A Linguistic View of Some Problems of Teaching Shakespeare

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A LINGUISTIC VIEW OF SOME PROBLEMS OF TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

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1. Two principles:

   (a) The dialect in which Shakespeare writes is an entity: it cannot be reconstructed by juxtaposing pieces of modern usage with pieces of imputed 16th Century usage taken from a dictionary or grammar. It must all be seen as potentially different.

   (b) It is impossible to accept traditional rhetoric as it stands, because it constantly violates linguistic principles, particularly those of phonetics. It is also impossible to extract Shakespeare by applying principles of modern rhetoric. The right approach for us is to endeavor to interpret traditional rhetoric in our linguistic terms.

2. Sounds. Much work has been done on the pronunciation of Shakespearian English (Kokeritz, Dobson). But it is pre-phonemic, and in the post-phonemic period of linguistics it is difficult to see how to systematize it.

   It is dangerous to draw conclusions by assuming that puns must be strictly homonymic, for they may not be phonetically identical:

   1H4 2.04.239 if reasons were as plentiful as blackberries.

   reasons: reːznz
   reːznz: 'raisins'

   It is dangerous to draw conclusions from rhyme, because it may be eye-rhyme, approximate rhyme, or traditional rime:

   HAM 4.04.65-6 from this time forth
   My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth.

   PER 3. Cho. 47-8 the grisled north
   Disgorges such a tempest forth.

   We remain uncertain whether "meet" and "meat" have the same sound for Shakespeare or not.

   The need to clear up stylistic definition in this area:

   'Apt alliteration's artful aid.'
ASSONANCE

Alliteration

Subassonance

/e/ /E:/

/æ/ /a:/

Is there superassonance?

CONSONANCE

Subconsonance /t/ /d/

/s/ /z/

/θ/ /ð/

/n/ /m/

/p b m f v.

Superconsonance

st, str, sp, spr, etc.

3. Rhythm. Traditional metrical systems are phonetically naive, but we have to start from them. I use a four-point scale (// / \ ()).

Syncopating the normal spoken rhythm against the imputed pattern. Maintenance of the imputed pattern as mental event.

HAM 1.01.6 You come most carefully upon your hour.

Stress and pitch: an emphatic system overriding the imputed system.

HAM 1.01.10 Have you had quiet guard? - Not a mouse stirring.

HAM 1.01.78 Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day.

4. Lexis. (i) The ascription of senses to a word is like sticking plays on a map: the senses are not categories, e.g. LLL 4.03.338:

is not Love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?

Not 'yet' as in mod E, but not simply 'continuously' (as enjoined in many Elizabethan contexts); but partaking of both, e.g. mod E 'for ever'. The important thing is to provide the student, not with a synonym, but with contexts.

(ii) In supplying such contexts, the relevant group of words needs to be borne in our mind. The group may be etymological, e.g. fancy, fantasy, fantastic/fantastical; or social, e.g. noble, gentle, honour, brave, breeding, high; villain, rogue, slave, peasant, bastard, base; or colour, e.g. red, gold; blue, gray; or complementary, e.g. fair, sweet.

(iii) The alternation of Germanic/Romance-Latin has often been observed, but what are its functions? E.g. in phrases like 'coagulate gore' in the Player's speech (HAM 2.02.462), or 'this my hand will rather/ The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red' (MAC 2.02.58-60). Note this type of alternation in the translations of Seneca, and in the development of Senecan rhetoric (Tamburlaine, The Tragedy of Dido, JC, HAM, OTH, MAC, ANT, COR, WT).

(iv) The different social background: thou/you (e.g. between Hamlet and his mother in HAM 3.04); modes of address above and below, e.g. the ambivalence of 'sir' and the clarity of 'sirrah'. We need to plot the
social position of each character and can do so above all by these modes of address. In HAM 1.01, what is the social order of Francisco, Barnardo, Marcellus, Horatio?

(v) Associational chains (independent of syntax); especially erotic, e.g. MM 1.01., particularly 25-43; 76-84:

Ang. Always obedient to your Grace's will, I come to know your pleasure.

Duke. Angelo: There is a kind of character in thy life, That to th' observer doth thy history Fully unfold. Thyself and thy belongings Are not thine own so proper as to waste Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee. Heaven doth with us as we with torches do, Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd But to fine issues; nor Nature never lends The smallest scruple of her excellence, But like a thrifty goddess, she determines Herself the glory of a creditor, Both thanks and use. But I do bend my speech To one that can my part in him advertise. Hold therefore, Angelo: In our remove be thou at full ourself.

