French couper la gorge – ‘cut the throat’, so he is just repeating (in a foreign language) what Nym has said to him. Then, at the end of his speech, he uses the Italian word paucia, literally meaning ‘few’, and associated with the expression paucia verba meaning ‘few words’ – an expression, incidentally, which the pedant Holofernes in Love’s Labour’s Lost uses (4.2.162). Pistol’s sense is ‘in
short’, or ‘that’s all there is to it’.

- There are also archaic words. Mickle for example, meaning ‘great’.

- Pistol is fond of using curious word order. Sometimes this makes his prose sound like poetry, as if he were altering the normal word order to achieve a rhyme, as in *think’st thou my spouse to get?* Other examples of curious word order in the passage are *thy forefoot to me give* and No, to the spital go.

- Another effect which gives his prose a touch of poetry is alliteration. This is where the front of words, rather than their endings, rhyme (and indeed we describe it in 6.4.1 as ‘front-rhyme’). It was a technique popular in Old English poetry. Examples in the passage are *Give me thy fist, thy forefoot to me give* (two words beginning with both ‘g’ and ‘f’ here), and *I have, and I will hold, the quondam Quickly* (with two ‘h’ words and two ‘q’s). As well as making Pistol’s speech curious, the effect was also to make him sound archaic.

- Pistol also had a love of classical and literary allusions. In the passage, Cressida is mentioned. She is the unfaithful lover of Troilus in the story set in the Trojan wars (though in fact it seems to have been a twelfth century French invention rather than classical Greek). The story was popular in medieval and Renaissance times, and indeed Shakespeare wrote a play about the pair (*Troilus and Cressida*). Because of Cressida’s unfaithfulness, she is often maligned, and Pistol here calls her a *lazar kite*, meaning a ‘leprous scavenger’; apparently the phrase *kite of Cressid’s kind* occurs frequently in literature of the time. The phrase suggests Pistol’s predilection for citing ‘half remembered or misremembered scraps of old plays’.

- Curious, bombastic phrases are Pistol’s particular speciality, and the passage has several examples. Consider particularly *thy fore-foot to me give*. A *fore-foot* is ‘one of the front feet of a quadruped’ – the definition is from the *OED*, which cites this quotation as the only case where the word is used to refer to a human hand. So the phrase means something like ‘give me your paw’.

In this section we have considered three dimensions of linguistic variation: register, dialect and idiolect. There are of course many others, and you are invited to consider what these are. Some will be touched on in later chapters, particularly in Chapter 5 which deals with pragmatics. There we will note (5.5) that the difference between *thou* and *you* is related to the dimensions of social status as well as degree of personal intimacy, while in 5.3.1 variations in forms of address according to social class will be briefly discussed.
A realisation of the many different levels of linguistic variation is important because it leads towards a proper understanding of the richness and diversity of all languages, including EModE. Crystal captures this well in the title of his book, *The Stories of English*. Perhaps we should similarly be using a plural form when talking about Early Modern English, with all its varieties. Not Early Modern English, perhaps, but Early Modern Englishes.

### 3.6 Fine volleys of words

The last section of Chapter 2 (2.4) emphasised that word creation was part of the ‘spirit of the age’: everyone was doing it. The same can be said about wordplay. ‘Artifice’ and ‘self-consciousness about language’ – key phrases for the present chapter – were characteristics not just of Shakespeare but of most English Renaissance writers, and ‘playing with language’ was not merely accepted: it was expected almost. Renaissance writers loved to produce ‘fine volleys of words’.

### Activity section

#### 1 Some fatal Cleopatras (AS)

(i) Here are some of Shakespeare’s ‘fatal Cleopatras’. Most depend on two different words having the same pronunciation. In (a), for example, the wordplay involves the two words *tide* and *tied* which are pronounced in the same way. You also sometimes find two different words which are written in the same way (*recover* is an example). In the passages below, establish what the play of words is; the words to focus on are underlined:

(a) Launce (and his dog Crab) are awaited on board ship, ready to set sail (TGV 2.3.33):

- Pantheo: *Away, ass! You’ll lose the tide if you tarry any longer.*
- Launce: *It is no matter if the tied were lost; for it is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied.*
- Pantheno: *What’s the unkindest tide?*
- Launce: *Why, he that’s tied here, Crab, my dog.*

(b) Romeo, sinking under ‘love’s heavy burden’, does not feel like dancing, but Mercutio tries to persuade him (RJ 1.4.13):
Mercutio: Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.
Romeo: Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes
With nimble soles, I have a soul of lead
So stakes me to the ground I cannot move

(c) In *Julius Caesar*, Flavius is trying to find out the job of the man he is questioning (1.1.20):

Flavius: Thou art a cobbler, art thou?
Cobbler: Truly, sir, all that I live by is with the owl; I meddle with no tradesman’s matters, nor women’s matters; but withal I am, indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes: when they are in great danger, I recover them.

(d) In the opening words of *Richard III*, the future king observes that the fortunes of the House of York are changing for the better (R3 1.1.1):

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York,

(e) Duncan (the he in the passage) is dead. Lady Macbeth wants his grooms (attendants) to take the blame, so she will smear them with blood (Mac 2.2.55):

If he do bleed,
I’ll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.

(f) You have to know something about fruit to understand this one. Count Claudio, Benedick's companion, is looking sad. Beatrice comments (MA 2.1.269):

The Count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil count, civil
as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

(g) Think here about possible meanings of the whole phrase *little seeming substance*. Lear is offering Cordelia's hand in marriage to Burgundy. Lear is upset with Cordelia because she refused to express her love for him in a superficial way, just for appearances (KL 1.1.198):

If ought within that little seeming substance
may fitly like your Grace,
She’s there, and she is yours.

(ii) Here is a slightly longer passage containing a short series of connected puns. It comes from The Merry Wives of Windsor (1.3.35) where Falstaff is telling his mates Nym and Pistol about his plans to try and seduce Mistress Ford. Identify the puns and plot how one leads to another (Note: the glossary will reveal that thrift has two meanings):

Falstaff: My honest lads, I will tell you what I am about.
Pistol: Two yards, and more.
Falstaff: No quips now, Pistol. Indeed, I am in the waist two yards about. But I am now about no waste – I am about thrift. Briefly, I do mean to make love to Ford’s wife. I spy entertainment in her.

2 Classifying malapropisms (AS)

Schlauch’s (1965) classification of Shakespeare’s malapropisms has three main categories made according to which part of the word is mistaken. The purpose of this Activity is to look at some more examples of malapropisms, and use these to identify Schlauch’s categories.

The passages below contain examples of each of Schlauch’s categories. Decide first what word was intended for each malapropism; like the examples you saw in the text, this is not always that easy, and you may need to consult the Answer Section on occasions. Write the malapropism and the intended word down side by side so that you can identify which part of the word has been mistaken. When you have done this for all twelve examples, look for common elements in the parts of the words which are mistaken, in order to work out what Schlauch’s three categories are. These categories are stated in the text, and the Answer Section gives the category of each example.

(a) Holofernes (LLL 4.2.40) gives Dull an allusion (= riddle), but the latter has trouble with the word:

Holofernes: The moon was a month old when Adam was no more,
And raught not to five weeks when he came to five-score.
Th’ allusion holds in the exchange.

Dull: ’Tis true, indeed; the collusion holds in the exchange.

Holofernes: God comfort thy capacity! I say, th’ allusion holds in the exchange.
Dull: And I say the pollution holds in the exchange

(b) Evans and Slender (MWW 1.1.42) are talking about the marital availability of Master Page’s daughter. (Evans is a Welshman, and Shakespeare sometimes makes fun of his use of English; see 3.5):

Evans: Anne Page, which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity.

(c) Slender (MWW 1.1.228), still on the topic of marriage:

I will marry her, sir, at your request. But if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance when we are married and have more occasion to know one another. I hope upon familiarity will grow more content.

(d) Mistress Quickly (2H4 2.1.21) describes the unseemly haunts and bad company Falstaff is associated with. She wants him arrested, and knows where he can be found:

he is indited to dinner to the Lubber’s Head in Lumbert Street to Master Smooth’s the silkman.

(e) Constable Dogberry (MA 3.3.18) is telling one of his subordinates what to do as he patrols the streets:

This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men; you are to bid any man stand, in the Prince’s name.

(f) Dull (LLL 1.1.181) announces that he, as the Duke’s representative, would like to speak to the Duke personally. (The passage contains a second malapropism. Farborough means thirdborough, a parish constable):

I myself reprehend his own person, for I am his grace’s farborough. But I would see his own person in flesh and blood.

(g) Mistress Quickly (MWW 2.2.91) brings Falstaff a message from Mistress Ford. She then tells him about another message, this time from Mistress Page:

Why, you say well. But I have another messenger to your worship. Mistress Page hath her hearty commendations to you too;

(h) Shylock has been invited to supper, but is reluctant to go. Launcelot makes it clear that he is expected (MV 2.5.19):
I beseech you, sir, go. My young master doth expect your reproach.

(i) In Measure for Measure the Viennese authorities are on the lookout for brothels. Constable Elbow knows of one (2.1.75):

Escalus: How dost thou know that, constable?
Elbow: Marry, sir, by my wife, who, if she had been a woman cardinally given, might have been accused in fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness there.

(j) Mistress Quickly (2H4 2.1.22) has ordered Falstaff's arrest, one reason being that he never pays his bar bill:

I am undone by his going, I warrant you, he's an infinitive thing upon my score. Good Master Fang, hold him sure; good Master Snare, let him not 'scape.

(k) Quince (MND 4.2.11) extols the acting virtues of his colleague Bottom:

Yea and the best person, too; and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice.

(l) Mistress Quickly (2H4 2.4.22) comments on the state of mind and health of Doll Tearsheet:

I'faith, sweetheart, methinks now you are in an excellent good temperality. Your pulside beats as extraordinarily as heart would desire, and your colour, I warrant you, is as red as any rose, in good truth, la!

3 Spotting 'kitchen diction' (AS)

Bland (1951) is all about Shakespeare's use of 'the ordinary word'. The following examples are all taken from his paper. Which word (or words) in each passage do you think Bland selects as 'the ordinary word', standing out in otherwise more poetic diction? It is possible that you may find more 'ordinary words' than Bland does in any passage, and you may well disagree with some of his choices, as given in the Answer Section.

(a) God take King Edward to his mercy,
And leave the world for me to bustle in
(R3 1.1.151)

(b) Because I cannot flatter and speak fair,
Smile in men’s faces, smooth, deceive and cog,
Duck with French nods and apish courtesy,
I must be held a rancorous enemy
(R3 1.3.47)

(c) Thus have I shunned the fire for fear of burning,
And drenched me in the sea.
(TGV 1.3.78)

(d) I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandar,
And he’s too tetchy to be woo’d to woo,
As she is stubborn, chaste, against all suit.
(TC 1.1.97)

(e) Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man.
(AC 1.1.33)

(f) These blue-veined violets whereon we lean
Never can blab, nor know not what we mean.
(VA 125)

(g) You cram these words into mine ears against
The stomach of my sense. Would I had never
Married my daughter there!
(Tem 2.1.108)

(h) Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts
(Mac 2.1.56)

4 Friends, oh so false (AS)

(i) Here are ten examples of historical false friends. Many are taken from Crystal (2008), who has a useful Appendix listing a number of false friends in
Shakespeare. Think first about the modern meaning of the underlined word. Then try to work out what it means in the passage. This will not always be easy. Sometimes trying to think of similar, related words in PDE may help. If all fails, there is always the Answer Section.

(a) In *The Merchant of Venice* (5.1.89), Portia is returning home and sees the light of home. She philosophises:

That light we see is burning in my hall;  
How far that little candle throws his beams!  
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

(b) Hamlet hears that his father’s ghost has been seen (1.2.255):

My father’s spirit! In arms! All is not well.  
I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!

(c) In *Much Ado About Nothing* (1.3.54), Borachio eavesdrops on the Prince and Claudio in conversation. Their talk is not ‘sad’ in the modern sense of the word:

as I was smoking a musty room, comes . . . the Prince and Claudio, hand in hand, in sad conference. I whipt me behind the arras, and there heard it agreed upon that the Prince should woo Hero for himself.

(d) Macbeth thinks that his enemies are dead, but he finds out that some are still alive. He feels ‘cabined’ (caged up) and ‘cribbed’ (shut up):

But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in  
To saucy doubts and fears  
(Mac 3.4.23)

(e) In *As You Like It* (4.1.18), Jaques is trying to explain his melancholy to Rosalind:

often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.  
*Humour* and *humorous* are, by the way, favourite words of Nym, a follower of Falstaff who appears in *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. My humour shall not cool, he says in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1.3.92).
(f) There are two passages to clarify this example. Portia (in MV 4.1.335) assures the court that Shylock will receive justice: *He hath refused it in the open court.*

*He shall have merely justice and his bond.*

*And in Antony and Cleopatra (3.7.47), Enobarbus advises Antony that chance and nothing else is what will assist him:*

*Give up yourself merely to chance and hazard*

*From firm security.*

(g) Iago tells Othello that he will deal with Cassio (4.1.210):

*And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker. You shall hear more by midnight.*

(h) Ophelia is distraught at the sight of Hamlet’s apparent madness:

*And I . . .
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me*

*(Ham 3.1.156):*

(i) Buckingham is flattering the future king (R3: 3.7.209):

*As well we know your tenderness of heart
And gentle, kind, effeminate remorse*

(j) Hamlet (3.4.19) suggests to Gertrude that she should take a good look at herself:

*Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.*

*You go not till I set you up a glass*

*Where you may see the inmost part of you.*

(ii) The last four examples above illustrate Ullmann's processes of restriction, extension, pejorative, ameliorative, but not in this order. Decide which example
illustrates which process (answers’ in the Answer Section). Remember that you
are looking at change from then till now (and not vice versa). So nice is
regarded as ameliorative because then it had pejorative meanings, and now
has a positive meaning.

(iii) As an additional activity, choose a couple of the examples above and look up
in an etymological dictionary how the words have changed sense over the
centuries. There are some such dictionaries online, including at

5 English, as she is (sometimes) spoken (AS)

Here are some passages spoken by Shakespearean characters using nonstandard
English. The speakers are: Irish, French, Scottish and Welsh (but not in that order). Try to
identify which is which: some are very easy and others almost impossible! Specify what
characteristics the speeches have that make them non-standard, and assess (as best
you can) how accurate they are as examples of their variety. Then specify any linguistic
characteristics that you associate with these varieties, but which are not found in the
speeches. Are you led to any conclusions about the accuracy of Shakespeare’s
representations of non-standard English?

(a) Vat is you sing? I do not like des toys. Pray you, go and vetch me in my closet un
boitier vert, a box, a green-a box: do intend vat I speak? a green-a box. You
jack(square)nape, give-a this letter to Sir Hugh; by gar, it is a challenge: I will cut his troat
in dee park; and I will teach a scurvny jack-a-nape priest to meddle or make. You
may be gone; it is not good you tarry here.

(b) To the mines? Tell you the Duke, it is not so good to come to the mines, for, look
you, the mines is not according to the disciplines of the war. The concavities of it is
not sufficient; for, look you, th’athersary, you may discuss unto the Duke, look you,
is digt himself four yard under the countermines. By Cheshu, I think a will plow up
all, if there is not better directions.

(c) By the mess, ere theise eyes of mine take themselves to slomber, ay’ll de gud
service, or ay’ll lig i’th’ grund for it, ay, or go to death! And ay’ll pay’t as valorously
as I may, that sail I suerly do, that is the breff and the long. Marry, I wad full fain
hear some question ‘tween you tway.

(d) By Chris, la, ‘tish ill done! The work ish give over, the trompet sound the retreat. By
my hand I swear, and my father’s soul, the work is ill done: it ish give over. I would
have blowed up the town, so Chrish save me, la, in an hour. O, tish ill done, ‘tish ill
done – by my hand, ‘tish ill done!
Extended activities

1. At two points in this chapter (3.1.1 and 3.5), the ‘authorship question’ is raised – that is, the question of who wrote Shakespeare. A huge amount of scholastic effort has been put into this issue, and a number of candidates for authorship have attracted passionate following. Spend some time (using the internet perhaps) finding out who the main candidates are. Then consider whether it really matters. What difference does it make who wrote Shakespeare? Once you have thought about this, you might like to consult an article by a law professor, Peter Jaszi, entitled ‘Who cares who wrote “Shakespeare”?’, available on the internet at http://www.wcl.american.edu/journal/lawrev/37/jaszi3.pdf?rd=1.

2. One of the dimensions of variation considered in 3.5 is idiolect. Focus on a play that particularly interests you and identify one character who has a particularly distinctive way of speaking. Identify the linguistic characteristics which make their speech so distinctive. What do these characteristics tell us about their personality or social position?

3. 3.3 is about ‘chains of imagery’ in Shakespeare. Considering again a play of your choice, seek out some examples of such chains, where an image, or a play on words, is extended over a few lines or more.

Answer section

Common punning words (section 3.1.2)

The other spellings are hart, sun and bare. Light can mean the opposite of dark, or of heavy; blood can refer to the red bodily fluid, or to family descent (as well as, also, a person’s temperament); bond can mean a tie, connection or even agreement (e.g. between people), but also a shackle or restraint; arms can be limbs, but also weapons; stomach can refer to the digestive organ, but also to a person’s inclination to do something (especially an action requiring bravery).

Malapropisms (section 3.1.3)

(a) comprehend for apprehend; auspicious for suspicious; (b) impertinent for pertinent; defect for effect; (c) benefactors for malefactors; (d) confidence for conference; endite for
invite; (e) sentences for senses; (f) deflowered for devoured.

Activity 1 Some fatal Cleopatras
(a) tide and tied; (b) sole and soul; (c) with the awl and withal; recover and recover; (d) son and sun; (e) gild and guilt; (f) civil and Seville; (g) In one sense, little and seeming go together to mean ‘apparently small’; here substance refers to Cordelia’s size. In the other sense, seeming goes with substance, almost as a compound. Here seeming means ‘paying attention to superficialities’, and substance means ‘essential nature’.

Activity 2 Classifying malapropisms
(a) collusion and pollution for allusion; (b) virginity for virgin; (c) decrease for increase; (d) indited for invited; (e) comprehend for apprehend; vagrom for vagrant; (f) reprehend for represent; (g) messenger for message; (h) reproach for approach; (i) cardinality for carnally; (j) infinitive for infinite; (k) paramour for paragon; (l) temporality for temper; pulsidge for pulse; extraordinarily for ordinarily. Schlauch’s classifications are Prefix (P), Suffix (S), and Root (R): (a) P; (b) S; (c) P; (d) R; (e) P, R; (f) R; (g) S; (h) P; (i) R; (j) S; (k) R; (l) R, S, P.

Activity 3 Spotting ‘kitchen diction’
Bland’s selection (which may not be the same as yours) is: (a) bustle; (b) cog and duck; (c) drenched; (d) tetchy; (e) dungy; (f) blab; (g) cram (there is an argument for stomach also perhaps); (h) prate.

