

SAA #46 Shakespeare and the Dictionary

New Orleans meeting 2016 Thursday: March 24th, 10:00 a.m. – noon.

Abstracts received

***Shakespeare in the Eighteenth-Century Dictionary* (Faith Acker)**

The English dictionaries produced in the eighteenth century boasted an impressive array of definitions, roots and origins, and even sample sentences culled from classical literature and from the developing genre of classical English literature. Nathan Bailey's *Dictionary Britannicum* (1730) focused primarily on definitions and some classical sources, but later scholars' linguistic interests incorporated sample sentences that drew specific attention to the English canon and, especially, Shakespeare. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), for instance, is well known both for its definitions and for its impressive array of quotations. Edward Capell, in the later eighteenth century, created both a "Glossary to Shakespeare" (1774) that defined less common Shakespearean terms and a later, supplemental volume titled *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare* (1783) that avoided definitions but included sentences and extracts from Shakespeare (and his contemporaries) as linguistic exemplars. This paper briefly compares and contrasts the changing definitions, uses, and contexts of key Shakespearean terms in these eighteenth-century reference texts, from the early dictionaries in which he played little part to the later glossaries and indices that were partially or wholly created in homage to Shakespeare's word use.

***Misused Reference Books in Shakespeare* (John Henry Adams)**

Thinking about the dictionary makes me think about reference works in general, especially commonplace books and concordances. The *Oxford English Dictionary* acts in much the same way as a sixteenth-century commonplace book: in addition to providing definitions for the words it contains, the *OED* presents quotations to underscore those definitions. Shakespeare appears perhaps disproportionately often as an illustration for such passages, which appears ironic given Shakespeare's general sense of amusement at the people who rely on such reference works. In this respect, both dictionaries and commonplace books work not merely to establish what words mean but additionally *how* they should be used.

For this seminar, I am interested in thinking about the moments where Shakespeare depicts the use of a reference work, particularly for comedic purposes. At one point in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the rude mechanicals hastily check the almanac to see whether the moon will shine during their play; Polonius appears to have swallowed a commonplace book in his litany of advice to Laertes in *Hamlet*; the recurring malapropic figures in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Measure for Measure* represent

characters who attempt to imitate reference works that they have presumably never actually encountered. These characters seem striking in that they offer Shakespeare a chance to explore the potential humor in categorization and mis-categorization, in using reference works in place of careful thought. While this is perhaps amusing with the lower classes, it takes on a darker significance with figures in a position of authority, where reference works rather than thinking human beings sometimes appear to be in charge.

“What needs this iterance?”: Habit and Hard Words in Shakespeare’s Othello (J.K. Barret)

After listening to Ophelia’s account of Hamlet’s strange behavior, Polonius inquires, “What, have you given him any hard words of late?” As the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, the term “hard words” indicates “harsh or unkind” words, insults, and reprimands. But, from the sixteenth century, it is also a term for words that are difficult to understand or spell. In the lexicographical tradition, “hard words” themselves signaled two contradictory categories—they prompted glossaries and early proto-dictionaries that aimed to define both old and new words. That is, they collected obsolete, archaic words as well as neologisms. In this paper, I explore how such multiple resonances for “hard words” might illuminate Shakespeare’s interest in the burden of “dressing old words new,” as he puts it in Sonnet 76. I consider Shakespeare’s writing in the context of the “worlds” and “gardens” of words, the “interpreters,” glossaries, and dictionaries printed in the early modern period. In so doing, I consider the status of words said and actions done “often”—that is, Shakespeare’s privileged discussions of habit, iteration and echo. Othello, for example, notes that Iago carefully weighs his words. So when he produces mere “echoes” instead of new words, Othello suspects “some monster in [Iago’s] thought / too hideous to be shown.” In plays that valorize repetition as a mark of character, why do words, when repeated, discredit or obscure identity? In *Othello*, characters imagine that habit and custom furnish evidence for establishing credibility, yet Othello and others identify echoic speech as particularly insidious—both empty and designed to hide, rather than show, thought. In approaching how Shakespeare regularly discerns between what is singular and what is signature, my paper will consider how both old and new “hard words” counteract the problem of merely “telling what is told” (76.14).

“Wells of English [] defiled”: Translation, Invention and Proto-lexicography in Early Modern England (Kristen Abbott Bennett)

Not to be a heretic, but *why* Shakespeare? Shakespeare was not unique in his development of neologisms, or his deployment of existing words in novel senses – these were common practices in a socio-cultural climate of English vernacular experimentation and evolution. Why is Shakespeare Dr. Johnson’s most cited source in his watershed *English Dictionary*? Why does Shakespeare still rank third in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for illustrative quotations? What, exactly, do Shakespeare’s works illustrate? And, why do lexicographers demonstrate a fierce and lasting attachment to his writing? On one level of interpretation, Shakespeare clearly suits dictionary projects because he so often dramatizes how language works, such as in Armado and Moth’s exchanges of synonyms in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, or in

the many scenes of French-English/English-French translation in *Henry V*. Yet on another level of interpretation, I would suggest that Shakespeare's suitability to dictionaries including Dr. Johnson's and the *OED* is equally indebted to his works' abilities to translate both *res et verba* from the stage to the page.

