A GRAMMAR OF SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

Also by N. F. Blake and published by Palgrave

A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE
  (with Jean Moorhead)
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE
THE LANGUAGE OF SHAKESPEARE

A Grammar of Shakespeare's Language

N. F. BLAKE

For Carol

Contents

Preface

Grammar can mean many different things to different people (Greenbaum 1988) and so it is best that I indicate what is included in this grammar. Although sometimes included in books on Shakespeare's language, I do not, except incidentally, deal with such topics as phonology, lexicography, word-formation, dialects and variation in usage since these are topics which do not fall within the domain of grammar. This book is principally concerned with morphology and syntax. However, modern grammatical studies have enlarged the scope of grammar beyond the clause to include what is often described as text grammar, and I have followed this example. So this book tackles not only the organisation of the various elements within clauses, but also the way clauses are organised to create larger patterns in the language. These patterns fall partly in the domains of stylistics and rhetoric, but I do not focus directly on either of these in this book. Although some have complained that historians of the language have shown 'indifference to stylistic values' (Houston 1988: 92), it would take too much space to go deeply into this subject, though I have learned much from Houston's books. One of the justifications for compiling a grammar of Shakespeare's language is that Shakespeare exploited the resources of his language, which naturally reflects his command of style and rhetoric. In addition, this book does not concern itself with metre or rhyme, although it could reasonably be claimed that each may have some impact on the way Shakespeare organises his language. These two do not fall within the domain of grammar and would also take too long to deal with adequately in this kind of book. Some examples are noted as occurring in rhyme where this seems helpful to the reader.

Dr Johnson complained that 'The style of Shakespeare was in itself ungrammatical, perplexed, and obscure;' (Smallwood 1985: 41), but in more recent times scholars have tended to believe that Shakespeare could do no wrong. Spevack asserted that 'the fundamental premise in dealing with Shakespeare's language is that whatever is, is right.' (Spevack 1985: 344). Kermode has in his lat-

est book adopted a more sensible attitude towards Shakespeare's language (Kermode 2000). Unfortunately, it is difficult to know how much of what survives in the quartos and First Folio represents Shakespeare's own work. That he worked with other playwrights on many of his plays is beyond dispute. That the plays may have been altered during the production is almost certain. That scribes and compositors made adjustments to the text or failed to copy what was in front of them is inevitable. Nevertheless, a book dealing with Shakespeare's grammar cannot go into the details of what precisely may or may not have been written by Shakespeare himself, even if others claim that they can tell what is and what is not his. Hence a book like this is really dealing with the language of the plays and poems attributed to the Shakespeare canon without dealing with the vexed question of which parts may actually be his. In essence this book deals with a restricted area of the language at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. It attempts to be descriptive within those limits. There are inconsistencies in usage and failures of expression in the canon, whether they are attributable to Shakespeare or not. There is no assumption here that whatever is found in the canon is 'right', but mostly the usage is described without reference to whether it is good or bad grammar – concepts which Shakespeare would not have found easy to understand.

The language of Shakespeare is a topic to which literary scholars pay lip-service, though they rarely pay as much attention to it as it deserves. It is naturally easy for language scholars to assume that the subject is more important than anything else since it forms the foundation of Shakespeare's meaning. Perhaps inevitably both sides adopt rather opposed positions in any such debate, as van Peer has stated:

> Linguistic analysis has an in-built tendency to *over*estimate the importance of linguistic form, and to *under*estimate the influence of context (except in some areas, such as pragmatics and discourse analysis). Literary studies, on the other hand, tend to the opposite, i.e. to *under*estimate the importance of form and to *over*estimate the contribution of contextual information (except in some areas, such as stylistics and poetics). It is not difficult to see how an overemphasis on either of the necessary ingredients may easily lead to one-sided or ill-founded interpretations.
> (van Peer 1988: 8)

In this book I have not tried to offer many interpretations, though I do from time to time suggest that a passage may be misunderstood or mispunctuated in some modern editions. Since I use Wells and Taylor (1988) as the basis of referencing to the text, I have often used their text as an example of where I think the text may have been misunderstood. I must emphasise that this is merely a matter of convenience and in no way does it indicate that I think their text should be held up as an example of incomplete editing. In most cases their text simply reflects what has become traditionally accepted in modern editions.

