



wony wony

*mosty pasty
wot of least self
stoggyly descandy*

Have I twice said well?

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If you're going to go to the trouble of inventing a word, you might as well try it out a second time before dropping it. Such an impulse must have been in Shakespeare's mind on some of his excursions into word-creation. I can't otherwise explain an effect which occurs quite often in the plays, where a *Williamism* – a Shakespearian neologism – is used twice in quick succession, and then not at all thereafter.

Outsell is one of those excursions, meaning 'exceed in value, surpass'. In both cases the notion is related to Innogen in *Cymbeline*. At one point, Iachimo reports his meeting with Innogen to Posthumus, saying 'Her pretty action did outsell her gift' (2.4.102), and in the next Act Cloten reflects on her qualities in the same way: 'The best she hath, and she of all compounded / Outsells them all' (3.5.75). Shakespeare doesn't use the word again.

Disgracious is another, in its sense of 'disliked, displeasing'. Richard uses it twice, first as Duke of Gloucester, then as King, both times referring to himself. To Buckingham he says 'I have done some offence / That seems disgracious in the city's eye' (3.7.111); and to the Duchess of York 'If I be so disgracious in your eye, / Let me march on' (4.4.178). No further use of that word afterwards either.

Incony is a third example; it means 'fine, darling, rare'. This is one of those words which keep etymologists in business, for its origins are uncertain. It probably relates to *cony*, 'rabbit', which developed as a term of male-to-female endearment. It was pronounced 'cunny', rhyming with *money* and *honey*, and this pronunciation inevitably gave it an indecent association, which was also current around 1600. It seems to have been a popular word – Marlowe, Middleton, and Jonson all use it – but the earliest instances in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are ascribed to Shakespeare. It is a Costardism. In 3.1.133, Costard refers to Don Armado as 'my incony jew', and 200 lines later (4.1.143) describes the repartee as 'most incony vulgar wit'. Here also, these two instances are the only Shakespearean ones.

A slightly different instance is *discandy*, meaning 'dissolve, liquefy, melt away'. Antony uses it when reflecting on those who have left him for Caesar: 'The hearts / That spanieled me at heels, to whom I gave / Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets / On blossoming Caesar' (4.12.22). Is he recalling the same neologism used by Cleopatra a few scenes earlier (3.13.165)? Antony has seen her let Thidias kiss her hand, and accuses her of being cold-hearted. She responds with vehemence, calling down

hail from heaven onto herself, to dissolve her completely, if the accusation be true:

The next Caesarion smite,
Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless

The new word evidently bemused the Folio typesetter, who printed it as *discandering* (though he got the later usage right, as *dis-Candie*).

Other interesting words apart from Williamisms can also be found used twice in quick succession then never again. Shakespeare is not the first to use *aby* meaning 'suffer for, pay for' – it had been in English since the 12th century – but when he does use it, it appears just twice. Both instances are from Demetrius talking to Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2.175): 'Disparage not the faith thou dost not know, / Lest to thy peril thou aby it dear'; then, less than 200 lines later, referring to Helena (335): 'if thou dost intend / Never so little show of love to her, / Thou shalt aby it'.

Sometimes the double usage cuts across plays, and perhaps therefore adds a tiny note of confirmation to hypotheses about dating. *Dry-beat* is a case in point, meaning 'cudgel, thrash'. This isn't a Williamism: it was being used around the time that Shakespeare was born. But in the plays, it appears only twice, in *Romeo and Juliet*. Mercutio tells Tybalt he means to take one of his nine lives: 'That I mean to make bold withal, and, as you shall use me hereafter, dry-beat the rest of the eight' (3.1.78). And later in the play, Peter harangues the Second Musician by saying 'I will dry-beat you with an iron wit' (4.5.122). There is only one other related use, and that appears in *Love's Labour's Lost*, when Berowne reflects on the lords' defeat by the ladies: 'By heaven, all dry-beaten with pure scoff!' (5.2.263). According to Wells and Taylor, *Romeo and Juliet* is 1594-5. *Love's Labour's Lost* is 1593-5 – but, perhaps, more 1594 than earlier, if the lexical similarity is persuasive.

Vasty is another example. This word is a favourite Shakespearian coinage, seen also in *plumby*, *steepy*, and elsewhere – and is used for the first time in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Morocco talks about 'the vasty wilds / Of wide Arabia' (2.7.41). It is simply a metrical variant of 'vast'. According to Wells and Taylor, this play was being written in 1596-7. What other play was being written then? *1Henry 4*. And what do we find there? Glendower to Hotspur: 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep' (3.1.50).

It intrigues me that the frequency of neologisms can be a useful source of evidence, not just about authorship, but also about the links between plays. And an even more intriguing thought occurs when we find *vasty* turning up in just one other play – in *Henry V*, where it appears in the Prologue ('vasty fields of France') and twice afterwards. Might its use have been triggered by reading over *Henry IV* by way of 'revision' before beginning work on the second sequel, a year or so later?