Activity 4 Friends, oh so false
(a) naughty = wicked (a much stronger pejorative meaning than today); (b) doubt = suspect (a sense that you find in the Modern French se douter de); (c) sad = serious; (d) saucy = insolent, presumptuous; (e) humorous = moody (associated with the humours, bodily fluids which control human moods; you can probably see associations here with the word humid); (f) merely = absolutely, entirely; (g) undertaker = one who ‘undertakes’ to do a specific task; (h) ecstasy = frenzy, madness (the OED relates it to the Greek meaning insanity); (i) effeminate = tender, gentle (it could also carry the pejorative sense which it has today, meaning unmanly); (j) glass = mirror.

Examples (g)–(j) in terms of Ullmann’s processes: undertaker = restriction;
ecstasy = ameliorative; effeminate = pejorative; glass = extension.

Activity 5 English, as she is (sometimes) spoken

(a) This is the French doctor Caius (MV 1.4.43 and 105).
(b) The Welsh Captain Fluellen (H5 3.2.56).
(c) Captain Jamy, who is Scottish (H5 3.2.110).
(d) The Irish Captain Macmorris (H5 3.2.85).

There are some French words in (a) (like un boitier vert) which make the first language of the speaker clear. There are some French sounding constructions like it is not good you tarry here, and what would be a false friend for a French speaker of English: entendre means ‘hear’, and since intend sounds a little like entendre, Dr Caius uses it (wrongly) here. Dr Caius uses a ‘v’ sound for ‘wh’ and ‘f’, and a ‘d’ for ‘th’ in words like the. These are not really characteristics of French speakers (today at least). More convincing are ‘t’ for ‘th’ in treat, and ‘sh’ for ‘ch’ in shalenge. Dr Caius also puts a vowel on the ends of some words (green-a, give-a). This is much more distinctive in Italian speakers of English, but the French may sometimes do it.

Fluellen, in (b), displays the linguistic characteristic that many associate with the Welsh – using the phrase look you. He also uses singular verbs after plural subjects (the mines is not). Adversary becomes athversary, based perhaps on the fact that Welsh people sometimes aspirate consonants (making bad sound like pad – or blow sound like plow as in this speech). Jesu is written Chesu, perhaps for the same reason.

In (c), a number of the vowel sounds are written to reflect how a Renaissance Scottish person might have pronounced them, like slomber, gud, grund, wad. You also find the Scottish version of two and lie: tway and lig.

Macmorris’ Irish accent in (d) is dominated by one feature: the use of ‘sh’. So Christ becomes Chrish, tis becomes tish, and is becomes ish.
CHAPTER 3

Prospero's Language, Caliban's Voice
3. Prospero’s Language, Caliban’s Voice

Bill Ashcroft is a founding exponent of post-colonial theory, co-author of *The Empire Writes Back*, the first text to examine systematically the field of post-colonial studies. He is author and co-author of twelve books including *Post-Colonial Transformation* and *On Post-Colonial Futures*. He is Chair of the School of English at the University of Hong Kong, on leave from the University of New South Wales.

It is probably no surprise, given the cultural consequences of the history of slavery in the Atlantic, where slaves were isolated from their language groups and developed an extensive range of linguistic variations, that Caribbean novelists and poets have been among the most energetic transformers of colonial language. Already competent in moving through various registers of English, within what Bickerton calls the “creole continuum” (1973), their inventiveness with language is virtually unparalleled in the post-colonial world. The Caribbean has also been a productive site for the re-reading and re-writing of the canonical texts of English literature. Barbadian George Lamming, for instance, although not the first to recognize the colonial implications of Shakespeare’s final play, *The Tempest*, is the writer who most influenced contemporary post-colonial readings.

When we examine canonical works they often show themselves to be consummate reconstructions of the dynamic of imperial power. Reading them we discover why they have been so attractive to re-writings. *The Tempest* has been read for nearly half a century as a powerful and remarkably comprehensive allegory of colonization. First used, somewhat eccentrically, by Octave Mannoni to demonstrate the ‘dependency’ complex of the colonized in 1950 (Mannoni 1950), *The Tempest* has become, since George Lamming’s reading in *The Pleasures of Exile*, a major allegory of the colonial experience, written back to, re-written and alluded to by one post-colonial writer after another. Lamming dismantles the view of Caliban as a creature outside civilization “on whose nature/Nurture can never stick” (IV.i.188–9), showing him to be a human being (specifically a West Indian), whose human status has been denied by the European claims to an exclusive human condition (see Brydon 1984; Zabus 1985, 2002). In the relationship between Prospero, Miranda, Ariel and Caliban we find demonstrated in dramatic form some of the most fundamental features of the colonial enterprise: the consummate binary set up between colonizer and colonized; the nature of the power relationship which this binary facilitates; the hegemony of imperial notions of order and good government; the profound link between such ideas and the technology of the colonizing power (which in Prospero is symbolized by his magic Art); the racial debasement and demonization of the colonized (articulated by Prospero’s, and the
play's, attitude to Caliban); and the belief that goals of 'improvement', of the civilizing mission, are a justification for subjugation.

Because such texts allegorize so well the dynamics of imperial power, they offer a rich site for the consideration of post-colonial issues, and one of these is the future of Caliban's language. While *The Tempest* has been a classic subject of re-readings and re-writings, it is in Caliban's encounter with Prospero's language that some of the most interesting issues in post-colonial transformation emerge. The play provides one of the most confronting demonstrations of the importance of language in the colonial encounter, but it does not share our interest in Caliban. He disappears almost without trace, contrite and repentant, leaving us ignorant of the possibilities of his use of Prospero's speech. *The Tempest* is fascinating because while it liberally displays the power of Prospero's language it offers no view of Caliban's response, other than his resonant "You taught me language, and my profit on't is I know how to curse". Famous though this response has become, it fails to conceive any possibility of Caliban's power to transform language. Caliban remains an evocative and controversial symbol of post-colonial resistance: while many would hold that colonial language has no other function than oppression, good for nothing but cursing, writers throughout the colonized world have continued to transform it, and turn it into a vehicle that works for them.

Caliban becomes, therefore, a peerless figure of colonial ambivalence and the main reason for the many counter-discursive renditions of the play. Caliban is important for our purposes because he has no future, that is, Shakespeare is incapable of conceiving any future for him. Thus to see Caliban's cursing as the only response the colonized subject might have to the colonial language, is to accept Caliban as the play presents him: a vanquished and marginalized miscegenator with no hope and no future. Once we locate the colonial significance of the play, some very different possibilities open up. Because Caliban is so manifestly the cannibal/primitive, the abject other of European civilization in the play, he has become a symbol for representations of subaltern exploitation and resistance. His disappearance from the action invites us to extend the allegory and consider the trajectory of his future, specifically the future of his speaking, his use of the colonial language.

Caliban's virtual relegation to the status of cursing savage is curiously echoed in the writings of Roberto Fernández Retamar whose Spanish essays on Caliban – "Caliban" (1971) and "Caliban Revisited" (1986), both translated in his *Caliban and Other Essays* (1989) and "Caliban Speaks Five Hundred Years Later" (1992 in McClintock et al. 1997) – raised the character to almost iconic status in Latin America. Retamar's essays are a trenchant attack on the huge and flimsy edifice of European imperialism. Yet in launching the attack they have as little to say about Caliban's future as *The Tempest*.
Caliban appears to be unable to do anything but curse in the dominant language. This strangely futureless positioning of Caliban's voice reaches a peak in Retamar's final essay, "Caliban Speaks Five Hundred Years Later," a long diatribe against Europe and its historic imperialist evils, in which the author adopts Caliban's identity, to, in a sense, 'curse' the effects of five hundred years of domination. For all its justification and political energy it becomes an interesting demonstration of the inability of some resistance rhetoric to take into account the kinds of transformations that have actually occurred in colonized societies. The paradoxical effect of this is to lock Caliban into the position of anti-European 'natural man'.

Clearly, Shakespeare endorses Prospero's project to civilize the 'natural man'. Prospero is also a model for the playwright himself, a creative authority at the height of his powers who looks back in the play upon the capacity of creative art to change nature. But, perhaps for this reason, the contest between Nature and Art in the play is by no means a foregone conclusion: in a significant intervention into this argument the kindly Gonzalo proposes that in a Kingdom ruled by him "All things in common Nature should produce/Without sweat or endeavour" (II. i. 155–6). Furthermore, Caliban, so comprehensively demonized, is nevertheless given some of the most beautiful and powerful lines in the play. While the conflict between Prospero's Art and Caliban's Natural Man remains central, Caliban becomes, in a post-colonial reading, the lens through which the political issues of colonial subjection are focused. Caliban is the key to the transformation of this allegory in such a reading, for he is not only colonized by Prospero, but in a sense, also by the assumptions on which the play is based.

Caliban, as the marginalized indigene, is the antithesis of culture. He is ignorant of gentleness and humanity, he is a savage and capable of all ill; he is born to slavery, not to freedom, of a vile rather than a noble union and whose parents represent an evil natural magic which is the antithesis of Prospero's art. More importantly, his nature is one on which nurture, the benefits of imperial culture, "will not stick". So in every respect he is the antithesis of culture, and the terms by which he is described justify the colonizing process that subjugates him. Prospero's Art, on the other hand, is seen to represent civilized man's power over the world and over himself, a power over nature divorced from grace, of the mind over the senses.

The naming and depiction of Caliban (Carib – Canibal – Caliban) is a clear demonstration of the attempt by the text to refute the view of nature as that which man corrupts, and of Montaigne's view that the natural man enjoyed a naturally virtuous life uncorrupted by civilization (Florio 1603). Caliban's origins and character are 'natural' in the sense that they do not partake of grace, civility or art. Clearly Shakespeare's text resists the ambivalence that enters into the argument between Locke and Rousseau about the 'natural' state of the child. Caliban is ugly in body,
associated with an evil 'natural' magic, and unqualified for rule or nurture. He is in every way offered as an example of the baseness of the life yet unordered by method, society, civilization or good government. The play contests categorically the assumptions of Montaigne or Rousseau that nature is that which human society corrupts (Rousseau 1755). Culture is that which necessarily turns the savage into a human being and it is the colonizing culture that provides the model par excellence of this process. But it is, above all, language that performs this civilizing and humanizing function.

Caliban is the prototype of the colonized subject, whose baseness, as constructed by the colonizer, is the justifying prerequisite of colonization. This is why Caliban has been so consistently fascinating to writers trying to understand their own colonial condition. Edouard Glissant says:

This is the problem of Caliban, that island creature whom a prince from the continent wished to civilize. The theme of Caliban has touched Caribbean intellectuals in a surprising way: Fanon, Lamming, Césaire, Fernández Retamar. The fact is that Caliban, as the locus of encounters and conflicts, has become a symbol. Above and beyond Shakespeare's savage cannibal, a real dynamic is at play – not only in the Caribbean but in many places in the Third World – a dynamic constituted by encounters among these three necessities: the class struggle, the emergence or the construction of the nation, the quest for collective identity. The facts of social and cultural life are only rarely combined and reinforced in harmony. It is claimed in Panama that the negritude movement promoted by Panamanians of Caribbean origin is in opposition to the will to reinforce the Panamanian nation. It is asserted in Trinidad that the resolution of political or economic problems is achieved or not achieved (depending on the ideology of the speaker) by the aggressive affirmation of either Indian or African identity. It is argued in Cuba that the solution to problems of social inequality will mean the simultaneous removal of racism. All of that is the true Caribbean problematic. It is why Caliban deserves such a passionate scrutiny.

(1989: 118–19)

It is not the simplicity of Caliban's rebellion and striving for identity that makes him so relevant to post-colonial experience, but its complexity. For every discourse of resistance there are several others vying for authority. The centre of this complexity, of the contending issues of class, race, nation, is the language he speaks. For in this language freedom resides, if only he can find the discourse that will liberate it.
Language, learning and colonial power

The domination of Prospero's Art over Nature is above all the domination of his language and books. Indeed it is, curiously, the reason for his overthrow and exile to the island.

And Prospero the prime Duke being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal Arts
Without a parallel; those being all my study,
Prospero's language, Caliban's voice 19
The government I cast upon my brother
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies.

(l.ii.72–77)

Prospero is no cynical politician, indeed, by presenting him as deceived by his brother and naive about the politics of Milan, the play suggests that his Culture dwells in a rarefied dimension far beyond the hurly burly of ordinary political intrigue. Dedicated to “closeness and the bettering of my mind” (l.ii.90), he embodies the highest ideals of his culture which exist in the space of the 'timeless' and 'universal'. This, indeed, is precisely the way in which European culture maintains a hegemony of ideas and values that outlasts colonial domination itself.

There can be no doubt that the key to the moral superiority manifested in Prospero's art is the language with which he names and controls the island. His function as an educator nurtures the prototypical settler colonial – his daughter Miranda – but it has a very different effect on Caliban. In a scene between Prospero, Caliban and Miranda in Act I Scene ii (on which this chapter will principally focus) we discover how crucial language becomes in the process of colonial control.

Caliban:  
As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both! a south-west blow on ye
And blister you all o'er!

Prospero:  
For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd

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As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
Than bees made ’em.

Caliban:
I must eat my dinner.
This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first,
Thou strok’st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in’t; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I lov’d thee,
And show’d thee all the qualities o’th’ isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
Curs’d be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own King: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whilst you do keep from me
The rest o’ the’ island.

Prospero:
Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us’d thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care; and lodg’ed thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.

Caliban:
O ho, O ho! would’t had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

Miranda:
Abhorred slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow’d thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in’t which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confin’d into this rock,
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

*Caliban:*
You taught me language; and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language.

(I.ii.332–67)

This scene plays out many of the major linguistic, racial and cultural issues emerging from the historical trauma of colonialism. Caliban’s famous reply is a tortured and resonant confirmation of the various processes of colonial domination that have been articulated in the previous exchange. Language is not one aspect of a broad range of colonizing strategies. It is the very mode of cultural control, the vehicle in which those strategies are effected. But what are these processes of domination? When we examine the scene closely we will see that it rehearses several of the most profound and troubling aspects of linguistic colonization: the connection between language and race; the issue of place and the power of imperial technology; the power of naming; the relationship between language and power itself; and the constitutive and therefore putatively ontological power of a dominant language.

**Language and race**

Prospero’s response to Caliban demonstrates his power to name and thus define his slave. The ‘gift’ of language with which Prospero ‘educates’ Caliban interpellates him as a linguistic subject of the master tongue. The question of Caliban’s resistance therefore hinges at precisely this point, for the power of demonization lies in the capacity to make names stick, to make them the frame of one’s self-representation. The colonized being whom Prospero at first stroked and ‘made much of ’is now constructed as a ‘lying slave’, ‘filth’, ‘hag-seed’, while to Miranda he is an ‘abhorred slave’, ‘savage’, ‘brutish’, of a ‘vile race’. What motivates this change? Nothing less than the horror of miscegenation.

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us’d thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care; and lodg’d thee
In mine own cell, till thou seek’st to violate
The honour of my child.

To which Caliban replies:

O ho, O ho! would’t had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

This passage radically skews the play against Caliban, undermining his protestations of hospitality to the father and daughter (1.i.333–46). The effect of this charge is to show that he is incapable of recognizing proper civil boundaries, thus abrogating any rights to the island he occupies. This failure to recognize proper boundaries is a sign of primitiveness that predicts the discourse of race. The attempted rape threatens to introduce a race of hybrid post-colonial subjects, a threat of an almost dehumanizing racial pollution.

The link between language and race has existed since the emergence of racialist theory in writers such as Buffon, and becomes a key feature of imperial discourse as racial dominance is encouraged and ratified by the political, cultural and racial assertions of a dominant group. This link is foreshadowed in the exchange between Caliban and Prospero and Miranda, although not explicitly, for it is important to remember that the formal categorization of races had not yet occurred in European thinking when the play was written. The language which enabled Caliban to “name the bigger light and how the less” (1.i.337) and which therefore becomes commensurate with reality itself, is a language in which the consequent assumption of authority cannot brook any thought of racial (nor linguistic) intermixing. In his play Caliban, Rénan has Ariel say “Prospero taught thee the Aryan language, and with that divine tongue the channel of reason has become inseparable from thee” (Rénan 1896: 18). There was a very deep investment in the link between language and culture in nineteenth-century thinking (when Rénan wrote his play); indeed it is the force of this link that carries over into assumptions about language today. Hybridity represents not merely a racial impurity, but more profoundly, threatens to disrupt the link between language and race so important to racialist thinking and hence, to the civilizing mission of imperialism. According to Rénan, if one is fortunate enough to speak “Indo-European” one benefits from all the qualities of that race (1896: 145).

Indeed, the myth of the authority of the dominant (Aryan) tongue as a discourse of knowledge rests upon its inviolability. As George Lamming asks:

Could Prospero really have endured the presence and meaning of a brown skin grandchild? It would not be Miranda’s own doing. It would not be the result of their enterprise. It would be Miranda’s and Caliban’s child. It would be theirs: the result and expression of some fusion both physical and other than physical.

(1960: 102)
It is these “other than physical” possibilities that are the most far-reaching. For quite apart from issues of rape and miscegenation is the possibility of the emergence of a hybrid ‘decolonizing’ language which might completely transform the nature of the colonial relationship and consequently Caliban’s power over discourse, and thus over the island itself.

The terms used to describe Caliban are so confused and contradictory that they give a clear insight into how the language of power operates. Caliban is such a ‘monstrous absence’ in contrast to the ‘civilized presence’ of Prospero, that it becomes impossible to visualize him by the descriptions the play gives of him. He is “a strange fish!” (II.ii.27); “Legg’d like a man! and his fins like arms!” (II.ii.34); “no fish” (II.ii.36); “some monster of the isle with four legs” (II.ii.66); “a plain fish” (V.i.266); and a “mis-shapen knave” (V.i.268). Morton Luce sums up this contradiction succinctly: “if all the suggestions as to Caliban’s form and feature and endowments that are thrown out in the play are collected, it will be found that the one half renders the other half impossible” (Hulme 1986: 107).

The ambiguous representation of Caliban comes about because notions of race had not clearly coalesced when Shakespeare wrote, and were not to be so for a century and a half. The ambiguous directions, intimations and descriptions of Caliban in the play come about because, although the concept of the ‘cannibal’ had become entrenched in the European psyche as the absolute sign of the other, it had not yet been connected to the category of race. What we discover here is the origins of racism in a more radical distinction – that between humans and animals, and the subsequent connection between race and slavery. Miranda calls Caliban “slave” as well as “monster”, and indeed he has been enslaved. But the concept of Caliban’s animalistic, language-less identification with Nature rather than Culture, locates the origins of racism in what Peter Singer calls “speciesism”.