(will, pleasure, unfold, belongings, proper, waste, virtues, torches, light, virtues, go forth of us, Spirits, touch'd, issues, use, bend, part, Hold, remove).

76-84

Escal. I shall desire you, sir, to give me leave To have free speech with you; and it concerns me To look into the bottom of my place. A pow'r I have, but of what strength and nature I am not yet instructed.

Ang. 'Tis so with me. Let us withdraw together, And we may soon our satisfaction have Touching that point.

Escal. I'll wait upon your honor.

(desire, free, bottom, pow'r, strength, nature, withdraw together, we may soon our satisfaction have Touching that point, honor).

This is a comedy about sex.

(vi) Abstract for person. This is a preferable way of approaching personification, e.g. SON 129, where 'lust' vacillates between meaning a lustful person, a personified quality, a state of mind.
(vii) The problem of tone (affectation, irony, social). Is tone any more difficult to establish and any more subjective than so-called plain sense?

(viii) The function of archaisms and neologisms.

5. Syntax. The outstanding phenomenon, that of 'abnormal' word order. The demands of metre and rhyme. Hyperbaton may serve these and yet serve other functions: the effect of phrasal juxtaposition:

HAM 1.01.208 And I with them the third night kept the watch.

The sense of contortion and its dramatic function:

HAM 1.02.1-14 King. Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious, and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
Taken to wife;

Change of syntactical order in order to follow the order of events:

HAM 1.02.196-9 Two nights together had these gentlemen, Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch, In the dead waste and middle of the night, Been thus encount'red.

209-11 Where, as they had delivered, both in time, Form of the thing, each word made true and good, The apparition comes.

6. Style. (a) The existence or not of a pattern. Some are clear enough:

Fair is foul and foul is fair (antimetabole)
surcease, success (paromoeon)

But when is there, and is there not e.g. assonance, consonance? There is the frequency of sounds: /z/s/r/, /d/, /t/ are more frequent than /g/k/, /p/, /b/. But it does not follow that two examples of e.g. /s/, /r/ are not significant:

HAM 4.04.60 Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red.
The vocal murmur /ə/ is too frequent usually to have significance. But what about unstressed /I/? It has the same quality as stressed /I/:

OTH 2.03.281 invisible spirit; 387 soliciting his wife.

(b) The ascription of meaning to stylistic features.

(i) The musical meaning. The problem of programme music.

Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony.

(ii) Onomatopoeia. Meaning does not inhere in sounds: the tendency is for the sense to reinforce itself with the sounds rather than for the sounds to impose a sense on the context. Sibilants for a storm, tears, and sleep:

TMP 1.02.3-5 The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch, But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek, Dashes the fire out.

ANT 3.02.43-4 The April's in her eyes, it is love's spring, And these the showers to bring it on.

MAC 2.02.34-7 Sleep... great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast.

(iii) It may be a tone that is reinforced, e.g. irony, sarcasm, affectation:

HAM 2.02.195-204

Ham. Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams; all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

But what are we to say about e.g. /k/ in LR 3.02.1-9:

Lear. Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage, blow! You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks! You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires, Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world! Crack nature's moulds, all germaines spill at once That makes ingrateful man!
crack your cheeks, cataracts, hurricanoes, cocks, thought-executing, Vaunt-couriers, oak-cleaving, all-shaking, Strike, thick, Crack, makes. There is the superficial onomatopoeia of crack, cataracts, but what about the rest?

Is it storm-painting or Lear-painting? Who is exercising the power? Is he enjoying it? Gusto. Is the /k/ part of the gusto pattern?

7. Conclusion. I have left the rhetorical devices to the treatment of my colleague, Camille Stilson Williams. But I would say generally that the application of readily comprehensible linguistic principles to the field of traditional rhetoric can provide generalizations which will help students in mastering the skill of reading Shakespeare, and, by implication, of anything else.

GLOSSARY AND COMMENTARY

ALLITERATION (2.2): The repetition of the initial sounds of words in a line or a sentence. As in HAM 3.04.31:

Thou wretched rash, intruding fool, farewell! 31

--or Genesis 36:1:

Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.

