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Shakespeare's Dictionary: One Playwright's Influence on the Modern English Lanugage

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Shakespeare's Dictionary: One Playwright's Influence on the Modern English Language

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Abstract

William Shakespeare is considered to be the father of Modern English, but what most people do not realize is that he influenced much more in English than just the language. The number of phrases and words he created is over-exaggerated, he borrowed from many other languages, and he was one of the first people to document modern medical disorders. Not to mention Shakespeare was writing during one of the most lexically innovative time periods, so he helped aid in the transition from using “thee” to using “you” when addressing another person. Moving away from language specifically, Shakespeare’s writing has also had major influences on some very powerful people, one of them being Abraham Lincoln. This project focuses on the achievements of William Shakespeare that are not normally recognized in regular teaching of Shakespeare. I look at how Shakespeare popularized many words as well as how he dipped his pen into other aspects of life, changing the way we use language forever.

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I would like to thank Dr. Koehler and Dr. Chaney for their support during my time writing this project. Without them, I would not have been able to develop the thoughts I had about this project into what it is today. I also want to thank my family and my sorority for listening to me to talk about nothing but Shakespeare for the last several months.

Preface

I chose to write about William Shakespeare's influence on the modern English language after taking two relevant English courses at Otterbein; the first was my Linguistics class the fall of my sophomore year and my Shakespeare course during the spring of my junior year. After taking Linguistics, I loved the class so much I decided to develop an Individualized Minor in Linguistics. Once I developed my minor, I was trying to figure out how to incorporate it into my senior project. Linguistics is the study of language, and I personally find language to be one of the more, if not the most interesting aspects of human life. We are the only beings that communicate through words, and we are the only ones who have an arsenal of sounds to accompany these words, which in turn creates thousands of different languages. Also, we are the only creatures who have to learn our way of communicating in order to communicate with one another. Initially, I had thought about writing about word etymology, but that quickly changed once I took Alison Prindle's class on William Shakespeare. In her class, we examined a multitude of plays, learned about Shakespeare's life, and what life and theater was like during Elizabethan and Jacobean times. We watched different interpretations of the plays and discussed the ways Shakespeare gave implicit directions to his actors through the dialogue. Needless to say, this course on Shakespeare is my favorite class I have taken during my time at Otterbein. Even before I had taken any classes about Shakespeare, I found his writing so amazing and wished English had stayed as eloquent as Shakespeare made it sound. My favorite play of his is *Much Ado about Nothing* for the quick-witted dialogue between characters and the plucky female characters, especially for Beatrice, the woman who does not need a man to define her. Once I took a full class on Shakespeare, I knew the Bard would be the focus of my Senior Writing Project.

Because I found his words so entrancing, I thought there would be nothing better suited for me to write about than Shakespeare's language. The hard part was determining exactly what path I was going to take while exploring the playwright's legacy. It was not until I met with my project director, Norman Chaney, I knew exactly what direction my writing was going to go. During our first meeting, Dr. Chaney gave me some research that best describes my project. David Crystal, a British linguist, wrote in his book, *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language*, that the common misconception about Shakespeare is how many words and phrases the Bard truly invented and his linguistic legacy is far from the words and phrases the Bard created. "His legacy is very different. From Shakespeare we learn how it is possible to explore and exploit the resources of a language in original ways, displaying its range and variety in the service of the poetic imagination" (Crystal 232). Shakespeare was a truly innovative writer, and even though he did not invent as many words as we think he did, he was still able to mold the English language in a variety of ways. Because of this innovation, I chose to discuss the misconception and what the playwright's true linguistic legacy is.

One of two reasons I chose to write about Shakespeare's influence on the English language is because there is such a common misconception that Shakespeare invented thousands upon thousands of words. In actuality, Shakespeare was able to describe common occurrences during his lifetime- something that most people living in London during the 1590s did not know how to do because of the lack of education and the linguistic revolution that was just beginning to take place. Not only did the Bard describe everyday life in Elizabethan London, he was able to describe with surprising detail and accuracy mental disorders within his characters that are only now defined by *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. As one evolutionary biologist observes:

It might be easy to mistake creative license for medical observation, but the rich detail of the descriptions suggest that some of the symptoms might have been inspired by real-life encounters. Perhaps the Bard was influenced by stories about London's St. Mary of Bethlehem Hospital—then a notorious mental institution best known by its nickname, Bedlam. (Hooper)

I am fascinated with the idea that a man who had no clue what the DSM is or how difficult describing modern mental disorders. He was probably never afflicted with any of the disorders he describes in his characters, so the fact he can write about them with accuracy is marvelous. Obviously, Shakespeare's influence does not just appear in the medical world; he influenced one of our nation's greatest leader's religious views. William Shakespeare's ability to influence someone's life so greatly, especially a man such as Abraham Lincoln is the second reason I chose to write about the Bard's influence on language. Although there is no criticism that states as much, Shakespeare's plays and the language he uses in them was so influential in Abraham Lincoln's life, that it became a sort of theology for him. However, one critic does introduce the idea that Shakespeare had a huge influence on Lincoln:

When contemplating the role of Shakespeare's ideas on Lincoln's religious beliefs in the Second Inaugural Address, there are two outstanding facts to recognize.