“Speciesism”

In 1873, Daniel Wilson, attempting to argue that Shakespeare had predated nineteenth-century evolutionary theory by constructing Caliban as an example of the ‘missing link’, compared Caliban’s relationship with Miranda to that of Ariel:

Caliban is her fellow creature, in a way that Ariel could never be, and provokes comparison such as the other in no way suggests. For his is the palpable grossness of the lower nature, a creature of earth, not unredeemed by its own fitting attributes nor untrue to itself, but altogether below the level of humanity.
Wilson’s language, although aimed at a pseudo-scientific outcome, is a telling demonstration of the capacity of nineteenth-century eugenic discourse to relegate the racial other to a liminal space of abjection and sub-humanity. Although he wishes to make a distinction between Caliban and the human ‘savage’, the language he uses renders the boundary between the human and sub-human somewhat vague.

After all that has been most strongly dwelt upon which seems to degrade the brutified Australian Bushman, Andaman Islander or other lowest type of human savage, he is still human. It can with no propriety be said of him that he has only doubtfully attained to the rank of manhood.

A different way of understanding this discourse can be provided in the concept of what Peter Singer calls “speciesism” (Singer 2003). The indeterminacy of Caliban’s representation in the play is an indeterminacy of species. It is his animal-like nature, confirmed in his lack of language, that constitutes him as both a lesser race, if human at all, and a slave. “The one special advantage we enjoy over animals,” writes Cicero, “is our power to speak with one another, to express our thoughts in words” (Greenblatt 1990: 23). The ‘civilizing’ mission is based on the profoundly speciesist assumption that ‘barbaric’ languages have placed other men at the level of animals, placing them in need of cultural redemption. It remains a given that animals are irredeemable, they remain the ultimate binary – non-human. One of the most common attitudes of colonizers was the constitution of the indigenous inhabitants as a part of nature and therefore, by implication, not human, but merely one feature of an environment that needed to be tamed. Identifying humans with animals rests on the presumption that animals are beneath consideration.

Consequently speciesism and racism are not merely analogous, but one preceded and justified the other. We afflict other races because we first afflicted animals. As Carey Wolfe puts it:

“Our humanist concept of subjectivity is inseparable from the discourse and institution of speciesism” since the “human” is by definition the not animal or “animalistic.” This in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in “a non-criminal putting to death,” as Derrida phrases it, not only of animals, but of other humans as well by marking them as animals.

(Wolfe 2003: 40)
Caliban, in his contradictory and inexplicable monstrosity, demonstrates the European discourse of racial othering in the process of coming into being. He precedes the link between cannibal and race in the distinction between animals and humans.

This conflation of racial ‘barbarism’ with inhuman animalism appears from the beginning of racialist thinking (and the word ‘barbarous’ still has the synonym ‘inhuman’ in Roget’s Thesaurus). When speaking of negroes Buffon never fails to mention “that their heads are covered with wool (like sheep) rather than hair, and he betrays no discomfort in writing that ‘Negroes and Negresses, when transported to the coldest climates always continue to produce animals of the same kind’“ (Todorov 1993: 101). But eerily reminiscent of Prospero’s view of Caliban (and indeed, of the way he is situated in the text), Buffon has a ready explanation for the African’s animal nature: “It is not improbable that in warm climates apes have ravished girls” (101). This bizarre assertion has its antecedents in Edward Long’s History of Jamaica (1774), which was quoted as late as 1857 by Armand de Quatrefages. Long presumed the existence of two kinds of sterile mulattos, of whom one lot were produced by the coupling of Blacks with Whites and the other of Blacks with Orang-Outangs, adding, “I do not think an Orang-Outang would be any dishonour to a Hottentot female” (Poliakov 1977: 178). We can see how clearly this version of polygenism demonstrates the importance attached to keeping the races separate. Given Rénan’s commitment to the importance of the link between the Aryan language and racial improvement in his play Caliban it is not improbable that the idea came from Shakespeare, certainly from the same racial fear.

Visually, Caliban is a kind of absence in the play, represented only by Prospero’s discourse. He takes shape completely within the language of the colonizer and by “learning to curse” through that language (I.ii.367) he fulfils the only expectations we may have of him. Linguistically, Caliban, the non-human monster, has been taught language itself, not just the invaders’ language, so that he might “know his own meaning”, a meaning provided, of course, by Prospero. If we ask the question, “How would Caliban seem if it weren’t for the consequences of his bondage and imprisonment?”, we find that we cannot answer it. In both his depiction as “hag seed”, monster, lying slave, filth, and his imprisonment in the colonial language by which this construction is borne, Caliban fulfils all prophecies of his debasement.

Language and place

The threats exchanged between Caliban and Prospero in this key scene appear equally malicious. Yet there is a very subtle difference in their nature. Caliban calls upon a “wicked dew” from “unwholesome fen” (324) to drop on them both; that a “south west blow on ye and blister ye all over” (325–6). Caliban’s resource is the place itself, the
conditions of that island which he takes for granted as his home. Prospero's threats are more sinister and painful, for they emanate from his Art and are directed at Caliban's body. "Tonight thou shalt have cramps" he says, "Side stitches that shall pen thy breath up"; urchins and bees will do their work on Caliban's body at Prospero's behest.

Although Caliban belongs to the place and can call upon the natural resources of the island, Prospero's art intervenes in nature, for this intervention is the very function of culture and it becomes directly responsible for Caliban's physical pain. That separation between the base materiality of colonial subjection and the erudite power of imperial learning is completely dissolved the moment the colonized subject offers resistance. The link between Prospero's superior technology and the intention to torture Caliban's debased body is a profound metaphor of the actual material consequences of an eloquent and 'civilizing' imperial culture.

It is clear that there is a distinct difference in the play between the ways in which Prospero and Caliban relate to place. Prospero's primary modality is mastery, effected through his 'Art' and represented in his language. To Prospero, Caliban has no place – he is the place. He is the place in its most primitive and unimproved state. As an indigenous subject, he is outside the colonizing language and therefore beyond culture. He is part of the wilderness, to be tamed, subdued and civilized. His 'gabbling', which passes for language, predicates, in Prospero's mind, a lack of any civilized comprehension of his island as a location. By teaching Caliban to "name the bigger light and the less" Prospero not only provides Caliban with a medium of representation, but to his own eyes, provides Caliban with a world. Without that language Caliban is effectively 'erased' – part of the uninhabited, uncultured wasteland, the Terra Nullius whose unoccupied state invites colonial occupation.

Prospero, for all his geographical control of the island, cannot see it as home, and chooses a power over Caliban's body. The match is an unequal one for Prospero's force is consummate. But it suggests very different ways in which the combatants are located. Caliban is constructed by the play as part of Nature. His ability to experience the island 'instinctively', beyond the domination of Prospero's art or language, is elaborated later when Trinculo and Stephano hear Ariel's music.

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak’d,
I cried to dream again.
(III.i.132–41)

Whereas Prospero uses music to charm, punish and generally consolidate his power, music provokes in Caliban an enjoyment of the dream-like riches of the island. In one view this is a moment of excess that exists beyond the restricting language of the colonizer. “Caliban’s production of the island as a pastoral space, separated from the world of power, takes literally what the discourse in the hands of a Prospero can only mean metaphorically” (Brown 1985, in Bloom 1988: 149). In this reading Caliban desires to escape reality and return to dream as the only way to evade the control of Prospero’s language. Yet it is in this very language that Caliban reveals the delights of the island to the drunkards. Even in this eloquent description of the dream-like qualities of the island (or perhaps particularly in this description) Caliban engages the language that ‘interpellates’ him in a way that sets his experience of the island apart. The power of a dominant language to construct the physical environment is one with which the colonized must always contend. Whatever the sense of inherent or cultural ‘belonging’ to place which Caliban may have, it is clear that place may be ‘controlled’ by being familiarized and domesticated through language.

Language and naming

The example of Prospero alerts us to the ways in which this apparently benign discourse of imperial naming may have actual, harmful effects on the lives and bodies of the colonized. In reply to Prospero’s threat of torture, Caliban launches into a famous speech that confirms his own indigenous possession of the land, the power of Prospero’s language and the ultimate hollowness of colonial control.

This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first,
Thou strok’st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in’t; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I lov’d thee,
And show’d thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
Curs’d be I that did so!

Caliban’s ownership of the island is based on prior occupation, which is the only
practical measure of indigeneity, even though his mother Sycorax had migrated there. But the moral force of prior occupation pales into insignificance alongside the linguistic force of Prospero's power to name place, that is, establish his names as the authoritative ones. The power to name place, by locating the speaker within a world that is recognizable through a particular language, bestows the more far-reaching capacity to construct human identity. This is because those names represent not just a language but also an entire edifice of cultural assumptions: attitudes about time and space, about the relation between language and place and even about the operation of thought itself. In European colonization names become, in effect, metonymic of modernity, in terms of which the rights to dominance are assumed.

This assumption of dominance requires that the indigenous subjects be, in effect, dehumanized, their own capacity for naming erased. In Ernest Rénan's play Caliban the opening scene sees Caliban and Ariel discussing the issues that arise in Act I Scene ii of The Tempest. Here Ariel echoes the formative and strategic assertion of colonial occupation:

Thou sayest without cessation that the island belonged to thee. In truth, it did belong to thee, just as the desert belongs to the gazelle, the jungle to the tiger, and no more. Thou knewest the name of nothing there. Thou wast a stranger to reason and thy inarticulate language resembled the bellowing of an angry camel more than any human speech.

(Rénan 1896: 17)

The pronouncement of the inarticulacy of the indigenous occupants is an important erasure, a constitution of empty space on which 'place' can then be inscribed by the various processes of colonial discourse. One of these processes involves endowing or denying human identity to the indigenous inhabitants, a role in which Miranda functions by providing the terms by which Caliban may know himself. It was she who, teaching Caliban language, taught him to "know thine own meaning" (I.ii.358). The naming and re-naming of place is a potent demonstration of the ways in which the power of a discourse may operate. Renaming operates as if it were the original and authoritative naming of the place, or any other concept, and it is this authority to describe the world that Prospero's language acquires. For to name reality is in some mysterious way to assume control of it, by fitting it into a scheme in which all things have their relation because they are related in language.
Language and identity

For George Lamming the language Prospero teaches Caliban is an unequivocal prison from which there is "no escape":

Prospero has given Caliban Language; and with it an unstated history of consequences, an unknown history of future intentions. This gift of Language meant not English, in particular, but speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self that could not be reached in any other way.

(1960: 109)

Prospero's gift is the gift of method. To interpret the productive power of imperial representation as imprisonment is to ignore the transformative agency of those produced in this discourse. Does language provide an avenue towards areas of the self, unreachable in any other way, or does it provide the names by which those areas come into being? Prospero's names metonymise the power he has over Caliban's world, here and now, but not necessarily for all time. Caliban is not imprisoned in Prospero's language incontrovertibly because it is by using Prospero's language (or any other) that Caliban can actualize his own possibility for being. This power is the key to the transformative dynamic of post-colonial writing and cultural production. Such a dynamic emerges in Caliban's determination to answer back to one who has such manifest power over him.

All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
28 Prospero's language, Caliban's voice
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own King: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whilst you do keep from me
The rest o' the' island.

This speech of Caliban's goes right to the heart of post-colonial subjectivity and specifically articulates the agency of the interpellated colonial subject to engage that power which produces him as subject. For, given the power of Prospero's language to interpellate Caliban, the discursive power that produces his subjectivity is neither absolute nor hierarchically fixed in those institutions – such as education, literature, and government – through which it is perpetuated. Clearly Prospero's power over Caliban is tangibly oppressive, he commands the means of physical torture and incarceration, not to mention the emotionally disabling impact of his personal
treachery to one who loved him and showed him "all the qualities o’th’isle" (I.ii.339). But there is a place where the power of his language cannot reach. For Prospero’s language can only have power over Caliban to the extent that it has power to cement his perception of himself, if Caliban comes to internalize the way in which he is situated in that language, accepting it as a true indication of his status and being.

Although such internalization may occur (and does occur often in the colonial experience) it is by no means inevitable or complete. Caliban’s reaction demonstrates the limits of Prospero’s power. For although his language assumes the status of an authoritative instrument for, in effect, bringing the world into being, it cannot obliterate Caliban’s belief that he is the deposed king of the island and that Prospero’s dominion is in essence pathetic, since Caliban is his one and only subject. Imperial power as either repressive force or productive energy is not absolute or static but transformable. Although it has the power to ‘produce’ Caliban, it cannot prevent him from ‘entering’ power and reproducing himself in the language.

**Beyond cursing: Language and transformation**

Miranda’s response demonstrates the extent to which the filiative relationship with Empire constructs the discourse of settlement and to what extent she is placed in antagonism to Caliban through her ownership of language and her stewardship of education.

Abhorred slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow’d thy purposes
With words that made them know. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in’t which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confin’d into this rock,
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

Miranda’s language in this speech both embodies and describes the justification for the subjugation of the indigenous Caliban. Quite apart from his constitution as a rapist and
miscenegerator, he is an “abhorred slave”, “savage”, “brutish”, “vile”. What is being enacted here is the power of Miranda's language to construct Caliban racially, a power that is coterminous with Prospero's very tangible control of his body, his actions, his destiny. Caliban is the very nadir of the natural man – an 'animal' in fact – “which any print of goodness wilt not take”. This is, of course, the inevitable retort of the civilizing mission to any rebuttals it might encounter from the colonized. The colonized subject cannot be endowed with the capacity for choice, can never be accorded the freedom to refuse incorporation. If he is recalcitrant he must be constituted as incapable of improvement: as Prospero says, he is “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/ Nurture can never stick” (IV.i.188–9). The moral framework of the relationship is entirely constructed by the dominant party, the settler colonial Miranda, and it is a relationship dominated by a simple binary that remains central to imperial discourse.

By entering so effortlessly into the spirit of Prospero's language, Miranda reveals herself to be as formed by that language, by imperial discourse, as Caliban. Although she seems to further articulate the debasement of Caliban in which Prospero is engaged, her speech clarifies the link between the imperial and the patriarchal power. Miranda has clearly had a relationship as a child with Caliban and assumes the nurturing aspects of colonial control by being responsible for teaching him language by which he can “know himself “. Caliban's response to Miranda's diatribe has become a resistance slogan:

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language.

The play provides Caliban with no way in which he can make the language work for him. The curse is not Miranda’s language but the way in which he has been situated in it. We have seen in this scene itself that Caliban does have the power of reply, he has the power of resistance, but his inability to appropriate the language of Prospero confines him as securely as does Prospero's Art. It is this acceptance of the link between Prospero's language and his Art, and hence the subtle acceptance of his domination, which traps Caliban.

What Caliban might do with this language constitutes one of the most pressing issues in post-colonial writing. For what he might have done has indeed been accomplished in post-colonial literatures. Until the middle of the twentieth century, says Vaughan, most critics implicitly sided with Prospero, blaming Caliban for his own linguistic limitations (1991: 166). But the relationship between Prospero and Caliban took a turn in George Lamming's essay “A monster, a child, a slave” in 1960. When Lamming identified language as Prospero's “prison” he posited an ambiguous prison
which maintained its power productively: its imprisonment was effected in the way it could “produce” Caliban.

No doubt Prospero remains convinced that his language is Caliban’s prison, “the very prison in which Caliban’s achievements will be realized and restricted” (110). This is a ubiquitous argument about the function of a colonizing language, although it is not always expressed so subtly: that for those for whom it is not a mother tongue the language is inevitably and essentially limiting. Language will not allow Caliban’s expansion beyond a certain point, says Lamming. “This kind of realization, this kind of expansion, is possible only to those who reside in that state of being which is the very source and ultimate of the language which bears them always forward” (110). That is, expansion and true self-realization are only possible to those born into the language. But we must ask how that “state of being” becomes the inherent property of a mother tongue? Why is Prospero’s language prevented from “bearing its speakers forward”? The history of post-colonial writing, including that of Lamming himself, would seem to suggest that language is a horizon into which all speakers may enter in different ways and along different trajectories.

Caliban “can never be regarded as an heir of that Language,” adds Lamming, “since his use of Language is no more than his way of serving Prospero; and Prospero’s instruction in this Language is only his way of measuring the distance which separates him from Caliban” (110). This embraces a non sequitur that denies Caliban any agency. Certainly it is undeniable that the colonizing language is taught and disseminated in a way that etrenches difference: the colonized speak dialect or marginal varieties, while the colonizer speaks, and has the status of, Standard English. But the idea that colonized peoples are unable to use the colonizer’s language as anything more than a way of serving the colonizing power, is a myth about the function of language which falls into Prospero’s trap.

But is it Prospero’s trap? Is Prospero not as much a prisoner of language as Caliban? For, as Heidegger says: “Language speaks. Man only speaks in that he artfully complies with language” (1975: 32). That word ‘artfully’ opens up a marked and subtle ambivalence in Shakespeare’s text. Why is it, for instance, that Caliban is given some of the most beautiful lines of the play? Could it be that the radical difference between Caliban and Prospero is seated in a kind of sameness, the similarity of their engagement with language? Both use threats of magic and curses and eloquent utterances of fearsome revenge. Both use language ‘artfully’. To what extent is Caliban’s agency embedded in his identification with Prospero? “I am all the subjects you have”, he says at one stage to Prospero. Is Caliban’s strategic intelligence, embedded so subtly in the present of the play, a premonition of his transformative agency in the future?
The answer to these questions may depend upon whether we see Caliban as a part of nature or a part of culture. Janheinz Jahn, building on Mannoni’s and Lamming’s interventions, offered a different prognosis for Caliban. Jahn suggests that Lamming is right, that “if Caliban is no more than a part of nature, he will never be able to break out of the prison of Prospero’s language” (1968: 240). “But suppose Caliban is also part of a culture, a different culture unfamiliar to Prospero?” asks Jahn (240). Suppose also, that Caliban carries out his revolt relying on his own resources rather than on the buffoons Stephano and Trinculo. In that event, the “thousand twangling instruments”, the music of his island which he explains to them, might be considered the voices of his culture rather than the voices of nature. Or perhaps Caliban’s culture is immersed in nature, in place, and therefore shows a different relationship possible between the two, a less hierarchic, un-European possibility. Caliban emerges from a culture very different from Prospero’s book culture but able to utilize it.

So he captures, in his own and Prospero’s language, a culture Prospero did not create and cannot control, which he, Caliban, has recognized as his own. But in the process the language is transformed, acquiring different meanings that Prospero never expected. Caliban becomes a ‘bilingual’. That language he shares with Prospero and the language he has minted from it are no longer identical. Caliban breaks out of the prison of Prospero’s language.

(Jahn 1968: 242)

Jahn explicitly dates Caliban’s appropriation of Prospero’s culture, the “successful revolt from the prison of Prospero’s language” (242) from the rise of the Negritudinist literary movement between 1934 and 1948. According to Jahn, the escape was effected in three ways: in semantics, rhythm and subject matter. In particular, the use of French led writers such as Senghor, Damas and Césaire to construct a new literary culture which reconfigured Africa as “no longer exotic and ‘primitive’ but as a specific culture” (1968: 244). The limitations of the négritude movement have been widely discussed, but clearly the appropriation of French by these writers preceded a flourishing African literature in English in the post-independence 1950s. Caliban remained in Prospero’s prison of language only as long as he could be deceived into believing it was a prison. The transformation of post-colonial literatures, which began in the negritudinist movement, was one that saw that language was not the repository of culture but its agent.