Wells, for his part, has been rather critical of language scholars, especially as regards modernisation of the text. In Wells 1984 (p. 7) he refers to an anonymous professor of English Language whom he consulted about some matter of language in Shakespeare. He claims that this professor was almost apoplectic when he discovered that the edition Wells was preparing was to be modernised. Wells went on to recognise that 'while students of the language may prefer old-spelling editions for working purposes, those concerned with literary and dramatic values are happy with modernised versions' (1984: 7). He goes on in this book to offer his justification for modernising Shakespeare for the modern reader, which I have commented on elsewhere (Blake 1990b). It is interesting that Shakespeare is treated as a rather special case when it comes to modernisation. Editions of other authors of his time, such as Spenser and Jonson, are often available in the original, if somewhat modified, spelling although modernised spelling editions are also produced. But the tradition with Shakespeare has been to present his language in a modernised form, and edited old-spelling editions of his plays are less easy to come by. As Wells himself has recognised 'no remotely satisfactory old-spelling edition exists' (1984: 7). I have decided that, as this book focuses on language, it is most sensible to quote the text in F, where that is available, and when that does not contain the example I wish to use I quote from a quarto version, usually the first quarto. In all cases the original punctuation is kept, though there are times in F when it is difficult to decide whether a full-stop or a comma is meant because of the difficulty of interpreting the printing. To rely upon modern editions with their modern punctuation may be to perpetuate misunderstandings or unnecessary emendations of the text, as one can see by looking at examples quoted in Abbott (1870) or Franz

(1924). But the lineation has for convenience been tied to the edition by Wells and Taylor (1988), rather than to the Through Line Number (TLN) system, since the former is more likely to be accessible to the ordinary reader. It is also my belief that all students of Shakespeare, whether of a literary or linguistic inclination, benefit from reading the plays and poems in a facsimile of the original texts to get away from the accretion of modern scholarship which may sometimes hinder rather than help a full appreciation.

In this book I have used a grammatical terminology which is somewhat eclectic as it draws upon both traditional grammatical and functional grammatical terms. Functional grammar is the modern grammar which is closest in its terminology to traditional grammar, and it is not difficult to marry the two. Since traditional grammar is still the grammar known to most literary scholars and ordinary readers of Shakespeare, it is my hope that the adoption of this mix of terminology in this book will make it easy for both linguists and literary scholars to follow what is included in this book and how it is arranged. In some ways the present time is possibly not the ideal one for the compilation of a grammar of Shakespeare's language. The language in dramatic works of his time has much in common with the spoken language of today, but it is only recently that attempts have been made to work out a grammar for modern spoken English. Professor Carter and his colleagues are establishing the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE), and this will form the data for the establishment of a grammar of spoken English, though the results may not appear for some time yet. It is undoubtedly true that there could be much to link studies of Shakespeare's grammar with whatever future grammar this project produces. It is also true that there are many cases in Shakespeare's language, as with modern spoken English, where it is difficult to decide what is the best explanation of the grammar, for there are different ways in which it might be interpreted. Sometimes alternative explanations are offered, but at others a single interpretation is presented, though there may be other ways of understanding the text.