This is a specialized case of consonance or assonance. It would be more satisfactory to consider alliteration the repetition of the initial sounds of stressed syllables, since the division of sounds into words is useful for the written language, but somewhat arbitrary when applied to speech. The purpose of this book is to introduce basic skills while requiring the student to have only rudimentary knowledge of phonetics.

Deciding whether a significant sound pattern exists in a matter of judgment; sometimes the presence of other rhetorical devices establishes the significance of a sound pattern, as in 1 Kings 4:30:

And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

If east and Egypt weren't in corresponding positions in phrases which are of the approximately same length (isocolon) and similar syntactic structures (parison) it is unlikely that the assonant allliteration would appear significant. See notes at assonance and consonance.

ANACOLUTHON (4.1): Ending a sentence with a structure different from that with which it was begun. As in TMP 2.01.280.287.

And melt ere they molest! Here lies your brother 281
No better than the earth he lies upon,
If he were that which now he's like—that's dead
Whom I with this obedient steel, three inches of it,
Anacoluthon is a general term which would include some instances of allethetia (substitution of one case gender, number, tense, a mood for another), hypallage (change of agreement or application of words), syllepsis (one verb lacking congruence with at least one subject it governs), and instances in which the sentence is begun with one subject but ends by a shift to another subject, changing the subject from the singular to the plural, the occurrence of a dependent clause which anticipates an independent clause that never comes, etc.

ANAPHORA (1.1): The repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive sentences, clauses, or phrases. For example, HAM 3.03,67-69:

O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engag'd! Help, angels! Make assay . . .

The important point about anaphora is that it is a pattern of repetition. While we have treated only what we call serial anaphora, we do recognize that what we call interrupted anaphora exists, for example MAC 1.01.1-4:

1. Witch. When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
2. Witch. When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

While lines 3 and 4 are clearly a case of anaphora, the question arises "is there anaphora in lines 1, 3 and 4?" Once a pattern, such as anaphora, has been established, it is inevitable that variation will result. Certainly the variation can be as interesting and as effective as the pattern.

ANTIMETABOLE (1.3): The repetition of the same words or phrases in reverse order, often emphasizing the opposition or contrast between the ideas expressed by those words and phrases. An example of antimetabole is MAC 1.01.11-12:

All. Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

Antimetabole may be distinguished from chiasmus in that antimetabole will be a repetition of the same words or phrases, while chiasmus will be a repetition of the same ideas, not necessarily using the same words.

ANTITHESIS (1.3): A syntactic framework of conjoined similar structures each containing a word, pair of words or a phrase whose contrast with the other word, pair of words, or phrase is established by the syntactic similarity and is not necessarily semantically inherent. An example of antithesis is Romans 9:13:

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.
It is the framework that is necessary to the antithesis: it must be sufficient to invite the recognition of the antithesis. For this purpose, sequent adjective plus noun phrases (e.g. "despised substance of divinest show") or a coordinate conjunction (e.g. "So foul and fair a day") are insufficient.

ASSONANCE (2.1): The irregular repetition of a vowel sound, as in MAC 2.04.27-8:

Rosse. 'Gainst nature still!
Thriftless ambition, that will ravin up

The /i/ sound occurs five (or six) times in the two lines in the above example. Unstressed vowels (particularly as the initial sounds of words) are frequently reduced to /ə/ for open vowels or /I/ for closed vowels; whether a vowel is reduced depends upon the speaker's delivery of the utterance: his dialect, level of language, juncture, and stress. Can unstressed reduced vowels comprise a significant sound pattern, or will stressed vowels always predominate in an utterance?

In recognizing assonance (and also consonance, alliteration, homoeoteleuton) it must be determined whether a significant sound pattern exists: the same sounds must be repeated fairly close together, and there must be a significant number of them. Keep in mind that sound patterns may run across lines or sentences, even across speeches by different characters. While two repetitions of the same sound in one pentameter may not itself appear significant, if the next line contains four of that same sound, obviously the sound is drawing attention. The effect achieved may be varied: two instances of the same sound in one pentameter can be significant if the two words are adjacent, five or six instances of a sound may exert a very subtle influence if those instances are spread over, say, three lines. See notes at alliteration and consonance.

ASYNDETON (3.1): The omission of conjunctions between a series of three or more words, phrases, or clauses. In writing, the omitted conjunctions are replaced by commas. Example: Romans 1:29:

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers.