**Prospero’s books**

From the position of insurmountable despair with which Caliban concludes his ‘learning to
curse’ exchange with Prospero and Miranda, he is relegated to the role of comic foil for Stephano and Trinculo. But this comedy comes to revolve around an important accessory to Prospero's language – his books, which Caliban identifies as the source of his power, and which he entreats the two clowns to destroy. When plotting to overthrow Prospero, he advises Trinculo and Stephano:

Remember  
First to possess his books; for without them  
He's but a sot as I am, nor hath not  
One spirit to command: they all do hate him  
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books.  
(III.i.89–93)

The recognition of the power of books elaborates the very important link between language and writing in the colonial exchange. Shakespeare uses the term 'books' here, as he did in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV.i.15) to refer to not only Prospero's physical collection of books, but also his book learning, his scholarship or study (OED). As Lord Macaulay put it in his infamous Minute to Parliament, knowing English gives anyone access to a “vast intellectual wealth”, a literature that is intrinsically more valuable than any other, a corpus of arts and sciences that cannot be matched. The capacity to transfer this belief is the capacity to rule.

This ideological assumption of the power of print is replicated in *The Tempest* in the power that accrues to Prospero from his books. The play imprisons Caliban in a form of Orientalism: it describes Caliban's unquestioned acceptance of the fact that Prospero's power is located in a superior culture embodied in the written word, in his books; and it denies Caliban any opportunity to appropriate Prospero's technology. The play specifically denies him the opportunity to be nurtured by this Art, because, as an unreconstructed natural man, a “devil”, he is one “on whose nature Nurture can never stick”.

In his play *Caliban* Rénan elaborates the connection between Prospero's books and the power of his language, adding the extra dimension of those scientific instruments by which Prospero has developed his Art and representing what to Rénan is the ultimate secret of European supremacy.

Those books of hell – ugh! how I hate them. They have been the instruments of my slavery. We must snatch and burn them instantly. No other method will serve but this. War to the books! They are our worst enemies, and those who possess them will have power over all their fellows. The man who knows Latin can control and command the people to his service. Down with Latin! Therefore,
first of all seize his books, for there lies the secret of his power. It is by them that he reigns over the inferior spirits. Break, also, the glass retorts and all the materials of his laboratory.

(Rénan 1896: 42)

There is both a class and a race dimension to Caliban in Rénan’s play. The slave has been taken with Prospero back to Milan and his vengeful nature has become the instigator of rebellion amongst the disaffected classes in this ‘civilized’ duchy. Once Caliban has assumed power as the result of the revolution his rule also assumes the moderation of princes, but Prospero’s counter-attack through Ariel is fruitless because, as Ariel suggests, the power of Prospero’s art lies in its capacity to persuade people of its reality.

Whence did it come that our magic prevailed so easily over our adversaries in the enchanted island? It lay in the fact that Alonzo and those minds that were so accessible to it perceived and believed in it ...

(Rénan 1896: 53)

Prospero’s cultural power fails in Milan because he fails to convince the ruled that the power lies with him. More significantly, once Caliban assumes power, his fear of Prospero’s books wanes.

The actual relationship with these books is a source of extreme ambivalence in the colonial relationship. Ideologically, they purport to give access to the “vast intellectual wealth” of the colonizer. But strategically, if Caliban were to acquire those books rather than burn them, would he not have access to an empowering counter-discourse? All Prospero’s and Miranda’s language can teach him is how to curse. But the example of post-colonial literatures reveals that Caliban can take hold of the language and make it work for him. And not only language, for this is but one feature, although a key one, of a set of relations of power that constitute imperial discourse. Rejecting the language will not alter the fundamentally productive power of the discourse itself. The future of Caliban’s language is not cursing but transformation. By appropriating Prospero’s language, his books, indeed the whole technological edifice of his ‘Art’, Caliban may determine not only his own future, but Prospero’s as well.

This also raises to prominence the issue of the associated technologies of communication, particularly global electronic ones. Prospero’s books stand for much more than books today just as they did in Shakespeare’s time. But where they suggested scholarship, learning and erudition, today they suggest technology, the means of communication and information capital. Caliban’s problem was not the language that
represented him as a slave, but the fact that he was allowed only an incomplete access to Prospero's discourse (he is never allowed to touch the 'books'). Caliban's partial literacy renders him incapable of engaging his master in a war of words – and thus he is forced to adopt physical violence as an alternative – an alternative that we soon realize is inadequate given Prospero's frequent demonstrations of magical power. The significance of this for the theme of colonial resistance is poignant – particularly in the present world dominated by a hyperpower ever ready to invade weak nations in case they may be thinking about conflict. The option of violent political resistance to colonial control simply invites the exertion of even greater force. But the capture of the source of Prospero's power offers the true means of social and political transformation. In this one fact we discover the very centre of the post-colonial method of transformative resistance.
“Re-speaking Earthly Thunder”: Hamlet’s Sonic Phantoms
4. "Re-speaking Earthly Thunder": Hamlet's Sonic Phantoms

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Written at a time when traditional theories of the cosmos were becoming increasingly discredited, *Hamlet* transforms the association between music and the divine into an association between the musical and the ghostly. The play originated in a world where the cosmos still consisted of harmonic ratios, where angels were accompanied in their song by the revolving heavenly spheres. The human soul was harmonically constructed; the healthy human body considered equally harmonious in its balance of humors. “When I made the firmament,” declares Nature in the 1586 treatise, *The Praise of Musicke*, “I established it by conceit. When I made the elementes I qualified them with proportions. When I made man I gaue him a soule either harmony it selfe, or at least harmonical.” To understand the fundamentals of music is to understand how the world works and how people work—or should work. When Claudius commits his crime, he disrupts not merely state and family, but the order of the universe itself—“The time is out of joint” (1.5.189). The usurper wrenches the kingdom of Denmark out of tune, and the country must be returned to harmony at whatever the cost in blood.

This, at any rate, would be the traditional conception of the role of harmony in Shakespearean tragedy; and in recent decades, a number of critics have pointed out that such a conception ignores the subversive effects of the actual music in the play: the songs of Ophelia and the gravedigger. Understandably, Ophelia’s discordant music-making has received the largest share of attention. She arguably stands, like Banquo’s ghost, as the origin of an oppressive line of inarticulate madwomen. Ophelia and her progeny disturb the ordered, patriarchal world around them through a means of communication that replaces signs with sound, yet they simultaneously reinforce the binary dividing logical, spiritual man from emotional, sensual woman. Nevertheless, a focus on Ophelia can obscure a wider pattern. Unsettling music pervades the play as a whole, and songs cannot be separated from other noises that echo with particular resonance around the grave and the apparition of Hamlet’s father. In *Hamlet*, song itself is ghostly. If we see Ophelia as another iteration of the Ghost urging revenge, we begin to perceive her music not only as uncanny, but also as hinting at more than personal secrets. “Her speech is nothing,” we are told; but later Laertes exclaims, “This nothing’s more than matter” (4.5.7, 172). The original audience would likely have heard the pun on “noting,” given the mad Ophelia’s tendency to mingle speech with song. “Noting” might be more than matter indeed, considering the persistent belief that the soul was “harmony it selfe, or at least harmonical.” But in what sense, the play asks, might the
soul or the self be musical?

*The Praise of Musick*’s seemingly confident—and hardly original—statement about the harmonious nature of the soul conceals a fundamental uncertainty in the slide from “harmony” to “harmonical.” The distinction is ambiguous, but a shift from the literal to the figurative plane seems to be involved. The soul may be harmonical because it responds to harmony, because it consists of harmonious proportions, or because it in some way resembles harmony. Indeed, the very word “harmony” may be a synonym for music, or it may be merely a metaphor.

In *Hamlet*, there is always something ghostly about the dead musical metaphor. The play takes metaphorical references to the music of cosmic and personal health and order, and makes them literal. These transformations of figurative music into actual sounds and actual songs do not lead, however, to manifestations of the divine. Music comes to life inverted, phantasmic, mad. “My pulse as yours,” Hamlet tells his mother, “Doth temperately keep time / And makes as healthful music. It is not madness / That I have uttered” (3.4.140–42). The sane, healthy pulse is musical; but when Ophelia utters madness, she sings. The rotten, out-of-frame state of Denmark similarly emerges as a weirdly musical place. The problem is not that Denmark’s audible music fails to correspond with divine harmony. Such a disjunction would be expected, even inevitable, given Neoplatonic commonplaces about the interdependency of microcosm and macrocosm, and traditional ways of representing such interdependency on stage. In a disorderly state, there can be no true harmony: only noisiness and dissonance. What if dissonance and noise, however, instead of subverting or conflicting with a higher cosmic order, simply reflect it? The near impossibility of distinguishing literal song from figurative dissonance and metaphorical harmony from literal noise—as in *Othello*—leads to an appealing perception of a harmony that terrifies, and an order that proves senseless. Shakespeare repeatedly raises the possibility that the time is not “out of joint”—that the world of Denmark is not “out of tune” with the cosmos, but in fact faithfully echoes and reproduces the structure of the universe and the soul. This structure, however, appears increasingly loose and unfixed, reverberating with eerie, forbidding, and sometimes alluring dissonance.

Amanda Eubanks Winkler has written of the problems that arise when “harmonious sounds [are] deployed to represent discord” on the early seventeenth-century stage. Ophelia seemingly presents just such a case, as Laertes marvels at her ability to turn “[t]hought and affliction, passion, hell itself ... to favour and to prettiness” (4.5.183–4). Winkler reads Laertes’s comment as an accurate—and disturbing—reflection of Ophelia’s performance; it “suggests that women do not go mad to incite horror in the audience. They go mad to entertain, turning suffering and affliction into ‘prettiness.’ ... Her music imbues her mad speech with a persuasive power
that renders Ophelia dangerous, making her death an ideological necessity." Not all critics take Laertes at his word, however. Leslie Dunn, for instance, argues that Laertes attempts to control Ophelia’s noisy and disruptive song by aestheticizing it. From this perspective, Ophelia’s music is dangerous precisely because it is not “pretty.” Winkler’s reading raises an excellent point: why would emphasizing the “prettiness” of Ophelia’s madness make it less unsettling? In a universe where rationality, order, and harmony are inseparable, “pretty” and “musical” are the very last things madness should be. It is true, however, that a number of Hamlet’s characters are deeply invested in understanding Ophelia’s music—and other, similarly disturbing sounds—as attractive. This investment stems from the need to find harmony in the sudden and frightening noises of the world.

Hamlet continues to portray the microcosm and macrocosm, the relationship between the human world and the universe as a whole, as a system of musical correspondences. But the play half-assumes the existence of such correspondences as an unquestionable truth, and half-posit their existence as the necessary condition for launching an investigation into the nature of the world that lies beyond the senses. Hamlet pursues this investigation in the spirit of a nascent empiricism, still tangled in assumptions of a universe structured on harmonic principles. What is music like, in our everyday experience? the play asks. How does it work? But neither these questions, nor the answers that eventually present themselves, can be separated from the insistent belief that to know what music is like is to know what the world is like, what souls are like. Conversely, the method of investigation—observation, the perceptions of the senses—makes it impossible to posit an ideal “harmony” qualitatively unlike the noisy music experienced on earth. Consequently, Hamlet does considerably more than depict the horror that arises from the transgression of the correspondence between state and cosmos, cosmos and individual. More radically, it evokes the horror of the correspondence itself (traditionally imagined as harmony) and what it does or does not reveal. The “music” of the play hints at a cosmos that either is unimaginably implacable and alien or else emptied of everything but echoes.12 Some entirely incomprehensible higher power presides over this universe—or else such a power is a mere illusion, a projection of an equally incomprehensible and uncomprehending humanity. In this world, singing voices emerge from the grave rather than from the heavens. Music in Hamlet retains its otherworldly associations, but it no longer serves as a symbol of divine harmony; it becomes instead a ghostly manifestation. Welling up from obscure points of origin and spreading like contamination, music ultimately infects the audience as well as the characters with its iterations.

In this chapter, I deal with a number of things that might seem to have little in common: not only songs and the playing of musical instruments, but also cannon-blasts, thunder-claps—and poetry. Generally, critics have emphasized the
differences between these various types of literal and figurative music. Nevertheless, the tangled interdependence of music, noise, and words emerges as both medium and theme in *Hamlet*. The sounds of the play do not merely punctuate language and action, but shift seamlessly from one realm to another: from the heard to the imagined, from the literal to the metaphorical. The characters attempt to make sense of ambiguous—and potentially meaningless—noises by describing them in words; but even as they do so, the metaphorical "music" of poetry becomes less and less metaphorical. Music, noise, and speech continually dissolve into one another, as the characters struggle to make the meaningless meaningful while the meaningful simultaneously slides back into meaninglessness. Ophelia's songs are both an attempt to restore order and an expression of order's collapse; and the play questions what it might mean to "re-speak" thunder, in Claudius's suggestive phrase. Such speech may reform—but on the other hand, it may merely reiterate. In re-speaking the thunder, characters work to translate chaotic sound into harmonious speech, even as the thunder in their language begins to undo the nature of such utterance as language.

There remains something irresistibly desirable about this mode of expression, however, this "re-speaking" of noise into music. Throughout the play, mysterious songs and sounds express or suggest things that did not happen, alternate realities. At such moments, music can stand in for what should have happened and yet did not—as Ophelia's songs, for instance, stand in for her father's funeral. These sonic substitutions may be mere fantasies, projections: on the other hand, they may allow a communion with a deeper reality, a truly ordered universe underlying the temporary aberrations of earthly life. The play hints, further, that speech modelling itself after harmony may—by its potential correspondence, its accordance with the true order of the world—become action and actuality. *Hamlet* ultimately presents two kinds of music that are desired and evoked but never heard directly. These two elusive musics are the blast of the Last Trump and a divine song associated with angels and the voice of Christ. In the absence of either, the characters inhabit a world that contains perhaps neither justice nor grace. Hence the desire to conjure the trump and the song into being ... but only shadows and fictions emerge.

Eerily, *Hamlet* suggests that a play brings a story to life not in the form of an imitation of nature but in the form of a phantom. Those dream-like "shadows" described by Puck in the epilogue of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* become nightmarish shades in a tragic world. In the earlier comedy, as we have seen, this "dream" is not only a shadowy play, but also a ballad: "It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream' because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death" (4.1.204–11). *Hamlet* presents a dark expansion of the ideas intimated in Bottom's vertiginously comical speech. In the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark, strange songs and noises cluster closely around two
kinds of moments: the metatheatrical moments that place most pressure on the distinction between the real and the fictional; and the frequently overlapping metaphysical moments that address the distinction between the living and the dead, this world and the next. At such moments, Hamlet anxiously questions whether figures of music are poetic lies or a cosmic truth, and whether they reflect or merely imagine a cosmos of harmoniously corresponding parts and levels.


Hamlet may not immediately strike us as an intensely musical play, but it is certainly a noisy one, punctuated by sudden blasts of sound: drums and trumpets, a roaring cannon, mad singing. In fact, the cannon—one of the loudest sounds that people in early modern England would experience—goes off more times in Hamlet than in any other play by Shakespeare. The play closes with Fortinbras’s call for the “soldiers’ music” (5.2.343) and the following cannon blast. Fortinbras inadvertently weights this sound with a significance it seems unable to bear: it is to “speak loudly for” the now silent Hamlet (344). In context, the reference to “soldier’s music” is more troubling and problematic than has been recognized. Fortinbras’s words crystallize questions raised implicitly by the sounds of the play, particularly those sounds surrounding the appearance of the ghost: the martial music of cannon, drums, and trumpets that Claudius appropriates to celebrate his drinking bouts; and the cock-crow, the trump that wakes the god of day and banishes the phantom. These noises and the final rites of war are closely linked with other funereal “rites” or substitutes for rites: the songs of Ophelia and the gravedigger. Ultimately, all these sounds and their inherent ontological ambiguity become indistinguishable from the “voice” of the play itself. This process depends upon, but renders increasingly problematic, the truth of the metaphor that noise can be music.

Considered in itself, Fortinbras’s reference to the “soldier’s music” of the guns is unremarkable. The “music of war” was a common Renaissance trope. Nevertheless, this apparently simple and compact idea actually conceals two different and conflicting conceptions of what it means for war to be “music.” The trope was influenced both by the Renaissance “ideal of war as a harmoniously ordered institution in which armies move as in a dance,” and by “a classical convention that translated the fearful actualities of warfare into an elevated, sonorous discourse.” These two traditions seem ideologically at odds. If war is “musical” because it is inherently orderly and dance-like, then surely there is no need for rhetoric to “dignify with ‘music’ the ugliness and realistic disorder of war.” The symbolic conception and the rhetorical description seem to fit together neatly; but in fact, while both can be used as strategies to mask an ugly reality, a “fearful battle ... rend’red in music” (Henry V 1.1.45) differs essentially
from an ideal if bloody battle that is music in its fearful symmetry, its orderly chain of command, and its grouping of many men into the harmonious “body” of an army.

From the symbolic perspective, Fortinbras’s words do not serve merely as an elegant turn of phrase: they suggest that the thunder of the guns gestures towards a true music, the harmony that Fortinbras restores to the state. Marc Berley argues that the gun salute is “music” in just this sense: “the ‘sweet prince’ could never bring ‘sweet’ harmony to the rude world; that takes the louder speech of warlike noise.” Finally, after the carnage, Fortinbras and his guns announce a return to order with the sound of the thunder traditionally associated with the voice of God and His justice, the simultaneous expression and enforcement of harmony and order. In the original staging, the cannon would have been located in the “heavens,” its position alone lending it a certain symbolic authority, particularly in a play like Hamlet, which underlines the metatheatrical parallels between the globe and the Globe. But does the thunder of Fortinbras’s cannon symbolize his legitimate authority, in which case the metaphor of “music” would indicate an essential truth? Or does it simply express his superior—and quite literal—force, in which case the “music” of the guns is a mere verbal trick, half-concealing violence? In this context, Fortinbras’s “soldier’s music” may reveal the hollowness of the metaphor. His words do not point to a truth, but simply disguise reality beneath a pretence of what we, like Laertes, might call “prettiness.” The metaphor is not fully reduced to mere decoration, however; and therein lies the problem.