This grammar has inevitably been prepared over a number of years and during this time I have lectured on Shakespeare's language in many universities and conferences both at home and abroad. Most of these talks have subsequently been printed in

one form or another, and many are listed in the Bibliography. Some of the examples quoted in these papers have been used again in this book. I am grateful to my audiences for the many comments I received and for the discussions which followed my presentations since this has helped me both to refine my views and to improve my presentation. It should also be apparent that I could not have written this grammar without relying on the work of those scholars, both past and present, who have written on Shakespeare's grammar and more generally on the language of the Early Modern English period. Their work has been a support and an inspiration to me over the years. Although individual debts are not recorded here, I should like to thank all those scholars in whose footsteps I tread. Needless to say, the interpretations of Shakespeare's language offered here are my own, though they may build on what other scholars have written. I should like to thank Professor Ron Carter for lending me his copy of Calvo (1991), Professor Javier Pérez-Guerra for sending me a copy of his book (Pérez-Guerra 1999) and Dr Elena Seoane Posse for providing me with copies of some of her articles. I have enjoyed conversations about Shakespeare with various colleagues in Sheffield, especially Professor Mick Hattaway, with whom I have had debates about the various editions he has produced. I should like to thank the staff at the University of Sheffield Library, who have always been very helpful in providing me with material. I am grateful to the understanding of my wife Valerie who had assumed that when I retired I would be able to devote more time to her, but often found that the completion of this book prevented that. I would also like to thank my niece, Carol Chapman, who has taken me to see many performances of Shakespeare's plays, and as a small mark of my gratitude this book is dedicated to her.

Norman Blake
Sheffield 2001

Abbreviations

Titles of Shakespeare's works cited

The principle followed has been to use, where possible, two capital letters to reflect the first two words (excluding determiners) or the first two significant words of a work's customary title. Where there is only one word in a title, the abbreviation has a capital letter followed by two lower-case letters. This type of abbreviation is used for one of two titles where both plays could have had the same abbreviation, as with *Titus Andronicus* (TA) and *Timon of Athens* (Tim). As there are no quotations from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, TN is used for *Twelfth Night*. Titles with English kings' names are differentiated by the number of the play (if there is more than one for that king), the capital letter of the king's Christian name and the Arabic numeral of which king of that name it is (e.g. 1H4 = *The First Part of King Henry IV*).

AC	Antony and Cleopatra
AW	All's Well That Ends Well
AY	As You Like It
CE	Comedy of Errors
Cor	Coriolanus
Cym	Cymbeline
1H4	The First Part of Henry IV
2H4	The Second Part of Henry IV
H5	Henry V
1H6	The First Part of Henry VI
2H6	The Second Part of Henry VI
3H6	The Third Part of Henry VI
H8	Henry VIII (*or* All is True)
Ham	Hamlet
HL	The History of King Lear (the Quarto text)
JC	Julius Caesar
KJ	King John
KL	King Lear (the First Folio text)
LC	A Lover's Complaint

LL	Love's Labour's Lost
MA	Much Ado About Nothing
Mac	Macbeth
MM	Measure for Measure
MN	A Midsummer Night's Dream
MV	Merchant of Venice
MW	The Merry Wives of Windsor
Oth	Othello
Per	Pericles
R2	Richard II
R3	Richard III
RJ	Romeo and Juliet
RL	The Rape of Lucrece
Son	The Sonnets
TA	Titus Andronicus
TC	Troilus and Cressida
Tem	The Tempest
TG	Two Gentlemen of Verona
Tim	Timon of Athens
TN	Twelfth Night
TS	The Taming of the Shrew
VA	Venus and Adonis
WT	The Winter's Tale

Other Abbreviations

A	adverbial
Ad	addressee
adj	adjective/modifier
aux	auxiliary
C	complement
C_o	object complement
C_s	subject complement
cf.	compare
conj	conjunction
D	distance
F	First Folio (1623)
FLH	*Folia Linguistica Historica*
FTA	Face Threatening Act
I	interjection
ME	Middle English
N	negator

O   object
O_d direct object
OE   Old English
OED Oxford English Dictionary
O_i indirect object
P   power relation
PdE   Present-day English
pl   plural
Q   quarto(s) (distinguished as Q1 [first quarto], Q2 [second
          quarto] as necessary)
R   risk
Rptd reprinted
S   subject
sg   singular
ShE   Shakespeare's English
Sp   speaker
SS   Shakespeare Survey
V   verb
voc   vocative
W   weight