We have specified a series of three or more words, phrases, or clauses, because in the English language it is fairly common, both in speech and writing, to use a triad in the form of word, plus word, plus conjunction plus word.

Some rhetoricians use brachylogia as the omission of conjunctions between words, and asyndeton as the omission of conjunctions between clauses, but we here use asyndeton as a general term, realizing that there may be subsets.

CONSONANCE (2.1): The irregular repetition of a consonant sound. Example: In MAC 2.04.7 there is the phrase "strangles the travelling lamp." There is consonance with tr, ng, and l.
Do not confuse consonant clusters with spelling conventions. If the consonants in a cluster, such as st, can be separately articulated, they may function in separate consonantal chains, e.g., s consonance in "sleepy, silent last sigh." Spelling has conventionally represented some sounds (phonemes) by consonant clusters: sh for (ʃ) in ship (some American systems use /ʃ/); ch for (ʧ) in church (some American systems use /ʧ/); these sounds and sʃ for the s in pleasure (some American systems use /z/) are produced by combining the point of articulation of one sound and manner of articulation of another sound; rather than by grouping separable phonemes. See notes at alliteration and assonance.

EPANALEPSIS (1.2): The repetition of a word or phrase after a break, parenthesis, or at irregular intervals. For example, there is epanalepsis in HAM 2.02.421-22:

You are welcome, masters, welcome all. I am glad to see thee well. Welcome, good friends, 0, old friend!

Epanalepsis is used in this book as a general term which would include what some rhetoricians call duplicatio (repetition of a word or words in succeeding clauses), diacope (repetition of a word with one or a few words in between, and prole (repetition of a word with a new signification or after the intervention of another word or words).

EPISTROPHE (1.1): The repetition of a word or words at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences. An example of epistrophe is found in Numbers 29:16:

And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

This book treats only serial epistrophe, but it is clear that interrupted epistrophe exists (see commentary on anaphora above).

EPIZEUXIS (1.2): The immediate repetition of the same word or phrase.

1H4 2.04.482-483:

Bard. 0 my lord, my lord, the sheriff with a most monstrous watch is at the door.

It contains an example of epizeuxis: epizeuxis sometimes occurs as anadiplosis (repetition of the last word of one line or clause to begin the next).

HENDIADYS (3.2): The use of the following pattern: substantive (noun) plus conjunction plus substantive instead of adjective plus substantive; or adjective plus adjective instead of adverb plus adjective. An example of hendiadys is found in MAC 3.01.5: "But that myself should be the root and the father," where "root and father" appears to be equivalent to paternal root.
HOMOEOTELEUTON (2.2): The repetition of final sounds of words in a line or sentence. Note the homoeoteleuton in this line from Micah 1:8: "Therefore I will wail and howl."

HYPERBATON (4.2): Separating words that ordinarily belong together; departing from normal word order. An example of hyperbaton is found in TMP 1.02.201-203:

Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors
O' th' dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
and sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks

(See Sister Miriam Joseph, Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language, p. 54).

While some rhetoricians classify sentences with inverted word order (the verb or the object preceding the subject) and sentences containing parenthetical statements, or a series of parenthetical statements, as hyperbaton, such constructions are commonplace in Shakespeare and so have not been classified as such.

ISOCOLON (3.3): Adjacent sentences, clauses, or phrases with about the same number of syllables (9-11, 18-22). Hannah's Song of Rejoicing contains isocolon, 1 Sam. 2:4:

The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

Sequent blank verses (iambic pentameter) are, by definition, isocolon; and therefore do not stand out as such. Isocolon in prose, or isocolon which divides or extends the line of a verse passage (for example, two clauses or five syllables each in a blank verse line, two or more clauses or sentences of fifteen syllables each in sequent blank verse lines) ought to be noted as significant.

Frequently isocolon will occur as clause plus conjunction plus clause. Sometimes the conjunction need not be "counted" in order for the clauses to be the same length, and other times the conjunction (usually counted with the second clause) must be counted.

INTERNAL RIME (2.2): Rime within a line or sentence. MAC 1.01.1 "When shall we three meet again?" has internal rime with we and three.

It is necessary to judge whether riming words are close enough to be "heard."

OXYMORON (1.3): The juxtaposition of two words whose literal meanings are incongruous, if not contradictory. Note the contradiction of two juxtaposed words in MND 5.01.59.