In its very structure, the traditional cosmos originating in the ideas of Plato and Pythagoras allows no troubling disjunction between the literal and the metaphorical. When Hamlet says that his pulse makes healthful music, he is not speaking fancifully. Like vibrating strings on an instrument, levels of meaning and levels of being respond and correspond to one another. The system itself works musically, in this sense of harmonious correspondence; and all things that are ordered, proportional, temperate, and functioning as they should, are not just like music: they are music itself in its truest form. In Fortinbras’s final words, however, this correspondence is invaded by irony. The phrase “soldier’s music” may be a flimsy euphemism, or an admission—whether proud or wry—that soldiers know no harmony other than that enforced by battle. The audience is confronted with an uneasy conflation of the symbolic and the ironic; and it is just this conflation that is troubling, in its suggestion that “music” could be symbolic and ironic at the same time. For even if Fortinbras’s salute does announce a new, divinely sanctioned order in the state of Denmark, the contrast between this sound and the angelic music imagined by Horatio remains stark. Shakespeare presses this contrast onto the awareness of his audience in Horatio’s startled shift from contemplating heavenly music to hearing earthly clamor: “Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. / Why does the drum come hither?” (5.2.302–4). If the
sound of the guns is not “musical” in a purely symbolic way, then the idea of the
musical in itself becomes terrible—it extends too far, encompassing confused rumblings
along with angelic song. Maybe the sound of the guns is not merely symbolic of a
higher and inaudible harmony: maybe this thunderous noise is an accurate and literal
manifestation of the very nature of this cosmic “music.” The positioning of the cannon
in the “heavens” suggests, eerily, that the gunshots may be an audible manifestation of
divine song, the music of some rather more militant angels than Horatio was expecting.

The words of the play must define the music and separate the speculative from
the practical, the divine from the earthly. And indeed the play’s cannon blasts and
trumpet calls and songs are surrounded, described, and possibly determined by
language. Pierre Iselin and David Lindley have argued that words often undercut the
effects of music on the early modern stage. Ophelia’s singing may beautify discord and
madness. On the other hand, Laertes may transform Ophelia’s disordered and disturbing
singing into favor and prettiness through his pretty description of her behavior. His
language interprets her wild song, presenting his sister and her music to the audience
in the way that he wishes to see and understand her. According to this interpretation,
his words frame and control—or attempt to control—her ambivalent sounds. Such an
argument, however, depends upon a distinction between words and noises, language
and music that the play repeatedly blurs in the process of questioning how all such
sounds signify.

Ophelia herself treats the “words, words, words” that Hamlet speaks in the
nunnery scene just as other characters treat frightening and inexplicable noises— like
discordant music that her own words must somehow retune and make meaningful. In a
speech of almost excessive lyricism, she translates Hamlet’s abusive words into the
jangling of sweet bells:

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh. (3.1.154–7)

Her measured and melodious response seems disproportionate to the horror of
Hamlet’s treatment of her. This speech is remarkable for its complete erasure of
everything that Hamlet has actually said. The association of music vows and sweet
bells works to confuse voice and reason, and Hamlet’s words—once “of so sweet breath
composed” (3.1.100)—regain a certain musicality through association. This “music” is
discordant, but Ophelia describes discord as melodiously as possible. When she
considers Hamlet’s words as the product of sweet bells (however out of tune), she
elides the brutality of their content. Ophelia’s speech revives the sweet prince through
sleight-of-hand, through the lyrical description of music that was never there to begin
with. She struggles to assimilate and make sense of Hamlet’s swirling words by turning them to favor and to prettiness. Soon, Gertrude and Laertes will respond to Ophelia’s own incoherent songs in exactly the same way.

How does this sleight-of-hand work? Two things are involved: lyrical and formal treatment of the jarring and incoherent, and the subtle blurring of two incompatible modes of musical figuration. By juxtaposing Hamlet’s “music vows” with his sweet and bell-like reason, Ophelia tries to conflate two very different metaphors. Hamlet’s vows were “music” in a rhetorical sense: they enthralled and possibly even seduced Ophelia with their honeyed promise. Hamlet’s reason, however, is also “musical”—when it is ordered, healthy, and “in tune.” Both vows and reason, however, are sweet, providing a direct and sensual pleasure. The sweet bells of reason seem less symbolic when jumbled together with the honey of the music vows. In turn, the relationship between truth and musicality—supposedly a simple correlation in the case of Hamlet’s reason—then becomes complicated when applied, retrospectively, to the vows. Music that is “false” is out of tune; but this conventional way of talking about tuning does not mean that all sweetly spoken vows are true, however musical they may sound.

The play’s questions about the nature of music and noise thus are also questions about language. Not only does language, as a system of sounds, potentially convey meaning in a comparable way, it also may create, rather than reflect, the orderly world in which music is opposed to noise. Shakespeare’s contemporaries argued over whether music signified by means of a natural correspondence between things or by means of conventional associations—an argument paralleling strenuous debates about language. As we have seen, the “music of war” trope arose from classical rhetoric and Renaissance conceptions of the harmonious military dance; but the trope was also influenced by “the important functional role of military music in contemporary fighting.” Although Hamlet’s funeral honors involve only the discharging of guns, this sound is repeatedly accompanied by trumpets and drums over the course of the play. Like the guns themselves, these military instruments could transmit signals to armies, informing them when to attack and when to withdraw. This functional use of musical instruments in war, however, coincided with the prevalent idea that certain kinds of music, by directly stirring the soul or the affections, could make listeners respond in a warlike manner. Music was thus conceived as operating in two ways: affecting the soul “naturally” through the imitation of a passion, and operating through conventional codes. Some writers questioned the idea that certain sounds inevitably and naturally would evoke a certain response in listeners. Such responses might be elicited by conventional or idiosyncratic associations rather than by natural correspondence. “For I cannot imagine,” one writer remarked skeptically, “that if a man never had heard a trumpet or a drum in his life, that he would at the first hearing be mowed to warres.” This question proves highly relevant to Hamlet, where the meaning of the “soldier’s
music”—what it says when it "speaks," and how it says it—is subjected to intense scrutiny.

Language itself creates some of the confusion between music and noise. For an early modern audience, "noise" and "music" were both synonyms and antonyms. The term "noise" often carries the suggestion of "loud music," but it could be applied quite legitimately to both harmonious sounds and cacophonous din. Noise and music may be ontologically similar, or the imprecision of the word "noise" may simply make it appear that they are. For that matter, the associations between "music," "measure," "temperance," and "harmony," may be essential in nature—or they may be mere products of language. What is the relationship between the metaphor and a deeper truth or symbolic correspondence? Does a metaphor point to an essential relationship, or does the likeness exist only in the language? In the first case, language proves "musical" in the harmonious correspondence of words to things—in the second, random and hence potentially "noisy," without meaning.

Fortinbras's reference to the "soldier's music" provides the concluding twist to Hamlet's complicated reciprocal—even porous—relationship between the words of the play and the startling songs and noises that break up the words. Kenneth Gross perceptively notes that "[the noises of the play], and what makes them, creep into the play's metaphors, as when Claudius describes the rebellious murmurs that threaten his throne as 'poison'd shot' that he hopes will miss his name ... or when [Hamlet] says in dying that 'the potent poison quite òercrows my spirit.'" At such moments, the audience faces the interpenetration not only of noises and language, but also of literal and metaphoric sounds. The noises of the play invade its metaphors, but it would also be possible to perceive the metaphors as generating the noises. In a reciprocal movement, metaphors materialize in sounds—or almost materialize. Such metaphoric noises are projected into the silences of the action, where they assume new, ghostly form. Death also is a gunner. "O proud Death," says Fortinbras, entering on the heels of his own "warlike volley," "what feast is toward in thine eternal cell / That thou so many princes at a shot / So bloodily hast struck?" (5.2.347–50). Death's gun has either gone unheard, or its sound has mingled with the real gunshots that we have heard repeatedly throughout the course of the scene. Either way, the actual shots that the audience has experienced make Death's seem less metaphoric. Maybe we have heard Death's cannon.

In the manner of its first appearance, the ghost is just such a projection of an unheard sound. It appears at an intersection of sound and language, setting in motion a complex series of interactions between words, music, the phantasmic, and the theatrical. In spite of its initial silence—or perhaps, paradoxically, because of it—the ghost is a sonic phenomenon, the silence of sound, noise turned inside out. It appears in sound, and vanishes in sound. Both sounds are markers of time—the ringing of the
bell, the crowing of the cock—but the apparition breaks time down, collapsing the present and the past. As time falls apart at the entrance of the phantom, words themselves become musical and ghostly, endowed with new power and yet broken, doing both more and less than they should.

BARNARDO. Last night of all,
When yon same star that’s westward from the pole
Had made his course ’t’illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one—

Enter Ghost

MARCELLUS. Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again. (1.1.33–8)

The apparition is a tear in the story and a tear in the fabric of time; it refuses to stay in the past. (In one sense, this is just what a ghost is: a piece of the past that refuses to remain there.) The time of night in narration and stage reality is supposedly the same, the star burns in the same place—and of course, the ghost always arrives “jump at this dead hour” (1.1.65). But as far as we can tell from the admittedly unreliable stage directions, the bell does not beat. (Barnardo must break off because Marcellus spots the phantom, not because the bell cuts into his words.) The striking of the clock is replaced by two things: by Barnardo’s reference to the sound, and by the entrance of the ghost. The apparition is a silent, visible manifestation of the beating of the bell, marking the “dead hour,” but it does not necessarily appear on the stroke of one—someone talking about the stroke of one is enough. In one unnerving jolt, Barnardo’s description becomes music and becomes dramatic reality.

In a list of the various noises of Hamlet, Gross adds in a parenthesis, “On the battlements, the sounds of the wind and sea are just audible as well, conjured up by the words of those who wait.” But surely a sound “conjured up by words” should be distinguished from a sound effect actually heard by the audience. Gross’s conflation of sound effects and sounds evoked by poetry is very suggestive—to some extent, the play itself generates the confusion, replacing the bell with Barnardo’s reference to the bell. As Barnardo’s tale conjures up a sound, it also conjures up the ghost; and Barnardo’s very words become phantom-like, as his narration is interrupted by itself come to life. At this first appearance, the ghost is a silent sound, the clock chime that no one hears, order and time themselves become phantasmic. The words that refer to the intersection of chime and ghost become like chime and ghost: silenced, but present in a new, spectral, and explicitly theatrical way. Narration becomes drama. The relationship between description and action here imitates the tricky relationship that the play establishes between metaphors and sounds. Throughout Hamlet, the figurative noises become literal in the same way that words here are confronted with their own dramatic
embodiment. Death’s cannon is heard; the striking of the “dead hour” takes physical shape. Such embodiment, however, is always spectral—never complete. Speaking of the clock conjures—and becomes—the clock, in turn conjuring the old king. Yet the temporal order that emerges is out of order, out of sequence, the dead interrupting the living, a phantom.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Shakespeare frequently associates such temporal confusion with the workings of song. _Hamlet_ similarly dramatizes the inherent tendency of old ballads to slip out of sequence. The play thus reveals certain formal resemblances between songs, ghostliness, and madness. 34 Ophelia echoes the first words of the ghost—“Mark me” (1.5.2)—before launching into her enigmatic singing: “Say you? Nay, pray you, mark ... Pray you mark” (4.5.28–34). 35 Her incoherence and anxiety present a stark contrast with Lorenzo’s confident, even complacent directive in the final act of _The Merchant of Venice_: “Mark the music” (5.1.87). For Lorenzo, and for the Neoplatonic tradition he invokes, music on earth is an audible manifestation of heavenly order and harmony, a faint echo of the singing stars whose music may not be heard by fallen man. In _Hamlet_, the staging establishes parallels between the appearance of the ghost and the grave of Ophelia, suggesting that the singing voices in the play are ghostly voices, simultaneously living and dead.

Hamlet’s songs rise insistently to the surface of the drama not only around the grave, but also around the entrances and exits of the players. The prince quotes “Jephthah, Judge of Israel,” just before their first entrance; “For O, for O the hobbyhorse is forgot;” just as the play-within-the play is about to begin, and “Let the stricken deer go weep;” when the play is broken off. In the last of these, Hamlet implicitly confluates playing with singing.

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungallèd play,
For some must watch, while some must sleep,
So runs the world away.

Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me ... get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir? (3.2.249–55)

David Wiles compares Hamlet with the clown in the public theaters, who typically sang and danced at the conclusion of the play, and notes, “The ‘this’ which could earn Hamlet a share in a company of players refers not only to his playwriting but also, more immediately, to his singing.” Hamlet’s cryptic “this” lumps his play and his antic song together—as Bottom’s “it” confluates ballad, play, and death. Wiles’s reading of the song posits an inextricable relationship between musical interlude and drama: “In _Hamlet_, symbolically, we see the jig being swallowed up and dissolved within the play.” I would
disagree only with the qualification “symbolically.”

Michael Neill has described the Gravediggers and the Players as “those antitypes of the Hamlet world ... those who inter the dead and those who resurrect them.” In fact, both groups intermittently occupy one another’s roles, in disconcertingly musical moments: the Gravedigger sings as he tosses skulls out of the grave; and the actors play upon recorders rather than serving as dependable recorders of history. The players may resurrect the past, but only in a fictive form, and only temporarily. “Playing” may be associated with music, but this association does not imbue drama with truth or permanence. Reciprocally, the possibility that music may serve as the expression of truth and justice is repeatedly raised, only to be denied—because after all, playing is playing. After The Mousetrap, the Prince cries: “Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders,/ For if the King like not the comedy,/ Why then, belike he likes it not, pardie./ Come, some music!”(3.2.268–71). A recorder is not only a musical instrument, but also a judge or magistrate, a witness, or “one who records or sets down in writing” (OED, n.1, 2, 3a). The criminal justice resonance is here both appropriate and ironic, as Hamlet suggests that the King’s response to the play is both evidence—and meaningless. Nothing can be inferred from the fact that the King didn’t like the play except that ... he didn’t like it. The Prince’s calls for music thus bracket a jingling tautology that turns back upon itself, concluding nothing, like so much of the prince’s speech. (Even his final words work this way, if we see in them a musical pun: “The rest is silence.”) The tautological jingle is partly a device to put Rosencrantz and Guildenstern off the scent, and partly a dark joke for Hamlet’s own amusement— but a joke at whose expense? The king’s response to the open hostility of The Mousetrap does not necessarily provide more proof than the Ghost’s story. Hamlet’s whirling words infuse with irony the implicit connection between music, order, and justice. These “recorders” are the instruments of actors, entertainers, called upon to provide a festive conclusion to a play; they are not instruments of justice. A recorder, in this case, is not “one who sets down in writing”: the music of pipes is transitory; it can “set down” nothing.

The otherworldly quality of Hamlet’s ballads gives them a kind of delusive authority, however: an authority that we gradually are encouraged to associate with the play itself. Characters refer to old songs as to the repositories of some transcendent truth, as if these ballads somehow held the answer to all the questions that wrack the play—although they patently do not. “Pray you,” says Ophelia, “let’s have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this” (4.5.45–6). Then she launches into her indecorous Saint Valentine’s Day song. Ophelia hints that the chaotic, inappropriate music is the meaning, the answer to the question. Interrupted in a rendition of an old ballad by the arrival of the Players, Hamlet tells Polonius that the first row of the pious chanson will show him further; in Q1, even more suggestively, he declares: “The first verse of the godly ballad will tell you all” (7.283; emphasis mine).
This version anticipates Hamlet's later exchange with Ophelia about the dumb-show, performed to the ominous music of hautboys.

**OPHELIA. What means this, my lord?**

**HAMLET.** Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief.

**OPHELIA.** Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

*Enter Prologue*

**HAMLET.** We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel;

*they'll tell all.* (3.2.123–8; emphasis mine)

Hamlet's answer bears a striking resemblance to his earlier, inappropriately flippant response to the voice of his dead father speaking beneath the stage: "You hear this fellow in the cellarge" (1.5.153). (The play-within-the-play goes on to stage the events described by the ghost—events that serve, in fact, as unstaged prologue to the action of *Hamlet.*) Dissatisfied with Hamlet's obscure response, Ophelia answers her own question, "Belike this show imports the argument of the play," in the very phrase that Gertrude will direct to her: "Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?" (4.5.27). All these questions echo the words of Horatio on the battlements of the castle, waiting for the phantom: startled by the first iteration of the "soldier's music," a roar of trumpets, drums, and cannon, he demands, "What does this mean, my lord?" (1.4.8).

**“That Follows Not”: Ballads in the Mind**

It has proven notoriously difficult to get at the "meaning" not only of the play, but also of the Prince's actions. T.S. Eliot's complaints about the lack of an "objective correlative" in *Hamlet* have been answered and disputed by a number of critics, but his argument does suggest a lack of correspondence between motivation and action, cause and effect in the play that I find very valuable. Various explanations have been offered for the prince's notorious "delay"—as well as arguments that this entire "problem" is an invention of scholarly criticism. The weirdness of the play's sequence of events and the inadequacy of motivation are traditionally associated with, and attributed to, Hamlet's excessive introspection. A number of critics, however, have cogently opposed the idea of *Hamlet* as a play heavy with secrets. Most recently, Margreta de Grazia has argued that the play does not even attempt to represent a sense of secret inwardness in its hero. "To early modern readers and audiences, the evasion that has mystified so many modern critics—'I have that within which passes show' (1.2.85)—might have been quite transparent. Transparent, too, for the characters within the play." Hamlet has been dispossessed, and everyone knows it, but this obvious fact is much too dangerous to articulate. According to de Grazia's argument, only in the last two centuries has Hamlet been endowed with mysterious inwardness, "an area of consciousness which he cannot
reveal even to himself” Despite this welcome corrective to two hundred years of obsession with Hamlet’s possibly nonexistent secrets, I would argue that excess, secrets, and inaccessible inner spaces are written into the play. It is not so much that Hamlet’s mysterious motives generate a mysteriously nonsensical and exaggeratedly extended plot, but that the play evokes a world where neither thoughts nor events “follow” in a logical fashion.

Hamlet famously asserts his personal “mystery” in explicitly musical terms. After singing a jig and calling for recorders, the Prince informs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that they cannot manipulate him, or force him to reveal anything that he does not wish to reveal:

You would play upon me, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. ‘Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

(3.2.335–40)

This speech has become the ground for a fierce and complex debate on interiority and subjectivity in Hamlet and in the early modern period in general. Francis Barker reads Hamlet’s challenge to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to “play upon this pipe” as revealing not only the impossibility of dramatizing subjectivity, but the impossibility of an interiority that remains anachronistic, belonging “to a historical order whose outline has so far only been sketched out.” In Barker’s analysis,

The hollow pipe is the refutation of the metaphysic of soul which the play signals but cannot realize. For Hamlet, in a sense doubtless unknown to him, is truly this hollow reed which will “discourse most eloquent music” but is none the less vacuous for that. At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing. The promised essence remains beyond the scope of the text’s signification: or rather, signals the limit of the signification of this world by marking out the site of an absence it cannot fill.

A musician, however, would hardly perceive the hollow pipe as a “site of absence.” If compared to, say, a book, the pipe is indeed “empty.” But the function of the pipe lies not in what it contains, but in what it produces. Hamlet’s metaphor asks us to think of a mystery as neither revealed nor hidden, but as sounded—and only through the action of playing. A number of critics have recently suggested a special connection between sound and the representation and formation of inwardness in early modern theater and
culture. As the previous chapter indicates, I would argue that the working of song in particular can provide a new understanding of the evocation of inwardness on the Shakespearean stage. If the heart of Hamlet's mystery is nothing, it is also "noting"—the pun Shakespeare employs in Laertes's response to Ophelia's singing: "This nothing is more than matter" (4.5.172). There is no "real" or hidden Hamlet, but there is a mysterious and excessive theatrical effect.

