

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Shakespeare's Talking Animals

Language and Drama in Society

Terence Hawkes



Shakespeare's Talking Animals

First published in 1973, this book is about Shakespeare, language and drama. The first part introduces some common ideas of anthropology and linguistics into an area where they serve as a base for the discussion of usually literary matters. It attempts to link language to our experience of speech — examining its range, texture, and social functions. In part two, the author argues that in Elizabethan culture there was a greater investment in the complexities and demands of speech due to the widespread illiteracy of the time. It examines eight of Shakespeare's plays, together with one of Ben Jonson's, in light of their concern with various aspects of the role of spoken language in society.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Shakespeare's Talking Animals

Language and Drama in Society

Terence Hawkes



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

First published in 1973
by Edward Arnold

This edition first published in 2017 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1973 Terence Hawkes

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number: 74159556

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-23713-1 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-315-30059-7 (ebk)

FOREWORD

The original dust-cover of Terence Hawkes' Shakespeare's *Talking Animals* encapsulates precisely the substance of this ground-breaking book: on the front, a still from the opening of the Olivier film of *Henry V* set in a mock-up of the Elizabethan public theatre, and on the back, a still from John Hopkins' celebrated television play, *Talking to a Stranger*. Drama, whose institutional home was once 'theatre', has now migrated to the modern technological media of film and television. Hawkes's strategy is to return to Shakespeare, and to the non-literate past from which the plays emerged, and to speculate upon a future in which the metaphor of the Globe might be realised in the global reach of new technological media.

Shakespearean drama has become transformed into 'literature', a passage that occludes many of the distinct linguistic and thematic elements whose traces remain in the texts. Even more contentious, however, is the claim 'live' theatre is moribund and that its social role has been taken over by modern media. Shakespeare's *Talking Animals* appeared in 1973, in the aftermath of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), with its emphasis upon popular literacy, and before the seismic eruption of 'theory' into Literary Studies, in which Hawkes himself was centrally involved. His distinctive and abiding contribution is to recover the popular drama of a 'non-literate' culture, and to rescue Shakespeare from the clutches of an increasingly specialised vociferous literary criticism, while at the same time appropriating certain of its interpretative methodologies. Shakespeare's *Talking Animals* recovers an Aristotelian observation about what makes 'man' distinctively 'human', and uses it to explore the specific non-literate operations of 'language' within the 'popular' medium of Elizabethan theatre. Many of its arguments continue to remain both original and prescient, and they set a clear agenda for the upsurge of radical enquiry that accelerated in the 1980s. What was a novel thesis in 1973 has, in recent years, come to fruition in the recent practice of live streaming of theatre productions of Shakespeare to cinemas, and television, and the preservation of 'live' performances on DVD.

Hawkes' anthropological definition of 'culture' as a whole 'way of life' emphasises the distinction between the popular culture from which Shakespearean drama evolved, and the 'high' culture determined to transform these once popular, and necessarily ephemeral, 'oral' texts into a permanent Literature. What Shakespeare's *Talking Animals* amalgamates, uniquely, is the insights from historical linguistics, social anthropology, cultural history and criticism that extends imaginatively what might otherwise be little more than a bland literary ecumenicalism. What has now become a fashionable interdisciplinarity is offered here as a careful and persuasive integrated approach. While Renaissance commentators have always insisted on the period as a site of religious and philosophical crisis, and have sought to enlist the support of Shakespearean drama (tragedy in particular), the few earlier attempts to treat the plays as products of a 'popular' culture floundered on the rocks of a reductive formalism. In the fields of Classical Studies and Religious Historiography questions were beginning to be asked about the effects of the discovery of the technology of writing, an issue that has since exercised post-structuralist thinkers from Derrida onwards. The originality of Hawkes's thesis lay in his probing of the question of what life and 'drama' must have been like, and what its concerns were, in a largely 'non-literate' (as opposed to an 'illiterate') culture facing the onset of literacy, and to link the substance of a range of Shakespearean plays to a crisis that only more recently enquiries in to the *History of the Book* have begun (rather superficially) to investigate. His arguments also anticipated, and greatly assisted, the theoretical enquiries that were to sweep through Shakespeare Studies and beyond; indeed, his launching of the *New Accents Series* in 1977 with his own *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977) emanated directly from the foundations that were laid substantially in Shakespeare's *Talking Animals*, and were to find their apotheosis in his championing of the project of *Literary Presentism*, and in books such as *Meaning By Shakespeare* (1992), and *Shakespeare in the Present* (2002) in his series *Accents on Shakespeare*.