First, Shakespeare's verses obviously abound with philosophical and theological ideas. Second, Lincoln examined the words of Shakespeare with great care.

(Stevenson 11)

While at Otterbein, I begin examining the words of Shakespeare carefully as well. But, during my four years in college, I came across more than a handful of English majors who scoffed at the idea of taking a full course on the works of Shakespeare. My generation is the generation of

technology, and one of the disadvantages of being so technologically dependent is that we expect everything to be translated into terms we can understand. The “No Fear Shakespeare” attitude where Shakespeare’s language is translated into modern English so it is easier to understand has, in my opinion, extinguished the beauty and complexity of the words the Bard used.

During the research stage of my project, I came across so many different aspects of life that Shakespeare had touched, even in the slightest way. I chose to focus on three extremely different aspects of Shakespeare’s influence- language, mental disorders, and religious influences- because they are not the most commonplace ideas when discussing Shakespeare’s influence on society today. While working on this project, I hoped to learn exactly how Shakespeare was able to come up with the words he did invent and how he was able to put into words the experiences so many understood but few could describe. I consider William Shakespeare to be the most influential writer in the English language whose importance is no longer a regular part of our educational system unless you are in an honors or accelerated program, at least in my experience. In the four years since I graduated high school, and now with my sister graduating from the same high school I attended, the materials which we read in our English courses varied greatly. My sister is reading more modern writers, like Fitzgerald, whereas I was reading the classics, like Dickens and Shakespeare while I was in high school.

My time writing this project has taught me just how Shakespeare became this English mastermind, and I want my project to teach readers how to appreciate Shakespeare without thinking of his language as out of date or too difficult to understand without the modern translation on the next page. It is only without the translation that Shakespeare can truly be appreciated because his works are available for interpretation. I am hoping to give my readers some information about the time in which Shakespeare was writing. I plan to do so because it is

difficult to understand the Bard's work without having a basic understanding of the audiences he was writing for, especially since he was writing for the different classes in some of his plays.

Hopefully, my project will give readers a better appreciation for Shakespeare.

This project has taught me that language is fluid and consistently changing and that those who have the biggest influence on language may not influence language in the most obvious ways. Shakespeare may be one of the biggest influences of the English language, but it cannot be pinpointed that he was the one who invented certain words or just how many he invented. As one critic notes:

The exact number of words Shakespeare added to the English language can't be known. Word origins in general are notoriously difficult to determine. We know that Gelett Burgess invented the word *blurb* at a New York dinner party in 1907, but for the most part, English terms emerge tentatively, out of miasma of hints and feints and half sense. Besides, there's no way to tell whether Shakespeare plucked a word out of his head or off the street. Most scholars agree that he coined somewhere in the vicinity of seventeen hundred words—far more than any other writer in any language. It's an even more astonishing feat when you consider that nearly 10 percent of Shakespeare's vocabulary of twenty thousand terms was new to him and to his audience. In a sense, he's easier to understand now, because we are familiar with words like *farmhouse* and *eyeball* and *softhearted* and *watchdog*. We've lost an entire dimension of the original Shakespeare experience. Imagine going to a new play and hearing for the first time *sanctimonious* or *lackluster* or *fashionable*. That freshness is lost to our ears.

(Marche 24)

Because the freshness of Shakespeare's words have been lost for modern audiences, I chose to write about his words with the hopes of bringing back the newness of an author who has such an impact on my life. As Shakespeare says in *All's Well That Ends Well*, "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players. They all have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts" (II.vii.139-142). Shakespeare's parts have added up to a man who has influenced more than just adding words to the English language, he influenced life in general, especially theology, medicine, and language.

“All the world’s a stage. And the men and women merely players”¹

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon on April 23, 1564—the third of eight children. Although there is no record of his education, it is assumed he attended grammar school, but it is unknown whether or not he finished his studies there or became an apprentice to his father. Very little is known about Shakespeare’s life before he moved to London to become an actor and a playwright somewhere between 1586 and 1592². When Shakespeare was eighteen, he married an older woman named Anne Hathaway. The couple had three children, two of whom survived into adulthood. Shakespeare’s only son, Hamnet, died when he was eleven years old, scarring the Bard for the rest of his life. Shakespeare and Hathaway lived the majority of their marriage apart while Shakespeare was in London pursuing a writing and theater career until his death in 1616. Out of this career came thirty-seven plays, a collection of 154 sonnets, the establishment of the Globe Theater, and the transformation of the English language.

“Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue”³

William Shakespeare is considered to be one of the most influential writers in the English language. He invented words and phrases that have become commonplace today. He influenced a wide range of other aspects of human life as well. In this paper, I will examine his influence in three distinct areas: language, psychology, and theology. When the average person thinks about William Shakespeare, she may think of a man who invented thousands of words and phrases that contribute to the English language. Shakespeare did invent a few dozen words and a smaller number of phrases, but truly, the number of words and phrases he popularized is the real reason

¹ Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 288-317. Print.

² These are considered the “lost years” of Shakespeare’s lifetime. There is no documentation of what he was doing or where he was living during this time.

³ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1189-1234. Print.

Shakespeare's language is still relevant today. The over gratuitous count in people's heads diminishes the true impact the Bard had on the modern English language. William Shakespeare has a large list of invented words credited to his name, some of which he did not actually invent. But, it is likely that the average person as well as the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* gave him credit for words he used in his plays even though they were coined by someone else. As noted linguist David Crystal observes:

Lexicography has its limitations: nobody can read everything or even have ready access to everything. And when compiling a historical dictionary, decisions have to be made about which texts to include. Shakespeare, of course, was a special target of the first *OED* editors: they went through his work with a toothcomb. As a result, there are rather more usages attributed to him that might have been the case if some of his contemporaries had been given the same treatment. (D. Crystal 8-9)

Shakespeare wrote during one of the most innovative periods of the English Language. During the sixteenth century, known to linguists as the era of Early Modern English, a huge expansion of vocabulary occurred. A large shift in the language- pronunciations and spellings- occurred, one wonders why, allowing for innovation and for popularization to take place. Scholarly writers attempted to invent words they deemed necessary, but Shakespeare is the most widely known innovator of language even though the majority of his work actually took the form of popularization of words he in his plays.

Shakespeare's largest influence on English was the popularization of words and phrases, such as "tainted" (*Henry VIII* IV.ii.14; Crystal xv) and "out of warrant" (*Othello* I.ii. 79; Crystal 489). This popularization of words is the main reason Shakespeare is still relevant in life today.

However, Shakespeare's influences travel beyond just language and words. The Bard wrote with such eloquence and insight, that his words become a theology for Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln, even without the formalities of education, found Shakespeare influential enough to study him with great care. Similarly, the way Shakespeare described common ailments during the Elizabethan Era with such accuracy, modern doctors have diagnosed his characters with different neurological and psychological disorders using *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Although Shakespeare's influence on Lincoln and in medicine are not typically thought of as an influence on the English language, but without either of these influences, history could have been written differently. The extremes in William Shakespeare's influence, be it in daily life, politics, or medicine, are still culturally relevant today.

“Neither a borrower nor a lender be”⁴

Many of the words that are attributed to Shakespeare existed in other languages before the playwright introduced them into English. He took words from languages, such as Spanish and French, which townsfolk used on the streets, but he also took words from languages that predated English and gave them English equivalents. The Bard's innovative take on foreign language begs the question, “Do we include foreign words? Shakespeare uses 288 Latin word-forms, 310 French word-forms, and 36 Spanish or Italian word-forms (it is sometimes difficult to decide which language it is). When characters are definitely speaking a foreign language, the words might reasonably be excluded, but it is not always clear when something is foreign” (D. Crystal 5). The foreign words the Bard would use in his plays were ones the average theater-goer would be able to understand. As Shakespeare writes in *Othello*, “Who's that which rings the bell? *Diablo*, ho!” (*Othello* II.iii.161). Although Shakespeare uses the Italian word “diablo”

⁴ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1189-1234. Print.

instead of the English word “devil,” his audiences would have been able to understand the word change because phonetically the words sound similar. Also, the context clues would have helped the audience understand the playwright was referring to the devil. Shakespeare was extremely perceptive about the world around him, and with this perception, he drew on other cultures to help make his plays more realistic and relatable to the theater-goers. Even though he did take words from foreign languages, Shakespeare transformed these words into English ones so they could be expressed.

Not only did Shakespeare borrow from other languages, he transformed parts of speech as well. The Bard took words from one part of speech and converted them into another and he used prefixes and suffixes to make new words out of preexisting ones:

Some of his best words are fancy, big Latinate words like *consanguineous*. He built many such words by fusing prefixes and suffixes onto preexisting words. *Con-* means ‘with.’ *Sanguine* means ‘blood’ or ‘related to by blood.’ Other words are foreign borrowings that he anglicized, such as the word *bandit* from the Italian *banditto*. Others, such as *hint* or *hush*, come from resuscitated Middle English words. (Marche 25)⁵

By transforming and popularizing foreign words, Shakespeare expanded the English language and introduced the concept of borrowing from another language, making this a more widespread practice. Shakespeare’s innovation with language has won him recognition and praise over centuries. His vocabulary is unparalleled among those writing in the Elizabethan period, and he came up with a different story line for each of his plays- not repeating any of the tales in his