This effect is also musical, in its opacity, its elusiveness, its suggestions of profound meaning both expressed and inaccessible. Even when "sounded," the mystery of things does not become clear: though Hamlet insists that the pipe—"this little organ"—will "discourse" music, playing on the pipe will not, in fact, "make it speak" (3.2.338, 331, 339; emphasis mine). When Hamlet claims that he cannot be played upon, he has just finished literally "playing upon" Claudius in an attempt to discover the truth. In language that anticipates his words to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet has mused that "murder, though it have no tongue, will speak / With most miraculous organ" (2.2.570–71). The recorder is not merely a metaphorical tongue, but a little pipe organ; and this musical pun remains a latent possibility in Hamlet's earlier thoughts about the vocalization of murder. The Mousetrap becomes the instrument (the "organ") through which murder speaks. In other words, it speaks for the ghost. The players are also the ones to supply the pipes, and their art is similar to that musical art Hamlet describes to Guildenstern: "'Tis as easy as lying" (3.2.229). The unfolding of the drama is the playing of the Hamlet instrument, and its sounds create a musical rather than verbal effect: mysterious, excessive.

Eliot found the play "full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art. And when we search for this feeling, we find it ... very difficult to localize." I would argue that the play locates this elusive raw material, the "stuff" that cannot be dragged to light, the "matter" that can never be ascertained, not in soliloquies, but in songs. In moments of intense crisis, Ophelia and Hamlet turn to song, as if to the only possible mode of expression for something that cannot be said. When Hamlet has proven Claudius's guilt, he directs his rage and exultation into an improvised ballad. At this point, closest to the bare bones of the situation, no soliloquy is adequate or possible. The "stuff" cannot be shaped into a speech; it emerges in a form simultaneously transparent and opaque, seemingly thin in meaning, but dense with affect. Ballads can spin out indefinitely, and yet their material seems almost too tightly compressed or elided to be understood. They are the perfect vehicles for matter that cannot be dragged to light or contemplated. Even so, the ballad forms in the play are always on the verge of breaking apart under too much pressure, as the impersonality of the mode falters. Ophelia desperately adds a jarring extra word to express the truth of her father's treatment: "Which bewept to the grave did—not—go"; and Hamlet's jingle fails to rhyme: "For thou dost know, O Damon dear,/ This realm
dismantled was / Of Jove himself, and now reigns here / A very, very—pajock” (4.5.38; 3.2.257–61). On one level, this failure to rhyme is an elaborate way of calling Claudius an ass. On another level, Hamlet's thought has to break out of the ballad, which cannot quite contain what it is supposed to contain. The formal unity of the songs is compromised; they break down, and their song-like logic, their musical opacity, spreads through the text around them.

Hamlet is haunted by old songs. And here, "haunted" is exactly the right word. Theodore Reik described the compulsive repetition of musical phrases in the mind as “haunting melody,” but more recently, these phenomena have been given the charming label “earworms” — a creepily appropriate term in the context of Hamlet. In addition to Ophelia's mad music and the gravedigger's song, Hamlet himself quotes several snatches of old tunes. Critical accounts of the music of the play largely ignore Hamlet’s ballad fragments, probably because it is generally assumed that these phrases were meant to be spoken rather than sung. Yet Hamlet’s snatches of unsung song (if they are, in fact, unsung) prove in some ways more disconcerting than Ophelia’s singing, because the prince's interlocutors find it difficult to separate the song from the speech, the ballad logic from the logic of conversation. If certain phrases in a conversation are song rather than discourse, how is it possible to distinguish song from discourse?

Simultaneously, the music that goes with the words becomes increasingly ghostly, evoked but never allowed to take shape anywhere but in the minds of the audience. (Try to speak the words of a song you know very well without thinking of the tune. It is almost impossible. The words drag the music with them.) Furthermore, traditional ballads have their own peculiar logic, a logic that becomes madness in any other context. Events are narrated in a fragmentary and idiosyncratic way, accommodations are made for the tune, and the narrative is interrupted by a refrain that may become more emptied of meaning with every repetition. Such songs have a habit of catching in the mind in disjointed phrases, and repeating over and over—a “repetition compulsion” characteristic of Hamlet itself.

When Ophelia abandons logical for musical sense, she is doing something that the play as a whole has already done; but she makes the shift literal and audible. In a world where time is out of joint, events and connections between events take on the irrational logic of an old ballad. Hamlet imitates this ballad logic in his outof-frame discourse, most directly in his exchange with Polonius after the latter’s announcement of the actors:

HAMLET. O Jepthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!
POLONIUS. What a treasure had he, my lord?
HAMLET. Why,
“One fair daughter and no more,
The which he lovéd passing well.”

POLONIUS [aside]. Still on my daughter.

HAMLET. Am I not i’ th’ right, old Jephthah?

POLONIUS. If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I love passing

well.

HAMLET. Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS. What follows then, my lord?

HAMLET. Why,

“As by lot, God wot”

and then, you know,

“It came to pass, as most like it was”

The first row of the pious chanson will show you more, for look where

my abridgement comes.

Enter the Players (2.2.385–404)

Polonius assumes that Hamlet’s quotation from the “pious chanson” must be relevant to

the situation at hand, but Hamlet implies that Polonius’s train of reasoning is flawed:

“That follows not.” Polonius inevitably falls into the trap and asks what does follow, and

Hamlet replies with the next lines of the song, cleverly replacing a train of thought

with a musical sequence. And of course, as the song in question beautifully

demonstrates, the order of events or words in a ballad is often without any apparent

logic. In this case, “what follows” are two of the most inane lines in this—and, one is

tempted to add, any—song: “As by lot, God wot, / It came to pass, as most like it was.”

These lines purport to explain and give the background for a situation, while

simultaneously refusing to do so.

In this passage, Hamlet suggests that a world of orderly and logical causation

has given way to a world where one event comes after another for no other reason

than that it does. In the prince’s own discourse, logical progression from one thought to

another is replaced by a seemingly illogical logic of association. This is the logic that

Shakespeare discovers in the working of songs in the mind: we remember familiar

songs not because of rational connections, but through seemingly random

associations—a phrase that sounds similar to another phrase, a memory linked with

another memory. Song verses themselves often obey a logic of sound rather than sense:

the need to rhyme with “pass” generates “most like it was;” not any narrative pressure.

The play poses the dangerous possibility that this may be the way that a musical

cosmos actually operates.

The associations of the songs of Hamlet, however, remain intensely suggestive:
like the “nothing” of Ophelia’s scattered speech, they tease the listener to search for meaning. When Hamlet reminds Polonius “what follows” in the old ballad, he flippantly encourages the old man—and the audience—to continue the song mentally while he welcomes the players: “The first row of the pious chanson will show you more, for look where my abridgment comes.” Hamlet implies that he would have gone on with the ballad if the players had not interrupted. And though Hamlet’s performance is abridged, the audience may have recollected more of the familiar song, as the prince encourages them to do. The “first row” to which Hamlet refers Polonius is particularly suggestive:

I read that many years ago,
    when Jephthah, Judge of Israel,
Had one fair daughter and no mo’,
    whom he beloved passing well
and as by lot, God wot
it came to pass, most like it was,
great wars there should be,
and who should be chief but he, but he.

The last lines of this verse, which Hamlet stops short of repeating, recall the opening scene of the play, with its murmuring about past and potential wars, and also touch on Hamlet’s sense of dispossession by Claudius. The song even glances ahead to Hamlet’s envy of that consummate war-chieftain, Fortinbras. The following verses continue to suggest, in distorted fashion, future events in the plot. In the third verse of the song, Jephthah’s daughter comes running to meet her father, playing tabor and pipe with “notes full high, / for joy that he was so nigh, so nigh,” and when he sees her he tears his clothes and hair and shrieks. The music-making and distracted grief will be conflated in the single figure of Ophelia, and the song’s temporal scheme disjointed in the process: the singing Ophelia cannot meet her father, who is already dead. The song narrative becomes distorted and fragmented as it weaves into the narrative of Hamlet, just as Hamlet’s rendition of this verse is broken and intruded upon by the prose conversation with Polonius—which in its turn is twisted and disfigured by the intrusion of the song.

The first line of the ballad ("I read that many years ago") suggests a new response to Polonius’s unanswered question of nearly two hundred lines back—“What do you read, my lord?” (2.2.191). Words, words, words are almost equivalent to an old song in their repetition and “noncommunicating language.” Aside from demonstrating the dexterity and complexity of Hamlet’s wit and power of allusion, this echo creates the impression that the play is haunted by more than Hamlet Senior. Hamlet’s quotation of the Jephthah ballad generates the retrospective illusion that the familiar ballad has been going on somewhere in the depths before Hamlet brings it to the
surface. The Prince may play on the song before he ever explicitly refers to it. The last word or phrase in each stanza of the ballad is repeated: "but he, but he;" "again, again;" "for the daughter of Jephthah still, still, still," a device that recalls Hamlet's repetition of his own words, particularly his response to Polonius's "What do you read, my lord?" Words, words, words; except my life, my life, my life. Speech and song, ballad and play bleed into one another.

Hamlet's play on "follow" in his conversation with Polonius hints at the ambiguity created by two possible meanings of the word. Polonius inadvertently raises the same issue in his sententious advice: "This above all—to thine own self be true;/ And it must follow as the night the day,/ Thou canst not then be false to any man" (1.3.78–80). The old counsellor conflates logical causality with temporal progression; and indeed, Polonius's own conclusion does not follow logically. Similarly, the narrative of the play, like the narrative in Ophelia's ballads, never quite "follows" in this logical sense. Events occur without clear cause or motivation: "It came to pass, as most like it was." The next bit comes next because it does. In addition, each item in the sequence might easily be confused with something else with a similar tune—or, for that matter, a similar rhythm. Consider Hamlet's own struggle to remember the proper order of phrases in Aeneas's speech. "If it live in your memory," he requests the Player, "begin at this line—let me see, let me see ... 'The rugged Pyrrhus, like th' Hyrcanian beast—'/ 'Tis not so; it begins with Pyrrhus: '/ 'The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms ..." (2.2.428–32). Like Desdemona's Willow Song and its series of interchangeable verses, the speech lives shapeless in the memory. Ironically, while ordering speech into meter makes it easier to remember, it also makes it easier for phrases to fall out of order. One half-line replaces another: the rhythmic "measure" and order of the speech makes it impossible to forget and impossible to fully remember. Such life in the memory is a haunting half-life.

By repeatedly dramatizing the working of songs, melodic phrases, and rhythmic patterns in the memory, Shakespeare suggests that music and its effects on the mind serve as a model for the paradoxical way that forgetfulness and remembrance cling together and reinforce one another—a particularly pressing concern in Hamlet. The play's songs are both transitory and lingering. Music continues beyond death—but not necessarily in the form of flights of angels singing. Ophelia's grave, from which the grave-digger sings, is the trapdoor, the entrance-point of the dead King, one of these great men who "shall ... suffer not thinking on, with the hobbyhorse, whose epitaph is, 'For O, for O, the hobbyhorse is forgot!'" (5.2.128–30). This kind of ephemeral epitaph vanishes even as it is sung; and yet it lingers on, insistent in forgetfulness. (It is strangely fitting that "the hobbyhorse is forgot" is the only line of the song to have survived.) Songs in the play betray an obsession with obsequies. Unlike Ophelia, Jephthah's daughter gets quite extensive—even perpetual—funeral rites:
And, as some say, for aye
the virgins there, three times a year
like sorrow fulfill
for the daughter of Jephthah still, still, still.
The funeral rites continue into perpetuity, and so does the song, lingering in the mind. One peculiar aspect of the strophic song is that it can go on *ad infinitum*; nevertheless, the singing of the ballad does not provide true eternity or immortality. The song serves as a memorial for events, for the death of a daughter; but as an epitaph, it is singularly elusive, easily broken into repeating bits and pieces.

*Hamlet* replaces the harmonious soul with fragmented, eerily shifting memories of music. This altered harmony has social as well as personal consequences. Old and familiar songs might embody shared folk memory and wisdom, express collective fears, sorrows, and reconciliations. In the play, however, they utterly fail to perform these communal functions. Instead, the old songs serve as potential vehicles for intimate and personal secrets that cannot be expressed in any other way. These intimate disclosures, however, turn out to be frustratingly illusory. Ophelia’s songs seem to invite her listeners to share an almost painfully private experience; but in fact, they are simply a reiteration of ballads that everyone already knows. In consequence, the songs fail both as a means of personal expression and as a means of connection to a wider community. In the singing of Ophelia and, to a lesser extent, Hamlet himself, a shared, communal experience has been taken into an individual mind and fractured, resurfacing to audibility in fragments that unsettle and disturb communal order and assumptions. At the same time, the snatches of song reconstitute a sense of community, in distorted form, across the divide separating reality from fiction. The songs would be familiar to the play’s audience, too, and the fragments of familiar music open the possibility of a communal half-sharing of “that within which passeth show.”

Carol Thomas Neely argues that Shakespeare “invented for [madness] a new italicized language.” Quoting Laertes’s comment on Ophelia in *Hamlet*, she describes this language as “something and ‘nothing:’” It is “both coherent and incoherent ... located in characters and dislocated from them;” and “characterized by fragmentation, repetition, and most importantly by ... ‘cultural quotation.’” I would argue that songs are not merely one aspect of this cultural quotation, as Neely suggests, but in fact both the dominant feature and the model for such echoic and fragmented repetition. (Ophelia’s speech is something and *noting.*) As the songs of *Hamlet* demonstrate, ballads blur the distinction between the quoted and the unquoted, the voice of the self and other voices.

If the singing of old songs occupies an ambiguous position between traditional, communal expression and a revelation of the secrets of the soul, such singing can also
occupy a strange middle ground between performance as pretence and performance as truth. Part of the indecorum of Ophelia’s behavior, which signals her madness, is the fact that she is performing—no well-bred young lady makes music in public. On the other hand, her effect upon an audience is complicated by a seemingly contradictory problem: she is not performing—not pretending, not putting on a show to obtain a particular effect. There is a creepy authenticity in the mad Ophelia’s self-expression. Her words and songs seem spontaneous, unmediated, and unpremeditated: the raw contents of the mind, unshaped by rhetoric. Nevertheless, the words are not her own. The voice we hear is not her voice, and this fact becomes most apparent as she “plays” different roles automatically and inevitably in songs where voices respond to one another: “How should I your true love know / From another one?— / By his cockle hat and staff / And his sandal shoon” (4.4.23–5). In this song, as in many others, the singer must answer his or her own questions:

And will a not come again,
And will a not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again. (4.5.185–9)

The longest and seemingly most complete song that Ophelia sings consists of three voices: the young man, the young woman, and the narrator. In a complicating twist, however, the narrator’s voice sometimes appears to overlap with the voice of the young woman and sometimes clearly does not.

OPHELIA. Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,
   All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window
   To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
   And dupped the chamber door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
   Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS. Pretty Ophelia—
OPHELIA. Indeed, la? Without an oath, I’ll make an end on’t.
   By Gis, and by Saint Charity,
      Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do’t if they come to’t,
By Cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she 'Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed,'
So would I 'a' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed. (4.5.47–64)
The song opens in first person, then shifts almost imperceptibly into a third person narration as the "I" of the third line becomes "the maid" of the seventh. The disapproving exclamations of the second verse defy assignment to a specific speaker, and the moralizing lines about the behavior of young men present a weird combination of the impersonal and the deeply personal. The voice of communal wisdom—"Young men will do't if they come to't"—cannot be distinguished from the young girl's self-exculpatory expression of betrayal: "they are to blame." The following line, however, resolutely splits the girl's voice from the narrator's voice with the definite "Quoth she." This confusion of subject within the song accompanies an equally confused time-frame. Is this happening "tomorrow" or now or in the past?

To read these seeming inconsistencies as particularly meaningful, however, would be to consider too curiously. Many of the things that seem odd about the song are in fact entirely typical of the ballad genre. The interest lies not so much in the song itself, but rather in the qualities that it exemplifies: an uncertain sequence of events; separate voices that are not really separated; and expressive possibilities seemingly blunted and diluted by the repeating tune that binds stanza after stanza to the identical series of notes, a repetition that nevertheless makes the song difficult to forget. Expression becomes reiteration, the personal and the impersonal fusing together. Ophelia opens for the audience a vertiginous inner world that isn't really inner, composed as it is of pieces of common songs.

In the "cultural quotation" of Shakespeare's mad characters, Neely finds an especially apparent instance of the era's "reconstitution [of the sacred in the human]," as "the voices that speak through [the mad] are not ... supernatural voices, but ... cultural remnants." This secular reconstitution is not fully complete, however. The pressure of the other world falls heavily on Ophelia's snatches of song—and on Hamlet's as well. Marjorie Garber describes Hamlet's "uncanny reciprocity ... created by the transference of death to the living and voice to the dead." I would suggest that this transference tends to occur around and through song—precisely because of the way that song allows singers to shift so easily from one subject position to another. Ophelia is in some sense already dead when she sings; her wits have proved as "mortal" as her father's life. Ophelia's songs, however, are haunted by more than her former self. They are haunted by the past in general, and by an entire communal tradition that becomes spectral as it sings with fragmented voices through this appallingly isolated individual. Similarly, the
gravedigger may be quick, but the "I" of his song no longer seems to be so: "The sexton sings in the person of someone whose human form has already disappeared in earth." The grave really belongs to Ophelia, and the gravedigger extends her singing beyond her death.

Ultimately, the contrast between melodious lay and muddy death is not as sharp as Gertrude’s tale of Ophelia’s drowning implies. Nevertheless, characters repeatedly attempt to maintain this contrast in language that struggles to translate disturbing sounds—and equally disturbing absence of sound—into music. Such language struggles to reconstitute the harmonious world.

**What the Thunder Said: Re-speaking Sound and Silence**

“Good night, sweet prince,” says Horatio, “And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. / Why does the drum come hither?” (5.2.302–4). *Hamlet*’s characters struggle to fill silences with imagined song and to reinterpret strange or ominous noises in terms of music. Many of these strange noises, including the approaching drum and the “soldier’s music” of the cannon, accompany the manifestation of the Ghost. But just as Ophelia’s songs “point to unsettling confusions of identity,” so this military music is associated with the voices of both Claudius and Hamlet senior. And also like Ophelia’s songs, these noises promise but fail to deliver meaning. The meaning must be supplied by the characters’ re-speaking of sound.

As Hamlet and Horatio wait for the phantom to appear, their ears are assaulted:

HAMLET. What hour now?

HORATIO. I think it lacks of twelve.

MARCELLUS. No, it is struck.