This important book touches directly and indirectly, on the central arguments that have, since its first publication, raged throughout the Humanities, although it is Hawkes's supreme expository gift to have succeeded in communicating complex ideas while continuing to be readily accessible to all. Also, the book's careful methodology gives the lie direct to claims that a theoretically informed interdisciplinary practice pathologically eschews the close reading of texts. Indeed, at the same time that Hawkes deftly dismantles some of the deeply cherished prejudices of a literary and literate Establishment, he deploys his unique and pioneering combination of analytical skills to provide original, unique and memorable readings of particular plays.

Hawkes's own methodology, that he subsequently went on to refine, is one that has become the norm, and widely imitated in relation to the study of texts, and his particular emphasis on the various historical pressures that determine the operations of language in action, brings the specialised study of linguistics into a closer alignment with the wider concerns that have always been central to the Humanities. The result is a significant departure from the sentimental affection for particular institutions, or for their élitist investment in the value of 'high' culture. His distinctive approach to the seminal link between Language, Drama and Society, raises important questions about the distinction between 'populism' and the 'popular', something that has had a modernity thrust upon it by more recent political events in Britain, Europe and the USA.

Shakespeare's Talking Animals unashamedly, and unapologetically probes the question that doubters about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays have continued to challenge: how could a predominantly non-literate culture have produced work of such extraordinary quality? Hawkes's answer is that non-literate culture is much more sophisticated than those who espouse 'literacy' are prepared to allow, such that its complexity manifests itself, in political institutions, its habits of mind, its methods of recollection, and, of course, its art, especially its dramatic art.

Of course, the speed with which Information Technology has developed, and the political nuances that have made the concept of 'globalisation' a problematical category, have tended to weaken some of the idealism that fuelled part of Marshall McLuhan's enthusiasm for Television and the 'global village'. But Hawkes is too sophisticated to be caught on the wrong side of this debate. He recognises the shortcomings of 'mass' audiences, and he distinguishes clearly between populism, and the 'popular'. Much of what he says about Shakespeare is of direct relevance to the issues that we encounter in the present, and in Shakespeare's *Talking Animals* we have the first major foray into what he himself was later to inaugurate as Literary Presentism, a vibrant mode of historical criticism dedicated to enquiring about the ways in which the present imposes itself upon the past. It is fitting that in the year in which we commemorate Shakespeare's death, we should also commemorate one of the most distinctive and challenging voices whose widespread influence has done much to transform and to reshape the present and the future of Shakespeare Studies in particular and Literary Studies more generally.

John Drakakis
University of Stirling
March, 2016

Shakespeare's
Talking Animals
Language and drama in society

Terence Hawkes



EDWARD ARNOLD

© Terence Hawkes 1973

First published 1973 by
Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.,
25 Hill Street, London W1X 8LL

ISBN: 0 7131 5697 X

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.

Printed in Great Britain by
Billing & Sons Limited, Guildford and London

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	i
<i>Part I: Language, Culture, Drama</i>	
1 Language as Culture	9
2 Gesture as Language	15
3 Drama as Language	24
4 Drama as Culture	31
<i>Part II: Shakespeare</i>	
5 Elizabethan Language, Culture, Drama	37
6 <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> : rhyme against reason	53
7 <i>Richard II</i> : the word against the word	73
8 <i>Hamlet</i> : the play on words	105
9 <i>Othello, Macbeth, and Jonson's Epicoene</i> : the language of men	127
10 <i>King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra</i> : the language of love	166
11 <i>The Tempest</i> : speaking your language	194
<i>Part III: Conclusions; New Languages for Old</i>	
12 Drama versus Theatre	215
Index	243



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to record a general debt of gratitude to my colleagues at University College, Cardiff, who variously listened to, read, and commented on this material in its successive stages. Special mention should be made of G. Ingham, James, Robin Moffet, and my sometime research student Malcolm Evans of the English Department who made particularly helpful observations. Needless to say, the many shortcomings which endure are my own responsibility. The typing skills of Mrs. I. Fawcett proved, as ever, exemplary.

An earlier version of Chapter 7 was originally published in *Language and Style*, parts of Chapter 10 first appeared in the *Review of English Studies*, and Chapter 12 incorporates material which began life as the basis of two B.B.C. talks, later published in *The Listener*. I am grateful for permission from these journals, where necessary, to reprint, refashion, or refurbish.