⁵ Crystal continues on to say, “He nounded verbs and verbed nouns. That’s how we have *to down* and *to elbow* out of the way. He made adjectives like *deafening*. He made adverbs like *tightly*. He made crazy words like *buzzer* and *kickshaw* and *zany*. Shakespeare is the special-effects master of everyday speech. He is, as Virginia Woolf put it, ‘the word-coining genius, as if thought plunged into a sea of words and came up dripping,’” (10).

plays. One may find herself wondering “Why is Shakespeare’s vocabulary so large? Partly because he wrote so much, but mainly because of what he wrote about. It is the difference between people, situations, and subject-matter, which generates different kinds of vocabulary, and Shakespeare is acknowledged to be unmatched in the range of his characters, settings, and themes” (D. Crystal 6). Because of his popularity and innovation, Shakespeare’s works were looked by dictionary editors without any cross-references to other works written at the same time or ones that were written earlier. Of course, because of the lack of technology, it was much more difficult to cross-reference different authors’ works. Without the cross-referencing, the actual estimated number of words Shakespeare invented escalated far beyond his actual contribution to the English language.

One of the other ways Shakespeare influenced the English Language was in his use of grammar. Grammar was changed by Shakespeare because inflectional endings in English had largely disappeared, allowing Modern English to become newly flexible. As with many of the romance languages today, the ending of a word in Old English would signify if it were singular or plural, masculine or feminine, formal or informal. However, by the time of the major developments of Early Modern English, many of these endings had disappeared. This meant that Shakespeare could use words in the way a verb was used, which was not allowed before due to the inflectional endings.

However, one of the reasons Shakespeare’s plays cause contemporary readers some difficulty, is his grammatical use of the “thee,” “thou,” and “ye” instead of using “you.” The usages of “thee” and “thou” were in transition, which is one of the main reasons Shakespeare exploits them in the fashion he does. In Modern English, the use of the word “you” is both a singular and a plural form. In Old English “thou” was used when addressing one person and “ye”

was used when addressing more than one person. “Thee” is used as in the objective case of “thou.” “You” was around in this time, but it was not used in the grammatical way it is used today. “Thou” and “ye” were used as a subject of a clause while “you” was used as an object. Once Early Modern English became more popular, the distinction of subject and object between “ye” and “you” had virtually disappeared. Even though people claim to understand the Authorized Version of the Bible much better than they understand Shakespeare, both of which use “ye” and “thou,” Shakespeare is much more modern than the Bible is (McCrum 101) in terms of the words used.

Once Shakespeare’s works became more commonplace in Early Modern English, “you” was being used for singular and plural forms. “You” became a word that is commonly used today had many uses by the time Shakespeare was writing. The singular form, “you” could be used as an alternative to “thou” and “thee.” In addition, “you” was used by people of lower status, such as commoners, children, and servants, when they were addressing those above them in social status; nobles, parents, and masters. “You” had also become a way for the upper class to address each other. In comparison, the people who held a higher social class used “thou” and “thee” to address those who were considered beneath them. The lower classes also used these terms to address each other. In reflection of the patriarchal times, men would address their wives as “thou,” and out of respect, the women would reply with “you.” Interestingly, “thou” and “thee” were also used when people would address God, witches, ghosts, and other supernatural beings (McCrum 102). Because of the switch in second person pronouns, Shakespeare used his grasp of the English Language to exploit these changes in his plays so his audiences would be able to understand his characters and be able to relate to them.

Not only does the case of second person pronouns “thou” and “you” have grammatical dimensions, but it has an emotional dimension as well. “Thou” would commonly express a special intimacy or affection for the person being addressed. “You” expressed formality, politeness, and distance from the person who was being addressed. This form is still used in many of the Romance languages, such as in Spanish with the “tú” for the informal and “usted” for the formal. “Thou” would also be used by a person in an inferior position to address their superior to express feelings of anger and contempt, or to insult the person of superior rank. It could also be considered insulting to use “thou” to address someone of equal rank. In his plays, Shakespeare is able to produce different levels of meaning by displaying the disrespect of one character for another character’s status (McCrum 104).

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet”⁶

While he was alive, Shakespeare’s name and his quartos saw a great deal of change. Shakespeare, like many Elizabethans, was well known for having a number of inconsistent spellings with his name. David Kathman, a linguist from the University of Chicago, focused the majority of his career on Shakespeare and the variances of spellings of William Shakespeare’s name:

Kathman collected as many variants as he could find for the Shakespeare surname between 1564 and 1616 and found 25 variants in 342 instances, such as *Shackspeare*, *Shagspere*, *Shaxberd*, and *Shekspere*. 60 per cent of the cases are *Shakespeare* or *Shake-speare*, however, and it is this form which triumphs, presumably because it was one chosen by his publishers. (D. Crystal 32-33)

⁶ Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1104-1139. Print.