HORATIO. Indeed? I heard it not. Then it draws near the season

Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

*A flourish of trumpets, and two pieces goes off.*

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET. The King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,

Keeps wassail, and swag’ring upspring reels,

And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,

The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out

The triumph of his pledge. (1.4.3–13)

Time in *Hamlet* is audibly out of joint. In the dark, sound measures time, and if the stroke of the clock goes unheard, time stops or jumps erratically. The nervous exchange
between the watchers is interrupted by a sound: not the orderly striking of the clock, but the raucous noise and music of Claudius's drunken festivities. The trumpets and cannon replace the unheard striking of the hour. They also replace—or, for a moment, displace—the entrance of the ghost. Upon Horatio's words, we expect the apparition's imminent arrival, but instead of a silent phantom, we get a raucous burst of sound. “What does this mean, my lord?” demands the jumpy Horatio. His question is never fully answered, although the play frames it repeatedly, sometimes in these very words. The sound is as ghostly as the apparition that materializes immediately after Hamlet's explanation of the sound's meaning, and its origins and significance remain quite as ambiguous.

What does this mean? The cannon, drum, and trumpet produce a military music, and seem a sonic manifestation of all the previous night's murmurs of past and approaching wars, and the "daily cast of brazen cannon" (1.1.72). But as Hamlet explains, it is no such thing: the King is just having a party. Claudius exposes his degeneracy in this perversion of the music of war. The usurper is confident in his ability to control sounds, and to project through them a specific meaning of his own. To Hamlet's agreement to remain at court, the king responds:

This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart; in grace whereof
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the King's rouse the heavens shall bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder. (1.2.123–8)

Claudius positions the noises of heaven as echoes: the reverberation of earthly sounds. It was traditional to conceive of thunder as the audible expression of divine justice. In The Tempest, the guilty Alonso raves, "the thunder,/ That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounced / The name of Prosper; it did bass my trespass” (3.3.97–9). Claudius refuses to hear his own victim's name in the thunder, but he does not figure the thunder in terms of meaningless noise. The word "re-speaking" suggests not merely noise but articulation. Claudius is saying something with the cannon, and heaven obediently repeats his message back to him. He reduces ominous rumbling from the sky to an echo of earthly accord, and smiles, and the drinking of "jocund health[s]." The last word suggests a system functioning as it should—but these "health[s]" are in fact intemperance in action. The cannon "tells" health to the clouds, like a great clock, or like Hamlet's supposedly sane pulse, which "Doth temperately keep time / And makes ... healthful music” (3.4.131–2). This earthly thunder makes music in its affirmation of the "gentle and unforced accord" that now supposedly reigns between the king and his nephew. Claudius works to erase all impression of violence or "force" in the sound; he
tries to remove the terror from the thunder by describing it as a signal of grace, rather than of justice. The speech insists on the meaning of the thunder; at the same time, Claudius’s own “re-speaking” attempts to translate noise into music.

Claudius precludes the possibility that heavenly thunder—which after all, according to his scenario, does not originate in heaven—might threaten or accuse; but in the following ghost scene, Claudius’s “earthly thunder” provokes first Hamlet’s condemnation (so much for accord) and then, seemingly, the appearance of the ghost. When the phantom appears directly after the burst of noise, the sound assumes a new significance: it is his herald, announcing his armored presence; and in retrospect, it reasserts its old military significance. Upon the ghost’s appearance, Hamlet echoes Horatio’s question about the sound, demanding: “What may this mean?” (1.4.32). The noise and the apparition are intimately connected: Heaven or Hell “re-speaks” Claudius’s treacherous music in the appearance of the ghost, and ultimately demands the usurper’s death. This doubleness may be hinted at in Hamlet’s initial explanation of the sounds: “The King doth wake tonight.” Which King?

Claudius’s obsessive desire to turn thunder and warlike noise into an extension of his own voice surfaces again in the final scene. Here, the “accord” is patently false: the king hides his aggression with gracious language.

Give me the cups,

And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,

The trumpet to the cannoneer without,

The cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth,

‘Now the King drinks to Hamlet.’ (5.2.252–6)

Once again, Claudius insists that the sounds are speaking, and that they are conveying a very specific message. By means of an auditory illusion, Claudius’s “speech” will seem to come from heaven—and since the King plans to poison the cup, this “speech” will condemn the Prince, as if by the voice of divine justice. But the sound is separated from its intended referent and hangs in the air. As drum, trumpets, and cannon go off, Claudius commands: “Give him the cup”—and Hamlet, anticlimactically, answers: “I’ll play this bout first. Set it by a while” (5.2.226–7).

Fortinbras fixes the “soldier’s music,” at last, into one appropriate meaning: a military honor for the dead, with all treacherous and debauched meanings purged away. But the “soldier’s music” carries an entire range of potential meanings that are quite beyond the soldier’s knowledge and control. Fortinbras assumes that the sound of a cannon is a sound of war, of battle on a proper battlefield, of military salutes; but throughout the play, the audience has associated cannon reports with Claudius and his
power. The last time a gun went off, we were told that the noise meant: "Now the King drinks to Hamlet"; and, implicitly, "The King drinks to Hamlet’s death." The play thus ends on a note of eeriness. Which King drinks to Hamlet? Is the "soldier’s music" an ironic salute from Claudius, from beyond the grave? Or a last, incomprehensible statement by the old warrior king, who may not have vanished completely from the world of the play?

In contrast, the ghost disappears at an audible sound that seems friendly and innocuous: the crowing of the cock. But in spite of the positive valence assigned to this noise by the on-stage listeners, the crowing partakes in the eerie music of the play, and its meaning and nature remain uncertain. Horatio and Marcellus draw upon tradition to explain the interaction between sound and spirit, and are relieved to find that the encounter has proven the truth of this tradition: ghosts are banished by the crowing of the cock. Horatio’s later account to Hamlet, however, suggests a more problematic and intimate relationship between the apparition and the crowing:

[Y]et once methought
It lifted up it head and did address
Itself to motion like as it would speak,
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
And vanished from our sight. (1.2.215–20)

If we initially get the ghost instead of a sound (the clock chime), now we are left with a sound instead of the ghost. The ghost lifts its head, perhaps even opens its mouth; the cock crows (loudly, like the soldier’s music and the rites of war); the ghost vanishes. It fades at and in the sound, and the sound takes the place of the speech that it does not get the chance to make. The music that apparently banishes the apparition is a weirdly appropriate voice for it: a “trumpet to the morn,” a warlike “warning,” awakening the “god of day” (1.1.131, 133). (Hamlet twice compares his father to Hyperion.) In retrospect, however, the sound can be connected with Claudius, the satyr who has usurped Hyperion, and in whose presence Hamlet feels “too much i’th’ sun” (1.2.140, 67). As soon as Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo exit the stage, an actual flourish of trumpets announces the entrance of Claudius; and at the end of the play, Hamlet, like his father, fades as the “potent poison ... o’ercrows” his spirit, this metaphorical noise accompanied by the audible “war-like volley” of the gunner Death. The trumpet of the morn has become the voice of poison—perhaps it was so all along. The first scene of the play prefigures the last, and the final soldier’s music signifies the same thing that the crowing did, although initially we did not understand what it meant.

Ophelia too fades quite literally in music. The audience does not witness her
swan-like death, when she supposedly sinks, still singing, into the river, but Gertrude
describes it in some detail. Several critics have interpreted this speech as another
attempt to beautify and control Ophelia's dangerous music. Leslie Dunn writes that
“Gertrude's verbal lyricism performs a crucial function: it re-appropriates Ophelia's
music by inscribing it in the containing verbal structures, the metaphorical 'music' of
poetry .... In telling her 'pretty' story of Ophelia's death, Gertrude is implicitly submitting
it to patriarchal authority, representing Ophelia the way men want to see her.”
Gertrude's pretty story takes on new significance when we realize that it is one of
several pretty stories, several crucial passages in Hamlet where characters describe
music. Marvin Rosenberg remarks of Gertrude’s speech, “There is the sense almost of a
mother shaping the content of a sad incident into a palatable fairy-tale-like form”—but
Marcellus's story of roosters at Christmas time in the opening scene of the play is even
more fairy-tale like than Gertrude's narration. The sudden noises of Hamlet undergo a
startling change as they pass into the language of the play. They behave as light does,
entering water, bent and distorted by the new medium. The play refracts the sounds
through its discourse, often through a lyricism that turns the noises into music through
the music of the words themselves.

The crowing of a cock is not an inherently pleasant noise. This sound effect was
cut from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions, for fear it would strike the
audience as absurd or grotesque. Producers preferred to let crowing be heard only
through the more decorous and poetic descriptions of the characters.

BARNARDO. It was about to speak when the cock crew.
HORATIO. And then it started like a guilty thing
    Upon a fearful summons. I have heard
    The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
    Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
    A wake the god of day, and at his warning,
    Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
    Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies
    To his confine; and of the truth herein
    This present object made probation.

MARCELLUS. It faded on the crowing of the cock.
    Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
    Wherein our saviour's birth is celebrated
    The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
    And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad,
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power of charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time. (1.1.128–45)

Barnardo begins by identifying the familiar sound that characters and audience have heard. His response is flat, frustrated, and in prose. Then, the long-drawn-out process of description, definition, and poetic redefinition begins. Horatio first describes the crowing as a "fearful summons," an apocalyptic phrase recalling his interrupted account of a time when "the moist star .... Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse" (118–20). This summons, however, as Horatio goes on to maintain, instead of drawing the sheeted dead from their graves, dispels spirits; it is the "trumpet of the morn," and not the Last Trump. It does not announce the end of the world, but restores normality.

Marcellus goes further, and transforms the sound yet again, in a lyrical restatement (and expansion) of Barnardo's original stark observation. The frustrated, "It was about to speak when the cock crew," becomes the meditative "It faded on the crowing of the cock," as Marcellus launches into what can seem like an irrelevant lyrical set piece. Quickly, the cock becomes "the bird of dawning," and the crowing, singing. (The actual sound of a rooster crowing incessantly all night would be a far less pleasant experience than the one Marcellus evokes.) This perpetual singing prefigures the end of time, but not in the same way that a fearful trumpet does. Time dissolves in the marker of time, as the bird's song stretches the liminal moment of dawn through a whole night, and disjoins time in a beautiful, even holy way. The crowing neither marks the relentless passage of time, nor announces the apocalypse, but provides a pleasant foretaste of eternity. It is not a bell tolling the hours, or a trumpet announcing doomsday, but expansive song. Here, Marcellus respeaks not only the crowing of the cock, but the entrance of the ghost. His words describe a past event (the birth of Christ) come musically alive in the present, but in a way that is no longer ghostly. The other voice speaking from beyond the grave is, implicitly, that of Christ, precluding all other spirit voices.

The audience has heard crowing, not singing; but by the time Marcellus has finished speaking, we have half-forgotten what we originally heard. The speech describes an ideal music, and simultaneously struggles to become this music, to replace crowing with lyrical verse. Marcellus transforms crowing into singing and translates Barnardo's initial prose statement into poetry in the same action. The "music" of the crowing and the "music" of the play are created simultaneously, and the passage performs the function it ascribes to the bird of dawning: drawing out the time, changing the mood from anxious questioning to lyrical mediation. During the speech, night turns to morning.

Marcellus's holy music does not come to life theatrically, however, as Barnardo's
ghostly chime does; no visible embodiment of the sound appears and moves about the stage. The speech itself must perform the function of the music it describes. In the final scene, Horatio similarly refuses to accept that “the rest is silence,” and he fills this silence with imaginary melody, the singing of “flights of angels.” His imaginings are rudely interrupted by reality. The (inaudible) angelic choir is replaced by the warlike sound of the drum, which by the end of the play will become Hamlet’s funeral music. The shooting of Death has an auditory analogue in the sonic world of the play, but the angels do not. Such an analogue can come to life only in Horatio’s own lyrical phrase. This phrase must stand in for the singing of the angels, just as Laertes’s equally simple lyricism stands in for the mass denied to Ophelia when the priest refuses “to sing sage requiem and such rest to her / As to peace-parted souls” (5.1.220–21). “Lay her i’th’ earth,” her brother says, “And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring” (221–3).

The power of such moments is increased by the fact that verbal echoes of both heard and unheard music cannot be confined to specific moments. The “singing all night long” described by Marcellus does not stay neatly contained in one lyrical interlude; it stains the material around it, like ink soaking through paper or cloth, as Horatio ends with the elaborately lyrical “But look, the morn in russet mantle clad / Walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill” (1.1.166–7). These are the two very lines that T.S. Eliot picked out to demonstrate the unevenness of the play, referring to its “superfluous and inconsistent scenes” and concluding that “[b]oth workmanship and thought are in an unstable position.” Thirty-two years later, Eliot felt rather differently, praising the exchange between Marcellus and Horatio as “great poetry,” but also as involving an elusive “something more … a kind of musical design … which reinforces and is one with the dramatic movement.”

The play encourages this musical reaction to its poetry. As Marcellus has just turned crowing into singing, the characters too have talked themselves into music, and their words are infused with new—almost, as Eliot’s first opinion suggests, excessive—lyricism. The transformation of noise to favor and to prettiness lingers in the surrounding words, in the awkward lyricism that clings stubbornly to the very idea of morning, touching even the Ghost’s strange and uncharacteristic announcement several scenes later: “The glowworm shows the matin to be near / And gins to pale his uneffectual fire” (1.5.89–90). In general, Hamlet senior could hardly be accused of excessive lyricism; but these lines might have come straight from A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Eliot’s two seemingly contradictory opinions thus prove remarkably compatible. The language of his second account is surprisingly vague: “it is something more … a kind of musical design.” In his earlier language, “superfluous.” There is a certain
instability here, an excess, and the play registers this excess in terms of music. Music is an overflowing of the dawn, the grave, and the mind. As words become "musical," however, they run the risk of becoming just as frightening and opaque as the sounds they attempt to transform.

Gertrude and Laertes struggle to re-conceive Ophelia's songs as "music," and to imagine that in singing, Ophelia does what their own descriptions of her songs attempt to do: turn hell itself to favor and to prettiness. But songs are so deeply absorbed into the rest of the language, and so much a part of the words and the action of the play that no complete transformation is possible. Gertrude tries to erase the shockingly sexual content and affect of Ophelia's singing by describing bawdy ballad as "melodious lay" (4.7.148, 153). In spite of all her efforts, though, the sexual aspect of the music that she attempts to transform through lyrical verse contaminates her own speech. Sexual allusions rise to the surface of Gertrude's description of Ophelia's melodious death, even as she seems to try to repress them. The singing Ophelia makes "fantastic garlands" of the "long purples / That liberal shepherds give a grosser name, / But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them" (4.7.139–42). In a similar vein, if Horatio's line about singing angels is intended to remind us of the singing Ophelia, as Joan Klein argues, the resulting image is highly disturbing. Angels are not supposed to sing the kind of music that Ophelia sings. Her ballads even retroactively taint Marcellus's lyrical account of the cock as divine voice with a hint of obscenity: "All in the morning betime ... Young men will do't if they come to't, / By Cock, they are to blame" (4.5.47, 59–60). In any case, the elusiveness of the sung epitaph, dramatized in Ophelia's songs and epitomized in Hamlet's line about the hobby-horse, casts an ironic light on the improvised requiems spoken by Gertrude, Laertes, and Horatio. If, in Leslie Dunn's words, "[Ophelia's] songs ... become ghostly echoes of rituals that never took place, griefs that were never articulated," the descriptions of music work all too similarly to the sounds that they struggle to reshape or replace. The characters project "harmony" onto the cosmos, in the form of fairy-tale narrations of music that hover poised on the verge of falling back into the eerie noise that generates them: the ghostly echoes without and within.

If we understand the way music lies at the heart of the play's treatment of haunting, then we can see the vividness, the almost-possibility of that other side of the ghostly: the transcendent, the wholeness of meaning, the singing all night long. The play derives part of its terror from the suggestion that all these things may be ghostly, fictive projections—along with the drama itself. In truth, there may be no angel choirs singing to rest; there may not even be a true Last Trump. Lindley writes: "In this account all the dangerous implications of [Ophelia's] songs are leached away" (Shakespeare and Music, 159)—but he only quotes from the moment that Gertrude starts to describe Ophelia's singing. Even the apocalyptic resonance of the rooster's crow—the "fearful
summons” of the final judgment—proves hollow. The action of Hamlet as a whole is overshadowed by apocalyptic intimations; but despite the possibilities of redress offered by the apocalyptic prospect, the play can never actually arrive at this moment of fulfillment. When told by his old school friends that the world has turned honest, Hamlet retorts: “Then is Doomsday near. But your news is not true” (2.2.234). The true Last Trump will truly raise the dead; the play raises the dead only as ghosts—and, finally, in the form of a theatrical illusion, as the “dead” actors arise to the sound of applause and dance a jig.

The play expresses two incompatible but equally unsupportable fears. Either we do not inhabit a harmonious cosmos at all—or we do, and its “harmony” corresponds precisely to the music of the play, in all its noisiness, eeriness, and incomprehensibility. The heavens either emptily reverberate, or operate according to the impenetrable and seemingly senseless design of an inscrutable power. In the end, the play casts the audience as this power. Their applause inevitably comes as a response to Fortinbras’s final words: “Bid the soldiers shoot.” The clapping will mingle with the sound of the guns, calling the actors to their feet—and to the “judgment” of the audience. Now it is our turn to “re-speak” thunder, taking the place of the heavens in Claudius’s map of traveling sounds: “the cannons to the heavens, the heaven to earth.” But though the audience may judge Hamlet, their clapping ultimately does nothing but reverberate the play’s own sounds.

In the comedic world of Twelfth Night, music is considerably more benign. It retains a constant suspicion of irony, and yet it repeatedly offers a way of escaping from irony, and from the context that would render it ironic. Music remains a haunting presence, imitating and inspiring the indirect operations of desire; but it also becomes an ameliorating influence, reducing pain and insult to harmless, but strangely genuine, “play.” In The Tempest, however, the eerie musical metaphysics of Hamlet return. When he rejects revenge in favor of forgiveness, Prospero arguably provides a revision of the action of Hamlet, averting tragedy through harmonious reconciliation.86 He calls for—and seemingly gets—the “heavenly music” (5.1.52) that characters like Horatio can only imagine. However, Hamlet and The Tempest both end with the thundering applause of the audience; and in both cases, the applause is elicited in an unsettling way. Prospero requests the audience to intercede for him in prayer, drawing attention to the way that The Tempest treats prayers and thunderous noise as inseparably as Hamlet treats Death’s gun and the music of the “heavens.” In general, The Tempest provides much more, and much more literally harmonious, music than the earlier tragedy; but its “marvelous sweet music” (3.3.19) may simply indicate a new level of success at turning affliction and hell itself to favor and to prettiness.
Classical Binglish in the Twenty-first Century
5. Classical Binglish in the Twenty-first Century

Jatinder Verma, writer at and Artistic Director of Tara Arts, became the first director from an Asian or black heritage to direct a play at the National Theatre, in 1990.

When I wrote the following address two decades ago, I was about to start work on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; two decades on and across two centuries, I have directed *The Tempest* (Figures 2.1, 2.4 and 2.5), *Macbeth* (Figure 2.2), *The Merchant of Venice* (Figure 2.3) and *Romeo and Juliet*.