I am also grateful to the Cambridge University Press for permission to include at various points a modified version of some material taken from an essay, 'Shakespeare's Talking Animals', which I contributed to *Shakespeare Survey* 24; to Messrs. Routledge and Kegan Paul of London and the Humanities Press Inc. of New York, for permission to quote briefly from my book *Shakespeare and the Reason*; and to Messrs. Methuen & Co. (Associated Book Publishers) for permission to draw on a small amount of material which was presented in another connection in my book *Metaphor*.

Parts of this book have formed the basis of lectures delivered, in recent years, at various institutions in Britain and North America. As a result, I feel obliged to thank my hosts and

audiences at the University of Waterloo, Ontario; the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut; Rutgers University, New Jersey; the University of Stirling, Scotland; the International Shakespeare Conference and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Summer School at Stratford-upon-Avon; and at the World Centre for Shakespeare Studies in London, for their benign tolerance of my inadequacy, as well as their condign commentaries on my argument. I have profited from both.

It is no less pleasing to acknowledge the profit I have gained from conversations over the years with scholars as munificent of their learning as of their hospitality: in particular, Maurice Charney, Bernard Beckerman, and Edmund L. Epstein. The beneficence, encouragement and friendship of Allan Lewis, John Drakakis, and Eluned Brown also demand special commemoration.

Finally, I must thank my own students at Cardiff, their amiable scepticism ever the best antidote for overweening confidence. They will discover that they are still owed a book worthy of them.

My greatest debt of gratitude remains, as always, to my wife: *sine qua non*.

University College
Cardiff

TERENCE HAWKES

Introduction

This is a book about Shakespeare, language, and drama.

I make none of the conventional apologies for writing about Shakespeare. His plays had a centrality in respect of Elizabethan culture that is palpable, and that culture has a very special relationship with our own. It experienced the beginning of a process whose end we now sense, and to study any aspect of it is to study ourselves.

Nor can I apologize for writing, however trivially, about language. If language is man's distinctive feature, as linguists tell us, it is far too important to be abandoned to them.

It follows that the case argued in Part I of this book is hardly for specialists, and certainly not novel. It tries to introduce some common ideas of anthropology and linguistics into an area where they may serve as a ground-base for the discussion of matters usually judged to be of a 'literary' nature. Their unfamiliarity to readers with a 'literary' background seems to justify the fairly full exposition awarded them, particularly as the argument aims to call aspects of that background into question.

In linking language concretely with our experience of speech in actual social situations, I am aware that I risk the enflated scorn both of linguists and of literary critics. Unrepentant, I affirm my belief that language consists ultimately of what happens when people talk to each other.

I also believe that what happens when people talk to each other constitutes the raw material of drama. Plays, after all, are made out of speech. Also drama, by definition, is a communal art by whose means a community 'talks' to itself. A good

play 'utters' (or 'outers') the inward and formative presuppositions of its audience, confronts it with, and so potentially resolves, its own essential and defining tensions. This radical 'interlocutory' mode constitutes the foundation of the play's inherent involvement with language, with utterance, with the sound of the voice and the movement of the body.

It seems clear that a general awareness of such matters has implications for the study of drama, just as the study of drama in such a context has implications in turn for the analysis of the society that generates it. The four chapters of Part I set out to initiate that awareness by attempting to give some idea, however inadequate, of the range, texture, and social function of drama's raw material, and of the relationship it characteristically inculcates between plays and the way of life from which they originate and towards which they reflexively incline.

In an oral society, where utterance constitutes the basis of social life, the relationship between the society's language and its drama must obviously be raised to an even higher power. Part II of this book argues that, in the case of the culture which produced our greatest drama, we are confronted by a far more extensive investment in the complexities and demands of oral communication than custom admits. Shakespeare wrote, that is, for an audience most of whom could not have communicated effectively by means other than those of face-to-face oral encounter. As a result, his plays embody a discernible notion of language and its function in the community which illuminates both themselves and the way of life of their audience.

Of course, such an argument makes much of Elizabethan illiteracy. In fact, it deliberately risks over-emphasis in the matter in an effort to correct the covert presuppositions which, as an almost wholly literate society, we inherit and foster. I believe our own literacy blinds us to the nature of what must have been a central feature of Elizabethan life, and in that belief have devoted a number of pages at the beginning of Part II to an attempted description of the history, nature and extent of literacy's anaesthetic grip on the modern sensibility. I think that is the right way to put it. In the matter of literacy we represent, after all, a minority. Most people in the world

have never been, are not, and will never be able to read and write.