During the seventeenth century, spelling was just beginning to become standardized. Because Shakespeare was becoming so popular during this time, it makes sense his publishers would want a standardized spelling of the playwright's name. This desire for a standardized spelling of the Bard's name, would have become popularized, just like the language Shakespeare used in his plays. Despite the publishers wanting a standardized spelling, "Shakespeare would never have felt the need to get his signature 'right'... there was no system of standardized spelling at the time he was writing; the concept of 'correct spelling', with its associated social sanctions, did not clearly emerge until the eighteenth century" (D. Crystal 32). This lack of standardization of Early Modern English spelling and little care on the Bard's part, could be the reason so much confusion and doubt arises about who exactly penned the plays written by Shakespeare. Similarly, there exists very little documentation about Shakespeare, and the spellings of his name exist through signatures on legal documents. "Signatures we have, but nothing else. There are six of them thought to be authentic, all in legal documents- a deposition, a conveyance, a mortgage deed, and three in Shakespeare's will" (D. Crystal 31). Without any record of Shakespeare's actual drafts of his plays, the authorship of the plays is doubted.

One of the other reasons Shakespeare's authorship is doubted is because of the variations of his plays in different editions. One of the more well-known disputes of work is from *Hamlet* in Act III scene I, or more commonly known as Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy. As seen in Figure 1, the variations begin at line one. This soliloquy is Hamlet's most well-known and the changes made between the First Folio and the First Quarto are ones that cannot be overlooked. One explanation for the change from "To be, or not to be, that is the Question" to "To be, or not to be I there's the point" is that other playhouses wished to steal Shakespeare's work without

having to pay to use it. Shakespeare wrote solely for the King's Men Troupe, and his work was not available to those who were not a part of the troupe.

Instead of paying to use his plays for a short time in another theater, competing producers would send actors into the theater where the King's Men were performing and listen to the plays several times until they had memorized the Bard's words. After they left the theater, the actors would go to a scribe and dictate what they thought were the correct lines from Shakespeare's plays. The other theaters would then produce Shakespeare's plays and print their own quartos of the work, creating a discrepancy between what the actors heard during a performance and what Shakespeare actually wrote.

Without any standardization of spelling and the competing actors stealing Shakespeare's works, the authorship of some of the plays the Bard has written has been called into question. However, the claims that Shakespeare was not the author of the works have yet to result in a change in authorship. Historians and linguists have been able to prove that the questionable works mostly written by Shakespeare by analyzing the writing and finding similar characteristics between letters. Even if there is still doubt about the origins of work, Shakespeare's name will forever be associated with the works.

Figure 1

F1 (1623)		123
1702	How smart a lash that speech doth give my Conscience?	3.1.49
1703	The Harlots Cheeke beautied with plaist'ring Art	50
1704	Is not more vgly to the thing that helps it,	51
1705	Then is my deede, to try most painted word.	52
1706	Oh heauie burthen!	53
1707	<i>Pol.</i> I heare him comming, let's wüdraw my Lord.	54
1708	<i>Exeunt.</i>	
1709	<i>Enter Hamlet.</i>	
1710	<i>Ham.</i> To be, or not to be, that is the Question;	55
1711	Whether 'tis Nobler in the minde to suffer	56
1712	The Slings and Arowes of outrageous Fortune,	57
1713	Or to take Armes against a Sea of troubles,	58
1714	And by opposing end them: to dye, to sleepe	59
1715	No more; and by a sleepe, to say we end	60
1716	The Heart-ake, and the thousand Naturall shockes	61
1717	That Flesh is heyr: too! 'Tis a consummation	62
1718	Deuoutly to be wish'd. To dye to sleepe,	63
1719	To sleepe, perchance to Dreame: I, there's the rub,	64
1720	For in that sleepe of death, what dreames may come,	65
1721	When we haue shuffle'd off this mortall coile,	66
1722	Must giue vs pause. There's the respect	67
1723	That makes Calamity of so long life:	68
1724	For who would beare the Whips and Scornes of time,	69
1725	The Oppressors wrong, the poore mans Contumely,	70
1726	The pangs of dispriz'd Loue, the Lawes delay,	71
1727	The inselence of Office, and the Spurnes	72
1728	That patient merit of the vnworthy takes,	73
1729	When he himselfe might his <i>Quietus</i> make	74
1730	With a bare Bodkin? Who would these Fardles beare	75
1731	To grunt and sweat vnder a weary life,	76
1732	But that the dread of something after death,	77
1733	The vndiscovered Country, from whose Borne	78
1734	No Traveller retumes, Puzels the will,	79
1735	And makes vs rather beare those illies we haue,	80
Q1 TRANSPOSITIONS		
1710	<i>Ham.</i> To be, or not to be, I there's the point,	836
1714-8	To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all!	837
1719	No, to sleepe, to dreame, I praye there it goes,	838
1720	For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,	839
1721	And home before an euerlasting Iudge,	840
1724	From whence no passerger euer returnd,	841
1725	The vndiscovered country, at whose sight	842
	The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd,	843
	But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,	844
1724	Whol'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,	845
1725	Scorned by the right rich, the rich cursed of the poore?	846
	The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong'd,	847
	The taste of hunger, or a tyrants raigne,	848
1716-23	And thousand more calamities besides,	849
1731	To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,	850
1729	When that he may his full <i>Quietus</i> make,	851
1730	With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,	852
1732	But for a hope of something after death?	853
1734	Which puzles the braine, and doth confound the sense,	854
1735	Which makes vs rather beare those cuillies we haue,	855