In my address, I noted how the demonisation of the Other is one of the propelling impulses of inter-culturalism. I could as well say it is the propellant of most of Shakespeare’s plays. In each of these productions, I found myself encountering the Other: Shylock, obviously, as a Jew in a Christian state; Prospero, exiled from his home; Romeo and Juliet, both as Other to each other because of their warring families and Other by dint of their love; and Macbeth, who willingly steps into being a gruesome Other. In an era when, post-9/11, the terrorist Other has risen to prominence globally at the same time as migration has become a deeply contested issue, this context goes some way towards explaining my increasing focus on Shakespeare as the site for cross-cultural Binglish.

(Let me here clarify that I used the term ‘inter-culturalism’ very loosely in my address, understanding by it multi-culturalism as much as cross-culturalism. It seems to me we are still wrestling to find the appropriate term to define one of the most significant human challenges facing all advanced economies today – how to create ‘national’ sensibilities out of a diversity of ‘nationhoods’ defined by race, faith, language, gender and class.)

I considered in my address that confronting the Other was a vital component of the Binglish approach to the classics, precisely because it is inherently inclusive of the diversity of nation-hoods that now make all modern societies – composed as they are of race, faith, gender and class disparities.

In the two decades since this address was written, the disparities in British society have increased. In part, this is a response to the severe economic downturn occasioned by the collapse of financial systems in the West since 2007. Immigration and terrorism, however, have served to make the disparities more visceral. This has led to a seeming contradiction, at least in theatre. While on the one hand the last two decades have seen many more Black and Asian works being presented on our stages – with increasing numbers of actors and writers gaining expressive opportunities – they
have also exposed more glaring inequalities of opportunity.

Our theatres remain predominantly White-led: at the time of writing, there are only five non-White-led theatre buildings in Britain (including my own) out of more than 1400 theatre buildings. This amounts to less than 0.4 per cent of our theatre infrastructure, at a time when the Black and Asian population of Britain is around 12 per cent. And these figures do not tell the whole story. Black and Asian populations are concentrated in major British towns and cities – in Leicester, they form the majority population, yet none of its theatres are non-White-led. In London, whose Black and Asian population is around 40 per cent and where four out of the five non-White-led theatres are based, the proportion is slightly higher – 1.6 per cent of the 250-odd London theatre buildings.

Structural disparities such as these have led to concerted campaigns for change. It remains to be seen how successful these are. At the heart of campaigns for change is the impulse to be part of the whole range of modern theatre and theatre-making – which, paradoxically, brings us back to the classics in general and
Shakespeare in particular.

It has long been a truism, in Britain at least, that no actor’s credentials are complete without some experience of the classics. For Black and Asian actors, this is particularly so – and where the ‘Black ceiling’ is most evident. Producers continue to make the assumption that Black and Asian actors are unsuitable for or incapable of working on the classics; and, conversely, many Black and Asian actors find the classics alienating.

For me, theatre exists in the interplay between tradition and modernity. The new Others in British society – Blacks and Asians and other immigrant minorities – have to engage in this interplay if there is to be a lasting imaginative change in British society. Specifically, this means Binglishing Shakespeare.

Figure 2.2 Deven Modha, Ralph Birtwell and John Afzal (the Three Witches, dancing) from Tara Arts’ Macbeth, 2015. Source: © Talula Sheppard.

Imperial Britain ‘universalised’ Shakespeare. In his (in)famous Minute on Education in 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay, arguing for the introduction of English education in British India against the so-called Orientalists who preferred to continue
education in local languages, definitively articulated the imperial impulse:

I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. *I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.*

This extraordinary judgement, put into practice throughout the British Empire, provides an historical context for Bingleish, or Other, approaches to the classics. Caliban’s accusation to Prospero – ‘You taught me language, and my profit on’t/ Is I know how to curse’ – takes on a complex poignancy. On one level, yes, the colonised has learnt how to abuse the coloniser. On another, he/she has learnt also the language of resistance. After all, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela turned ‘English’ values of freedom, equality and justice back on their oppressors to win political and social freedoms.
Faced with the twin, and at times related, challenges of Terror and Immigration, it seems to me that Binglishing the classics in theatre offers hope for achieving freedoms of the imagination – sparking both our own and our audiences' minds and hearts into an appreciation of Other sensibilities. It is precisely this negotiation which I have now enshrined in the fabric of our new theatre, reconstructed to architecturally display a dialogue between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, between Britain and India. The reconstructed Tara Theatre, opening this year, is designed to become a crucible for Binglishing the classics. A tree inscribed across the new façade of the theatre is suggestive of the Shakespearean bower within, where the stage is an Indian earth floor and the theatre roof sprouts a green garden.

**Binglish: a jungli approach to multi-cultural theatre**

**Address before the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD), Scarborough, 19–21 April, 1996**

In modern Hindi, *jungli* – deriving from the ancient Sanskrit word for wilderness, *jangla* – means, naturally enough, wild man. There was a very popular Bollywood film of the 60s where the hero was called Jungli – a film I saw in East Africa, where I was born. But until I came to York to study, and began to walk about the Yorkshire Dales – and particularly when I came across the surreal radar domes in Fylingdales – I had thought that the wilderness I’d so loved when growing up in Africa had been lost to me forever when I made the journey from Kenya to England back in 1968. It seems appropriate, therefore, that, here in Scarborough, I am reminded again of my jungli-ness!

In East Africa, where I spent the early years of my childhood and youth, the jungle was quite literally around us: I remember as a child waking up one day to find that my pet dog had been gored by a wildebeest. My transportation – or translation – to England has been a journey towards the appreciation of another kind of beast in a different jungle. Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* draws a pregnant image of this sort of beast. His hero, Salahuddin Chamchawalla (who literally fell into England from the skies), wakes up one day in his flat in the East End of London to find that he has begun to sprout horns on his forehead and hooves for feet. The demonisation of the ‘other’, I think, was what Salman was alluding to as a characteristic of modern England. A demonisation that achieved the stamp of political orthodoxy when Mrs Thatcher in one of her election speeches of 1979 invoked the fear felt by the host community of aliens ‘swamping the country’. Extraordinarily enough, neither her successor nor any of the other contemporary leaders has ever sought to overturn this statement. And that is perhaps due to the fact that the legal fabric of our society in fact demonises the Others
in our midst. Some here may recall me falling foul of Portuguese immigration a couple of years ago, since my status on paper did not allow me the freedom of movement around the EEC that a number of us cherish. Under the terms of the recent Asylum and Immigration Bill, I also learn that my official British Overseas citizenship, despite 28 years of continuous residence here, may disqualify me from receiving any benefits. It is a well-known fact that if you’re a Black migrant, it is immensely more difficult to enter the country than if you’re White. The law uses the euphemism of ‘Commonwealth immigrant’ to escape calling a spade a spade. But the spade, as in a deck of cards, remains nevertheless Black.

If I elaborate upon the political context current in our society, it is because I think it fundamental to an appreciation of the problematics of inter-culturalism. For it suggests that, for here and now, the starting point – perhaps even the underlying premise – of inter-culturalism is a sensibility of Otherness, of being an Outsider, a Demon. Starting from this premise, there seem to me one of two choices: either try and

Figure 2.4 Chris Jack and Jessica Manley (Ferdinand and Miranda) from Tara Arts’ The Tempest, 2008. Source: © Talula Sheppard.
become an ‘insider’ – join the club, as it were – or try and change the rules of the game. After all, as an Outsider, you’re not expected to be au fait with the rules. The former strategy, I believe, leads to attempts to conform, to integrate; the latter, to confront. Inter-culturalism is, I suspect, about encountering the Other – a city boy confronting a beast in the jungle.

There is another sense in which modern England is best characterised as a jungle: the gap between the lords of the jungle and their prey. Social Darwinism has had a revival over the past two decades, under the guise of ‘market forces’. The ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the enlargement of the hidden economy, the rise in power of marketeers and accountants in theatres as in other walks of life, the homeless dotting every city and town, the multiplicity of languages, faiths, diets, dress . . . of course, England was never a homogenous society. But in former eras, the facts of Empire and Whiteness at least kept alive a notional sense of ‘One Nation’. Today, all but naive politicians find this notion highly suspect. Issues surrounding
gender and ethnicity alone make society today a multiplicity of ‘nation-hoods’, bound within the geographical confines of this island. Brecht’s *Jungle of Cities* is a more useful way of viewing the nation today.

In deploying the metaphor of the Forest, however, I understand by it not only the post-Enlightenment Christian sense of an abode of mystery and malevolence but also the Indian sense of an abode of self-discovery and fulfilment. In Indian thought, the Forest is regarded as the crucial stage in the rites of passage between earthly life and *moksha* – the release from cycles of rebirth. In literature, this Forest is time and again characterised as the space where characters achieve an acute knowledge of their own natures – not at all unlike the heath in *King Lear*. The Forest, therefore, is sage, guru, teacher, prophet. It is an actor in the unfolding drama of life.

In the *Mahabharata* – one of the two great epics of Indian literature (and one that is known now to most of us inter-culturalists!) – the central section is entitled *‘Vanavasa’*: exile in the forest. It is in this section that the heroes acquire the necessary tools to achieve their goals – weapons of combat, love (and with it, a knowledge of their own roots as well as a more acute perception of the routes before them) and wisdom. Perhaps most importantly, it is in the Forest that the characters are most acutely aware of their loss; and this awareness of loss provides them with the key to unlock the door to self-knowledge.

Loss, I’ve come to believe, is central to inter-culturalism. That ever present shadow alone lends depth to the gains of inter-cultural practice. Without that ‘chip on the shoulder’, the picture is flat. I suppose I have come to this realisation because of the fact of migration. To quote Salman Rushdie again, Salahuddin Chamchawalla falls from the sky into England, and in the process ‘there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes . . . the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, land, belonging, home’. To put it another way, there are many actors today who stand in English rehearsal rooms or drama schools reading texts while the shadow of other texts cloud, confuse or beat upon their hearts. Take the word ‘honour’ – individualised, even atomised in modern English. But it also offers an approximate translation for the Urdu concept of *izzat*. *Izzat* is familial, transmitted through generations, a treasure to be guarded jealously; where the gain by one is the gain of all, and so too for loss. Or take ‘thee’, the ubiquitous word in the Shakespeare canon – Old English, almost dead English, but offering me the only means of translating the concept of the honorific that is a structural component of all Indian languages. Speaking in Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu (the three languages I speak with relative fluency), I could not and would not address my elders or those I accord respect with the familiar ‘you’: that is reserved for those I consider my equals, or lower. Speaking in English to my mother, how do I say ‘you’
without violating some sense of myself – without feeling (as I always do when I’ve used the familiar word) as if I’ve sworn at her? When I first came to England, schooling in Manchester, I latched on to ‘thee’ as offering a way out – until I was reminded by my teacher whilst giving a talk on Gandhi (yes, in a geography lesson, of all things!) that English had moved on.

One of the characteristics of the English language – and, dare I say, the English – is a universalising tendency, a characteristic legacy of the Imperial Raj, which seeks to reduce all Othernesses – language, custom, dress, artefact – to its own image. A means of absorbing or side-tracking the potential of encounter that is presented when two people face each other across the border post. Take the words of Thomas Babington Macaulay, who in 1833 was charged by the British Government of India to arbitrate upon the relative merits of universal education being introduced in imperial India in English and in the native languages:

All the literature of Persia, Arabia and India would suffice only to grace one bookshelf in an English girls’ boarding school . . . for it is a literature that teems with mountains of butter and a history that streams with seas of treacle.

This from a man who, by his own admission, knew neither Persian, Arabic nor any of the Indian languages. Today, we can laugh, even dismiss, such crass imperial ranting. But is this a million miles away from Peter Brook’s own account of his initial encounter with the Mahabharata? I quote:

The day I first saw a demonstration of Kathakali, I heard a word completely new to me – ‘The Mahabharata’: . . . Through the magnificent ferocity of the movements, I could see that a story was unfolding. But what story? . . . Gradually, sadly, I realized that my interest was lessening, the visual shock was wearing off. After the interval, the dancer returned without his make-up, no longer a demi-god, just a likable Indian in shirt and jeans. . . . and I realized I preferred it this way. . . . [Later] through that remarkable Sanskrit scholar, Phillipe Lavastine, I began to understand why this was one of the greatest works of humanity.

To return to Macaulay (if only because enough blood has been spilt on Peter Brook), there is a more acute legacy of his pronouncements. He of course chose English as the medium of education in India and his most compelling argument for this choice should give us pause today: ‘to create a class of Indian that is English in language, culture and value, that could act as the arbitrators between the rulers and the ruled: This is my ‘tradition’ of the English language: a language of alienation as much as of mediation. Is it any wonder that words like ‘universal’ and ‘humanity’ signal a hiccup in my brain whenever I hear them?
In inter-cultural practice, how aware are we of loss? Or rather, is the awareness of loss one-sided, i.e. empathy or, at best, recognition of the loss experienced by the Other? In the early 60s, when mass migration from the Commonwealth began, government social policy was aimed at ‘integrating’ the foreigners into the host community – a way, I think, of keeping one’s own sense of loss at bay, by inducting the others into one’s own mores. Ironically, I think now only Enoch Powell was brave and honest enough to articulate the white English sense of loss. Though I do not accept his prognostications – of ‘rivers of blood flowing along the Tiber’ – I have come to understand the deep sense of the loss of a particular kind of England engendered by the arrival of so many people different in so many ways into the landscape of England. If the admission of feelings of shame, of guilt, is necessary in the cementing of individual relationships, they are no less so in the fostering of cultural relationships. All cultures are rapacious: it is the fuel to go forward, to change, to evolve. Empire, however, opened another chapter in cultural exchange: borrowing without acknowledgment. A borrowing that is engrained in the very language we use today. How many shampooed their hair this morning? Right. Well, you’ve been massaging a bit of India in your scalps! For the word comes from the Hindi champā, meaning ‘to massage with oils’. To quote an example from the *OED*, one John Forbes observed of a woman in India in 1813, ‘She first champoes her husband, and fans him to repose; she then champes the horse!’ Thankfully, not many of us are called upon to do the latter nowadays – or the former, more’s the pity.

A similar etymology goes for the vehicles that plague our roads: juggernauts, the word deriving from the name given to Krishna in eastern India (Jagannath) and the festival in praise of him in the city of Puri, when devotees pull along a huge cart through the winding streets. Should the cart slip from the control of the scores of men pulling it, and trample devotees under its myriad wheels, which tends to happen often, it is considered a blessing. I’m not sure the families of the victims would feel they were blessed, any more than we would should one of the modern-day juggernauts plough through our living rooms.

And this process of linguistic borrowing has not ended. Today, the most popular take-away food in England is Indian. Indeed, ready-made Indian foods, spices and other ingredients are now commonplace in most shops and supermarkets around the country. Not too long ago, one of the major car manufacturers in the country advertised its latest sports car with the slogan ‘faster than a vindaloo!’ Here is an acknowledgement that for many Britons Indian food is no longer exotic. Biriyani, ghoṣht, kebab, pakora, samosa, popadom are all popular items of food and have begun to be incorporated in the vocabulary of modern young Britons. So, in a quite real sense, the development of inter-culturalism is being led by the stomach.
Food, however, is not the only source. Politics has also provided some impetus. In the wake of the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, ‘fatwa’ and ‘jihad’ are now common parlance for many British political commentators and journalists.

Jokes, it is commonly assumed, are among the most difficult things to translate from one language to another. Two years ago, I put this to the test in a play I’d adapted and staged: Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. The father, foiled by his son in his attempt to seduce a fashionable woman, rounds on him angrily and shouts, ‘Why must you forever be a bone in the kebab?’ To my amazement, this literal translation of a Hindi joke elicited hoots of laughter from a largely English middle-class audience. I shouldn’t have been so surprised: we are all now familiar with the properties of a kebab, and know that a bone in a kebab is the equivalent of being a ‘stick in the mud’.

Such inter-lacing – what Edward Said calls ‘over-lapping’ – of texts and tastes is what I’ve come to call ‘Binglisch’. Yes, it means exactly what it sounds: not quite English! Food, popular music, dress are pushing this sensibility ever onward – in a consumerist sense, admittedly, with all the attendant dangers: to eat does not obligate one to love the source of the food. But, faced with the babble that abounds in the modern Forest, the jungle that is England, can we ignore the creative challenge and possibilities of Binglisch?

Binglisch for me denotes more than modes of speech. If language is a way, following Marina Warner, of structuring the world, then Binglisch more accurately reflects the fractured world – the overlapping world – that is modern England; where English vies with a whole host of languages in our cities and towns, as is amply demonstrated in the works of the current masters of English literature: Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry. Indeed, I would suggest that literature is currently at the forefront of interculturalism, to an extent that theatre, certainly in England, has simply not caught up with. The great writers of today have realised that Standard English is simply not capable of giving adequate expression to the fractured narratives of our times.

Binglisch, by definition almost, is inherently inclusive. It is an expression of the Other in constant dialogue with the Self. (A modern paradox is that post-colonial societies consider the mark of modernity the acknowledgement, even emulation of the West; whereas post-imperial societies characterise modernity by the denial of the East. . . borne out of unvoiced shame of Empire.) This inclusivity tends towards a consensuality: attempts to make whole the fractures of oneself – like the Asian kid growing up in a Mirpuri-speaking household in Bradford is faced constantly with the need to negotiate between Yorkshire and the foothills of the Himalayas, where Mirpur district is located.
Such consensuality perhaps suggests an alternative model to the conflictual one that has been for so long a paradigm of Western society and thought. Our economic fabric is founded on the weave of Them and Us: the Bosses know best (are literate, cultured) and the Workers are dumb (illiterate, slobs). In the search for profit which is the definition of economic vitality they lay off workers … and no one dares question the rationale for doing so, for it seems such a self-evident truth. Increasingly, however – led of course by the examples of many Asian economies – economists and entrepreneurs are beginning to acknowledge that the most successful enterprises are the ones where the Bosses work and eat with the Workers, where lay-offs are not the only option available to sustain a decent enterprise.

This slow turn in economic thinking leads me to wonder whether time is also up for the Aristotelian conflict-based paradigm of drama, a paradigm that has acquired the status of a transcendent Truth. Yet Indian and many other Asian dramaturgies of the classical period drive towards a consensual notion of drama. In Indian thought, a central notion is sat-chit-ananda – truth is joy. Joy as truth sounds quaint to our post-Freudian ears. What about good and evil? But life – certainly life in the Forest – is somewhat greyer (or browner) than that.

In arguing for the metaphor of the Forest when considering the possible practices and strategies for inter-culturalism, I have in mind that the forest is both malevolent and the abode of self-enlightenment. And in the Forest, the sensibility of Binglish offers a means for the construction of rich – inclusive, consensual – pathways out of the Forest.

I’ll end by invoking Shakespeare as a guide: ‘Bless thee, bless thee. Bottom, thou art translated!’ shouts Snug on seeing Bottom in the forest with an ass's head. ‘Bless thee, bless thee’. Not ‘curse thee, curse thee!’