This is not to presume the question of Elizabethan literacy to be a simple or a settled matter. Historians know otherwise and the pages of Chapter 5 respond, I hope, to the complexity they recognise, and which is recognised in their disagreements. It would be foolish to argue that the Elizabethans were completely non-literate. What makes for intricacy is the age's state of transition in the matter; the fact that literate and non-literate traditions coexisted and were intermingled particularly by a medieval and revived 'classical' tradition of education which stressed the importance of the spoken word far more than modern education does; and the fact that literacy *per se* did not then necessarily involve the massive commitment to printed material in English that we tend to presume it predicates. There is even a sense in which the issue has less to do with literacy than with the way in which the developing technology of the printing industry responded to it. Books, and not the ability to read them, seem to cause the impact to which *Love's Labour's Lost* offers a riposte.

As a result, a simple counting of literate heads tends to prove misleading. The question is not how many people *could* read and write, but the extent to which they *did* in a society in which books, candles, privacy and motivation were variously in short supply and in which, perhaps even as a result, the most vivid and rewarding form of popular entertainment was provided by the oral art of drama. We must allow, as the historians rarely do, that the plays themselves constitute a considerable body of evidence in the matter. Whatever the extent to which Elizabethan society was *actually* literate, their presence suggests that there was also a sense in which it never ceased to be *virtually* non-literate. It is the edging of virtual into actual truth that characteristically precipitates art.

The remaining six chapters of Part II make a close examination of eight of Shakespeare's plays (spanning the Comedies, Histories and Tragedies) together with one of Ben Jonson's, in the light of their concern with various aspects of the role of spoken language in society. As the implications of this concern unwind, a view of society and of drama in relation to it emerges

which seems to lie, not only at their core, but at the core of the way of life from which the plays derive and towards which they are directed. They are seen to embody the notion that the essence of humanity lies in the efficacy of human communication: that man is the talking animal. In consequence, inhumanity often manifests itself most potently as the constriction or prohibition of talking and its concomitant activities. And as a result drama itself ultimately becomes a recurrent symbol of efficacious communication, as the plays indicate a firm faith both in the enabling capacity of man's 'talking' nature, and in themselves as the medium which best exemplifies it. Through art, pre-eminently the ephemeral art of 'playing', man talks to man, and so *is* man.

If this is so, it seems to follow that the study of the structures embodying drama in any society will afford a uniquely rewarding insight into that society. In any case, such can hardly be avoided, for to study a play is to study its audience. The difference between the nature of those structures in the Elizabethan period and in our own will in turn tell us a good deal about ourselves, and thus serve to reinforce both the necessity and the value of the special relationship between our society and Shakespeare's postulated above.

And so I make no apology for concluding this book in Part III with an attempt to say something however shallow about the general nature of the medium of television. It seems to me to have such obvious affinities with a popular tradition of drama and entertainment stemming directly from the Elizabethan theatre and its forebears that its persistent omission from the realm of scholarly discussion and analysis of that tradition by now almost occasions embarrassment. An understanding of the nature of the television medium undoubtedly both illuminates and is illumined by an understanding of the Elizabethan popular drama. More, it helps us to comprehend the complexities of the concept 'popular' which it has been our century's desperate lot shamefully to oversimplify.

That television connects vitally, formatively, and numerically with our own society in ways that the theatre can no longer hope to match is a situation that mockingly devalues the standard academic disdain which the medium encounters.

Recognition of that in no sense implies approval of the sort of television we have. But it is the first step towards improving it.

We force ourselves to carry so damagingly heavy a burden of history and of art that we may reasonably balk at the demands an entirely new medium makes on an over-crowded pantheon. This book ultimately suggests that, past-ridden as we are beyond any previous age, we might now allow some items which have served their excellent purpose to be surrendered to the ephemerality which their nature makes their right. We have Prospero's example. Meanwhile television, the new Ariel, remains. It is far too important to be abandoned to anybody.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Part I

Language, Culture, Drama



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

I

Language as Culture

When Ben Jonson nominated speech as

. . . the only benefit man hath to expresse his excellencie of mind above other creatures.

(*Timber, or Discoveries*)

he was articulating an idea that has had modernity thrust upon it. In fact, the concept of man as the Talking Animal, with language his distinctive feature, marking him off from the other animals, is one of those currently fashionable notions redeemed, we might now profitably allow, by its antiquity. For the classification of man as *zoon logon echon* (a living creature possessing speech) enjoyed currency before Aristotle, and Cicero offers a formula as positive as Ben Jonson's when he claims that

. . . it is in this alone, or in this especially, that we are superior to the animals; that we can converse amongst ourselves, and express our thoughts in speech.