“I have seen a medicine that’s able to breathe life into a stone”⁷

During Shakespeare’s lifetime, there was no *DSM* or formal diagnosis of neurological or psychological disorders. There were only apothecaries and the St. Mary of Bethlehem Hospital. Despite having very little medical knowledge, Shakespeare described modern medical conditions that were commonplace during his time in London. Many of his characters took on the qualities of those around him and served as conduits for the neurological disorders that could land townfolk in Bedlam. Just like the words Shakespeare popularized, he also popularized knowledge of medical conditions, allowing them to become commonplace and, more importantly, made his characters relatable to the theatergoers. “For all the crudity of 16th-century

⁷ Shakespeare, William. *All’s Well That Ends Well*. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 538-575. Print.

healthcare, there's a surprising amount of modern medical detail in Shakespeare's plays. The behaviours of some of his characters often bear a striking resemblance to how today's doctor's describe a range of neurological disorders, and his observations continue to inspire centuries after his death" (Hooper 1). Shakespeare was able to take the fast moving life of London, and turn the psychological disorders of the townspeople into some of the most iconic characters in literature today.

Some of the Bard's most well-known characters display symptoms of neurological and psychological disorders include Lord and Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*), King Lear (*King Lear*), Sir John Falstaff (*Henry IV*) and Hamlet (*Hamlet*). In his article "The Bard Will See You Now" Rowan Hooper, an evolutionary biologist, imagines how Shakespeare's characters with different disorders might be diagnosed. He diagnoses Lord Macbeth with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, more commonly known as mad cow disease, which is brain damage that leads to the rapid decrease of mental function, most likely caused by infectious proteins in the cauldron Macbeth has been in contact with (Hooper2). Hooper also suggests that Lady Macbeth has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder from emotional stress caused by her husband. Hamlet's haphazard way of living, his talkativeness, and his inability to make decisions could indicate a diagnosis of bipolar disorder (Hooper 2). Finally, Hooper suggests that the symptoms King Lear is displaying could be linked to Parkinson's disease with dementia. These possible diagnoses Hooper gives would not exist had the Bard not taken real life examples and common ailments and popularized them through his plays.

Lord Macbeth is known for having hallucinations, such as a dagger floating near him- "Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?" (*Macbeth* II.ii.32-33), voices telling him he will no longer be able to sleep- "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no

more! Macbeth does murder sleep,” (Macbeth II.ii.32-34); does he has impaired cognitive function, involuntary movements, insomnia, and a psychotic breakdown? As for Lady Macbeth, she is able to function as a normal person while sleeping, “Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise, and upon my life, fast asleep” (*Macbeth* V.i.19-20) and she has obsessive-compulsive tendencies like washing her hands, “It is an accustom’d action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her to continue in this a quarter of an hour” (*Macbeth* V.i. 28-29). Both Lord and Lady Macbeth exhibit nervous symptoms that could be diagnosed using today’s medical knowledge.

The speech of King Lear, who lived well past the life expectancy of the Elizabethan era, is often impulsive and increasing in speed, especially during performances. Lear also switches between not recognizing his daughter, Cordelia, to moments of clarity and even believing himself dead. Lear says, “Man’s life is as cheap as beast’s. Thou art a lady; If only to go warm were gorgeous, Why nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear’st, Which scarcely keep thee warm” (*King Lear* II.iv.267-270). Lear recognizes that he is worth nothing, like an animal, and because he feels so unimportant, even though he is king, Lear considers himself dead.

Sir John Falstaff, more commonly known as Falstaff, is known as being a sweet, plump man who is addicted to alcohol, namely sack. Aside from his obvious drinking problem, Falstaff makes it known he suffers from a sleep disorder. In people who are overweight, the constriction of airways, known as sleep apnea, is extremely common. Despite its commonality, sleep apnea can lead to more serious conditions, such as brain damage due to lack of oxygen reaching the brain, resulting in memory loss if untreated.

In *Hamlet*, the title character suffers from extreme mood swings, which could indicate bipolar disorder. Hamlet is melancholic and impulsive, he impulsively kills Polonius instead of

Claudius. His mood swings from extremely happy, like when he devises a plan to get the King to confess to his father's murder, to despairingly low, which is conveyed in his famous "to be or not to be" speech (*Hamlet* III.i.57-91). Hamlet also is extremely caring to Ophelia one moment, and the next is extremely cruel, near violence with her.