This essay investigates dictionary-makers' interest in Shakespeare in the context of the shift from auditory to visual culture brought about by the popularity of print culture. Shakespeare's plays are of special interest because they enact a shift from medieval vernacular translation practices that prioritize retaining the "sentence" of a given source, to an attempt to resolve the tension between *res et verba* and elicit an affective response from his audience. The challenge lexicographers face is one of intersemiotic translation as they use words to describe words that become metaphors for experience, sense, and affect. By invoking scenes from Shakespeare's dramatic works to illustrate the meanings and senses of words, dictionary-makers attempt to translate the experiences of the play into the experiences of the word.

Caliban's Legacy: Ian McEwan, Frank Bidart, and the Empathy of the Curse (Jeffrey Galbraith)

This paper focuses on a specific sense of malediction which I call "Caliban's curse." Rooted in *The Tempest*, this curse refers to the encounter with cultural others and, more specifically, to the Enlightenment legacy in which language learning served as an instrument for creating colonial subjects. This sense of the curse becomes evident in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which repackages the Shakespearean text, isolating lines from the plays as a means of fixing the meaning of individual words.

I examine instances of Caliban's curse in Frank Bidart's 9/11 poem "Curse" (2002) and Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* (2005) in light of the tension that exists in lexicography between the principles of prescription and description. Traditionally, dictionaries relied upon Shakespeare to slow the rate at which words and their meanings changed over time. In the *Dictionary*, Samuel Johnson mined Shakespeare's plays for useful quotations, as he sought to arrest a language threatened by instability. But prescription is subject to ideological blind spots. Johnson curiously negates Caliban's curse in the entry for the verb "to learn." Misquoting the Shakespearean text, Johnson's Caliban tells Prospero, "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know *not* how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (1.2.423-5). As Janet Sorensen has observed, the insertion of "not" prescribes Caliban within a colonialist fantasy. Caliban becomes an ideal colonial subject: His education has rendered him unable to register a protest. It is "profit," we surmise, as this restriction has made him virtuous despite himself.

Lexicography helps us consider how Shakespeare's meaning continues to evolve in the present day. Whereas Johnson's misquotation is suited to post-colonial readings of *The Tempest*, Bidart and McEwan reflect the current interest in literature's usefulness for instructing readers in empathy. This descriptive approach is able to capture the tension between the desire to empathize with cultural difference and the desire to fix, or render harmless, Caliban as threatening Muslim other.

***“Bastard Normans, Norman Bastards”*: The Language of Politics in Shakespeare’s King John (Elizabeth Pentland)**

The paper will look at efforts to define (and differentiate) French and English in King John, a play that brings into focus the closely intertwined histories of the two nations. Unlike Henry V, this play does not feature a scene in the French language, and indeed there is almost no French spoken in the play. At first glance, in fact, the language of the play seems pointedly to avoid vocabulary that would recall, too powerfully, the place and influence of the French tongue in Anglo-Norman England. At the same time, however, the play is deeply concerned with French claims to England (and English claims to France), and preoccupied with questions of legitimacy, genealogy, and degeneracy in ways that recall (or rather, anticipate) the reference in Henry V to “Normans, but bastard Normans, Norman bastards” (3.5.10). Although the play can be seen to rely upon contemporary stereotypes of “warlike” Englishness and French inconstancy, I will be looking for ways to complicate our reading of these terms. This, I hope to do by teasing out the relationship between the play’s language choices and its efforts to define, retrospectively, the cultural differences that set England apart from its closest European neighbour.

***Translating the Chains of Debt: Mercantile Language Lessons in Early Modern England* (Susie Phillips)**

Operating largely outside the structures of formal education, the phrasebooks, pocket dictionaries, and language instruction manuals that flooded the European marketplace from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries offered pragmatic polyglot literacy to a new clientele. As language learning itself underwent a translation—out of the classroom, into the marketplace, and further down the social ladder—these manuals provided readers not simply a multilingual mercantile vocabulary, but lessons in all manner of disorderly conversation—insults, lies, pick up lines, and gossip. Far more than entertaining content, this disorderly conversation was a profitable pedagogical strategy in and of itself. Although seduction scenes often garner the most critical attention, it is the scenes of bargaining in the marketplace (common to all these little books) that demonstrate most palpably the central role of conversational mischief in this particular brand of popular instruction. This paper focuses on one such scene, a dialogue entitled “How to call upon Debitours” from Noel van Berlaimont’s *Colloquia et dictionariolum*, the bestselling vernacular language instruction manual in early modern Europe (it appeared in at least 160 editions). For Europeans of every social stratum, debt was a ubiquitous and absolutely essential feature of premodern economic life, thus it is hardly surprising that a pragmatic little book like the *Colloquia* would include dialogue devoted to debt. The dialogue, however, does not teach readers how to navigate the moral hazards of the credit economy, nor does it provide an earnest account of the vocabulary, customs, and rules pertaining to it. Rather, it is an almost farcical tour through all manner of mercantile and conversational mendacity. After first unraveling the threads of language learning and petty larceny, pedagogy and pragmatism, mischief and mercy in Berlaimont’s text, the paper will then reread the commercial preoccupations of *The Comedy of Errors* through the lens of these mischievous language lessons and their disorderly debt practices.