(*De Oratore*, I. 8; 32)

Some three hundred years before that, the Athenian orator Isocrates had put the same point no less categorically:

For in the other powers which we possess . . . we are in no respect superior to other living creatures; nay, we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources; but, because there has been planted in us the

power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish.

(*Antidosis*, 253-7)

Such ideas obviously have particular force and relevance in societies where the act of talking, face to face, constitutes the fundamental mode of life and where speech seems not only to embody humanity, but to bring into being and reinforce all the communal social structures of 'civilization'. In such societies speech and man, language and culture, talking and 'way of life' must be very closely connected.

In fact, one might reasonably generalize on that basis. Most linguists would probably agree that man apprehends the world and is enabled to live in it by means of a complex network of communicative systems, in which language appears to predominate. His encounters with 'reality' take place in the context of the language of the community in which he lives. As Emile Durkheim has said,

Language, and consequently the system of concepts which it translates, is the product of a collective elaboration. What it expresses is the manner in which society as a whole represents the facts of experience.¹

In short, the structure of the 'real world' is largely pre-determined by social forces. And the most powerful of these forces is language. In the words of Basil Bernstein,

Language marks out what is relevant, affectively, cognitively and socially. . . . Speech is . . . the major means through which the social structure becomes part of individual experience.²

¹ *Cit.* Herbert Landar, *Language and Culture* (New York, 1966), p. 149.

² 'Aspects of Language and Learning in the Genesis of the Social Process' in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Language in Culture and Society* (New York, 1964) pp.

'Individual experience', it has been further suggested by Benjamin Lee Whorf, is itself embodied to a significant extent by the nature of the particular language spoken by the community, and in whose terms its individual members apprehend the world. Each language, Whorf argues, formulates experience in its own way, by means of its own structure, and is 'not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas, but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the programme and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade'.³ Thus the speaker of *Hopi* (an American Indian language) 'sees the world' through the lens of his own language, and that world differs significantly from the one seen by the native speaker of English.

Man, this seems to suggest, is very firmly a creature of his distinctive feature of talking. Culture, or way of life, and language, or way of speaking, appear to be coterminous. For man, language and reality interpenetrate, and seem all but inextricable.⁴ The point is memorably made by Edward Sapir:

. . . Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving

251-61. Cf. Bernstein's 'Language and Social Class', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. II, 1960, pp. 271-6 on the relationship between language (especially vocabulary) and the social structure. In general, see J. R. Firth, *Papers in Linguistics 1934-51* (London, 1957), pp. 7-35.

³ Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956) p. 212.

⁴ For an expanded and provocative statement of this proposition (in which the phrase 'the talking animal' is coined) see George L. Trager's articles, 'Language' and 'Linguistics' in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1956 edn., Vol. 13, p. 694; Vol. 14, p. 162.

I have argued the same case, drawing on much of the material deployed here, but rather more fully and in a different context, in *Metaphor* (London, 1972) pp. 78-83 *passim*.

specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.⁵

This is not to say that no 'outside world' exists beyond our languages which we can call real: there are, after all, 'brute facts' that one bumps into. But we perceive these 'realities' through the spectacles of our languages, and there is no other way of perceiving them. Since there are no language-less people, each culture deals with the world, reaches it in fact, through its own linguistic structures, and it can hardly avoid imposing these on reality. And the 'brute facts' of life tend to appear in different guises and call forth different responses in different cultures. As Margaret Mead puts it⁶ the notion we may embody in a simple statement such as 'Love will find a way' (one of our 'brute facts': either Love will or it will not) may simply not exist in some cultures, or may have an utterly different role (and so call forth appropriately different responses) in others. Hence in some languages it just would not be possible to make such a statement without 'labelling' it a bizarre and foreign notion. In effect, this is to say that English contains, as overt 'ways of putting' things, covert presuppositions about the nature of the 'reality' outside us which clash glaringly with the way in which other peoples perceive that reality. As Dorothy Lee found, an analysis of a language like *Wintu* throws the matter into relief:

Recurring through all this is the attitude of humility and respect toward reality, toward nature and society. I cannot find an adequate English term to apply to a habit of thought

⁵ Edward Sapir, 'The Status of Linguistics as a Science', in *Essays on Culture, Language and Personality*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley, Calif. 1964), pp. 68-9.

⁶ *Male and Female* (Penguin edn., 1962), pp. 54 ff.