The qualities of Shakespeare's characters come alive through the language he used. The characters' psychological symptoms were relatable to the audiences who were going to see Shakespeare's plays. Because he used language in an unbiased way, Shakespeare's characters publicly display and create sympathy for psychological disorders that would have otherwise been hidden away in Bedlam. Because of the descriptive language and the commonality of the diseases Shakespeare was describing, Hooper has been able to diagnose some of the most iconic Shakespearean characters with modern diseases.

***"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will"*⁸**

Although he was not a theologian, Shakespeare's words have sometimes been used as a sort of theology. One intriguing case is that of Abraham Lincoln. There has been some recognition of Shakespeare's influence on Lincoln:

No published writer has suggested that Lincoln's religious views were seriously influenced by the ideas expressed in the works of William Shakespeare. Yet, once Shakespeare's influence on Lincoln is acknowledged, it provides a new focus for understanding Lincoln's religious outlook and his March 4, 1865, religious utterances in the Second Inaugural Address. (Stevenson 11)

Abraham Lincoln was one of the most influential and revered leaders of America, and it is well known that he never truly expressed what religious denomination he followed in his daily life.

⁸ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1189-1234. Print.

However, it seems William Shakespeare played a large role in Lincoln's life for two major reasons: "First, Shakespeare's verses obviously abound with philosophical and theological ideas. Second, Lincoln examined the words of Shakespeare with great care" (Stevenson 11). Lincoln would often go to the playhouse to see Shakespeare's plays performed and he read the plays with the utmost care, as someone with faith would read the Bible. Likening Shakespeare to a religion for a man whose own "refusal to adopt the creed of any specific religion offers supporting evidence that he had no great passion for formal theological works or conventional religion in general" (Stevenson 14) provides insight into Lincoln's beliefs. Technically, Lincoln was a Christian, however, he did not follow the religion with the utmost care.

The President "never exhibited much appreciation of conventional works of criticism, philosophy, or theology" (Stevenson 13). Despite this fact, Lincoln enjoyed reading Shakespeare and he adopted some of Shakespeare's verses as a guiding ideal. Those who worked with Lincoln while he was in office noticed this adaptation, noting the President's references to the playwright. "Congressman Isaac N. Arnold reported that President Lincoln said: 'I have all my life been a fatalist. What is to be will be or rather, I have found all my life as Hamlet says: There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will.' Herndon confirmed that Lincoln repeatedly used those lines from *Hamlet* to express his philosophical outlook" (Stevenson 16). Lincoln's adoption of *Hamlet* as a kind of sacred texts speaks to the importance of Shakespeare to his philosophical outlook. Not only do we have evidence that Lincoln turned to this play for spiritual insight, but Hamlet himself is a character who struggles with religion, much like Lincoln does. It is possible Lincoln identified with Hamlet the most among Shakespeare's characters. Like Hamlet, "Lincoln often referred to God as a deterministic force" (Stevenson 15). By believing in the concept of destiny, Lincoln can be likened to Hamlet, who

believed his fate had been predetermined by God. Hamlet believed he was going to die avenging his father's death as a part of God's plan. Although Lincoln may not have known he was going to be assassinated one day, it is plausible he could have believed God had written his fate into the stars like Shakespeare wrote Hamlet's fate. Yet, he was not religiously devoted and did not turn to God for comfort or salvation.

As literary critic Harold Bloom notes, "Shakespeare's works have been termed the secular Scripture, or more simply the fixed center of the Western canon" (Bloom 3). With Shakespeare's works defined as a scripture, it would make sense that a man who does not follow a specific religion like Abraham Lincoln would believe in the words the Bard wrote about religion. The case of Lincoln demonstrates that one does not have to be religious in order to understand Shakespeare, but one can use Shakespeare to become spiritual or as a substitute for religion.

"O God that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market place"⁹

During the 17th century, it was uncommon for a piece of literature to have a strong female character as a protagonist. Much like other aspects of his writing, Shakespeare was ahead of his time by giving his female characters strong feminist voices. Two of his most prominent female characters are Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* and Beatrice from *Much Ado about Nothing*. Although Queen Elizabeth was ruling during this time- and she was an avid theatre-goer- there were no female actors to portray Shakespeare's strong female characters. UCLA humanities professor Claire McEachern studied the feminist aspects of the Bard's leading ladies and how they fit in to his literary canon. She states:

⁹ Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado about Nothing*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 366-396. Print.