'I need a dictionary to it': Dictionaries and Early Modern Drama (Jan Purnis)

When the doctor in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* diagnoses Ferdinand as having lycanthropia, Pescara asks, "What's that? I need a dictionary to it." The doctor then functions as a dictionary of sorts, providing both his on- and off-stage audiences with an explanation of the condition, demonstrating in the process Webster's familiarity with texts on the subject. Shakespeare doesn't use the word *dictionary* in any of his plays, but as in this example from Webster, there are frequent moments when the plays function as dictionaries, employing similar logic and strategy. When in *Richard III*, Richard famously explains to the audience, "I moralize two meanings in one word," he offers a concise example of what early moderns called *equivocals*, words with more than one sense, a feature that John Wilkins, writing in 1668, considers a "defect" of words because "they render speech doubtful and obscure," as well as being evidence of a shortage of words. In other moments, Shakespeare's characters ask what words mean (Sir Andrew Aguecheek: "Is that the meaning of 'accost'?"); or explain what words mean using synonyms (Sir Toby Belch: "'accost' is front her, board her, woo her, assail her"); or they provide an English translation, as when Margaret tells Beatrice that she had no "moral meaning" in recommending Carduus Benedictus for her illness, but simply meant "plain holy-thistle." For Wilkins, member of the Royal Society, synonyms are "tedious" and "superfluities," but they are a key feature of early modern dictionaries and demonstrate linguistic fluidity (see Ian Lancashire's introduction to the *Lexicons of Early Modern English* site). In my paper, I will read these and other examples from Shakespeare's plays in the context of early dictionaries, focusing on how the plays engage with word meanings and explore questions about language and meaning more generally.

Lexicography without Language (Marjorie Rubright)

This essay traces the epistemological questions that arise when we take a counterintuitive approach to dictionaries—moving beyond a focus on their semantic content—to attend, instead, to lexicography without language. I focus, primarily, on Noel de Berlemont's popular parallel wordlists to consider not only the knowledge about language that these pages encode, but the ways of thinking about language that they enable. In exploring these questions, I read early modern wordlists as both pragmatic and poetic art. The final part of the paper turns to Shakespeare's *Henry V* to consider how its linguistic skirmishes participate in a cognate lexicographic imagination.

Etymology and the “Common Part” of Coriolanus (Robert N. Watson)

Certain prefixes – especially those derived from the Latin *cum-* and *part-* – dominate the diction of *Coriolanus* in ways that reinforce the tragedy’s persistent interest in insular and divided identities. Classical ideals of a proudly centered and circumscribed person, always “like himself,” collide with communitarian Christian ideals of humility centered on companionship – shared bread – in a play set at a moment of comparable tensions: the transition from imperial Rome to its shared-governance republic. Scholarship has demonstrated the emphasis on separation in the plot and even in the protagonist’s syntax; my paper will argue (with statistical support) that this thematic pattern extends down into the homophones and etymology of Coriolanus’s vocabulary. He feigns acceptance of the “common part,” but the last thing he wants is to “mutually participate” in “the appetite and affection common / Of the whole body.” Attention to these word-roots seems especially well justified in a play where Menenius plays off the suffixes of names of the Tribunes Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus with a jeering homophone: “I find the ass in compound with the major part of your syllables.”

(Ab)using Petrarch: The English Petrarchan Lexicon (Victoria White)

This paper aims to understand the cultural and literary context of Shakespeare’s drama and poetry by historicizing terms of Italian origin such as “Petrarchan,” “sonnet,” and “canzone.” In other words, this research investigates how these imported words and concepts were defined in early modern dictionaries. These particular dictionary entries (“Petrarchan,” “sonnet,” “canzone,” etc.) are of interest because, as imports from the Italian Renaissance, they represent sites of cultural translation as well as word translation. Furthermore, understanding how these terms were interpreted and defined in the period reveals a great deal about how Shakespeare and his contemporaries understood their relationship to Italian models—Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, but also the many Renaissance humanists who theorized the vernacular idiom and its literatures.

This project combines research done at several archives—the UC Davis Special Collections, the Newberry Library in Chicago, and Early English Books Online (EEBO). Primary texts include Henry Cockeram’s *The English dictionarie. Or, an interpreter of hard English words* and multilingual dictionaries such as Randle Cotgrave’s *A dictionarie of the French and English tongues* and John Baret’s *Alvearie*. These archival sources do more than provide definitions that are often surprisingly fluid and open-ended when compared to the rigid and closed definitions that characterize modern criticism. They also illuminate how a proper name (Petrarch) turns into a verb (*pétrarquiser*, to *Petrarchize*) that crosses borders, vernaculars, and value systems, becoming derogatory from having been admirable. Furthermore, these dictionary entries for Petrarch and the lyric forms associated with him (the sonnet, the canzone, etc) provide a paradigm for following the dynamics and metaphors for Renaissance imitation (as in the bee metaphor of the *Alvearie*).