That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow.

Hot ice is oxymoron; strange snow is not. Oxymoron is differentiated from antithesis in that we are dealing on a word rather than a syntactic level.
PARALLELISM (3.4): Repeating similar ideas in different, though semantically parallel, phrasing; sentence constructions are not necessarily parallel (see parison below), but semantic contents are. Isaiah 55:12 contains parallelism:

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Composition teachers often refer to "parallel sentence structure;" as stated above, the parallelism we are talking about is not dependent upon sentence structure, except generally, but rather on semantic content.

PARISON (3.3): Adjacent sentences, clauses, or phrases, with the same syntactic structure: for example, TN 1.05.156-158:

Mal. Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy; as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple.

Parison is what many contemporary composition teachers would call parallel sentence structure.

PAROMOEON (2.2): Two or more words whose initial and final sounds are the same; a combination of alliteration and homoeteleuton. Surcease and success are an instance of paromoeon in MAC 1.07.4: "With his surcease, success: that but this blow . . . ."

PERIPHRASIS (3.4): Circumlocution. The following is periphrastic:

TMP 1.02.121-132

Pros. Now the condition.
This King of Naples, being an enemy
To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit,
Which was, that he in lieu o' th' premises,
Of homage, and I know not how much tribute,
Should presently extirpate me and mine
Out of the dukedom, and confer fair Milan
With all the honors on my brother; whereon,
A treacherous army levied, one midnight
Fated to th' purpose, did Antonio open
The gates of Milan, and i' th' dead of darkness
The ministers for th' purpose hurried thence
Me and thy crying self.

PLEONASM (3.4): Redundancy in a sentence. Note the pleonasm in MAC 5.03.23: "Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf."

PLEONASTIC PAIRS (3.2): Pleonasm occurring in the following pattern: adjective plus conjunction plus adjective, or substantive (noun) plus conjunction plus substantive. There are two pleonastic pairs in Micha 1:8:

Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls.
POLYPTOTON (2.3): Using several words having the same root but with different suffixes, prefixes, or a variation of the root itself. An example of polyptoton is found in MAC 1.02.36-38:

If I say sooth, I must report they were
As cannons overcharg'd with double cracks, so they
Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.

POLYSYNDETON (3.1): Three or more words, phrases, or clauses joined by conjunctions. We have specified three as a number since in English it is very common to have a triad in the form of word, plus word, plus conjunction plus word. Note the use of conjunctions in Isaiah 8:15.

And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

SENSE-PLAY (2.3): "Playing" on different meanings of one word. Note the play on the word lie in SON 138:11-14:

O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not t' have years told
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

Sense-play is part of what is commonly called punning; rhetoricians have identified various forms of this playing on words, including paronomasia (playing on the sounds and meanings of words), asteismus (facetious answer that plays on a word), cacemphaton (double-entendre), and distinctio. In this book we use only two forms, sense-play and word-play: we feel that these are useful distinctions, and those students who wish to be more specific can refer to Lanham and Joseph for further help. (See Word-play below).

TRANSFERRED MODIFIERS (4.3): A modifier 'attached' to one word it could modify, but seeming more appropriately the modifier of another word in the sentence or of one understood in the context. Transferred modifiers are a subset of hyperbaton, and frequently occur in the form adjective plus noun, the adjective apparently a shortened adjectival or adverbial phrase. Note, for example, warlike shield in the following text, MAC 5.08.32-33:

Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff.

It seems likely that warlike refers to Macbeth himself, rather than to his shield.

TRIADS (3.2): Coordinate (not subordinates or appositives) words (and sometimes phrases or clauses) in groups of three. See, for example, MAC 4.01.79:

2 App. Be bloody, bold and resolute: laugh to scorn.

WORD-PLAY (2.3): "Playing" on similar-sounding or associated words. The following example uses associated words, hot and cold, 2H4 1.01.49-51.
North. Ha? Again.
Said he young Harry Percy's spur was cold?
Of Hotspur, Coldspur? that rebellion
Had met ill luck?

An instance of word-play in which similar sounding words are played upon is found in MAC 5.09.14: "Had I as many sons as I have hairs," in which hairs and heirs are brought to mind with the use of sons and hairs.

While word-play exists in scripture, the King James Version of the Bible is a translation, so the word-play is not readily discernible.