Pioneering feminist forays into Shakespeare's canon, while seeking to "compensate for bias in a critical tradition that has tended to emphasize male characteristics, male themes, and male fantasies" as well as to develop a uniquely feminist criticism capable of searching out "the woman's part" discovered in Shakespeare an apparent commitment to the portrayal of liberated female characters, strong in voice and action. (McEachern 269)

Shakespeare was a feminist before the definition of a feminist existed. His strong female characters were often the voice of reason and of morality. Interestingly enough, no critiques have risen about the rebellion against the patriarchy Shakespeare brings forth. As a matter of fact, his feminist ideals are praised and are considered empowering for women and for his writing. "In order to empower his own writing, Shakespeare rebels against the archetypes he inherits. His refusal to replicate the assumptions of patriarchy—while obviously not part of any specifically feminist agenda—originates in his inquiry into nature of power, particularly as it is manifested in the imitative pressure of patriarchy" (McEachern 272). Elizabethan England was very much a male-dominated society, and Shakespeare himself was able to benefit from the patriarchal predisposition in the country. Even with his benefits, Shakespeare pushed against the societal norms and created the characters of Portia and Beatrice to counter the male dominance.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is the main character and she is the object of Bassiano's affections. Portia is a woman of means and holds great power in the town of Belmont. "Portia is a steely woman who knows her value, who knows how to reject men she doesn't want, who uses her money and sexuality to succeed in a man's world, and who gets what she wants in spite of her father's injunction" (Russin 120). Portia is a woman of high status and many people look to her for guidance, however, she is governed by her father's rule in

her romantic life. She also seems to be a secondary character to Antonio, the merchant of Venice, in several respects. The title of the play offers some guidance as to whom is the more important character to follow, but there is a slight misconception of who the protagonist actually is in the play. According to Robin Russin, American screenwriter and professor at UCLA, Portia is the main character of the comedic plot and several other subplots. He states:

What the title does not reveal, however, is the true central character of the play.

The titular merchant, Antonio, is the protagonist of neither the romantic comedy plot nor the subplot involving Shylock. In fact, it can be argued that the character central to both is Portia, who emerges at the end having all the rest of the main cast dependent on, diminished by, or indebted to her. (Russin 116)

Portia takes control during the play, she does not sit back and watch idly as her male counterparts make deals and wreak havoc on the city of Venice. She is able to keep a level head and devise plans that give her the outcomes she desires, particularly during the legal argument during Antonio and Shylock. Portia's level head and cool demeanor gives her the most power, and in conversation with Bassanio, she says she is “. . . an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractisèd, Happy in this, she is not yet so old But she may learn; happier than this, She is not bred so dull but she can learn; Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit Commits itself to yours to be directed As from her lord, her governor, her king” (*The Merchant of Venice* III.ii.164-170). Portia's recognition of her shortcomings is a very powerful tactic which allows her to dominate over men, an unusual feat for a woman in Elizabethan England.

Somewhat similarly, Beatrice from *Much Ado about Nothing* is the strong female voice in a society dominated by men. The major difference between Beatrice and Portia is that Beatrice is much more boisterous when it comes to her dislike of the male persona, which leads men to find

her unmarriageable. However, Beatrice recognized her station as a woman gives her very little power, especially when it comes to avenging her cousin Hero's broken heart. After Hero's engagement is broken, Beatrice becomes enraged with Claudio for questioning her cousin's virtue, and tells Benedict- who ends up marrying Beatrice at the end of the play- how she wishes she were a man because, as a woman, she is unable to inflict the same pain on Claudio that he inflicted on Hero. In her enraged state, Beatrice says:

Is he not approved in the height a villain that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman? Oh, that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands and then, with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancor—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace.

(Much Ado about Nothing IV.i.298-305)

Beatrice frightens Benedict with her hateful speech, and her pride is her Achilles' heel. Beatrice's voice is a powerful one- she speaks bluntly and often truthfully. Her character, not unlike Portia, is able to move forward past her station as a woman, but Beatrice is not seen as the virtuous, intelligent woman Portia is.

Shakespeare created two women whose voices were strong and very feminist in nature. Despite the time in which he was working, the Bard acknowledged that the power balance between the men and women in England was completely askew. He made women who questioned the patriarchy and thus Shakespeare brought forth some of the earliest feminists.

“Demand me nothing: what you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak word”¹⁰

¹⁰ Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. The Riverside Shakespeare. 2nd ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1251-1288. Print.

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest writers of all time. His contribution to the English language far exceeds the invention words and phrases, “What Shakespeare invents are ways of representing human chances, alterations not only caused by flaws and by decay but effected by the will as well, and by the will’s temporal vulnerabilities” (Bloom 2). Shakespeare’s popularization of words is his main contribution to the English Language. The Bard transcended being just a playwright and became a doctor, a theologian, a documentarian, and perhaps most importantly, an influence. His plays are still being read and performed all over the world today. With Shakespeare’s influence reaching beyond the English Language, his writing is more relevant and more global than any other author’s. Shakespeare’s influence has transcended time and he will continue to add to the English language, for all the world’s a stage (*As You Like It*, II.vii.142).

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