Shakespeare’s lively and precocious young children do not seem to be especially linguistically inventive. Despite their adult ways of talking, they don’t go in for the kind of lexical creation I have been calling Williamsisms — words whose first recorded usage is found in Shakespeare. The Boy in Henry V (3.2) has a 250-word speech with not a Williamsism in sight. Mamillius: Nothing. Rutland: Nothing. Young Maccab, young Coriolanus: Nothing. I was beginning to think that looking for child Williamsisms was one of those pointless exercises, when Arthur saved the day. In King John (4.1), the young prince is faced with Hubert, who is threatening to put out his eyes. The urgency of his situation fosters eloquent pleas, and as part of his rhetoric we find three newly minted compounds:

Are you more stubborn-hard than hammered iron? (4.1.67)

What need you be so boisterous-rough? (4.1.76)

Fierce fire and iron are said to be Creatures of note for mercy-lacking uses. (4.1.120)

Arthur uses boisterous again a few lines later — as an adjective this time (it has the force of an adverb above —‘boisterously’).

Then feeling what small things are boisterous there [i.e. in the eyes]

Your vile intent must needs seem horrible. (4.1.94)

Boisterous is a Williamsism, in one of its senses, and also a ‘false friend’ — a word whose familiarity fools us, because its meaning has changed. In modern English, it means ‘exuberantly high-spirited’, but this sense didn’t develop until a century after Shakespeare was writing. When we talk about children being boisterous today, we are more amused than upset. It has positive connotations now.

In Shakespeare’s time, the all the uses of the word were negative. Its meaning of ‘violent, tempestuous, savage’ was already in the language, but he is the first recorded user of it to mean ‘painful, rough to the feelings’, as when Arthur talks about his eyes. He had earlier used it in this way in Romeo and Juliet, when Romeo means about Rosaline, Love for him is ‘too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn’ (RJ 1.4.26). And we see it again later in As You Like It, when Rosalind condemns Phoebe’s love letter as being ‘boisterous and cruel’ (4.3.92).