

# Cultural understandings of good and bad: Computer-generated readings

*Jonathan Culpeper and Jane Demmen,  
Lancaster University, UK*

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@ShakespeareLang  
<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/shakespearelang/>



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# A myth about Shakespeare's language?

- Universal characters, emotions, themes ... language??

“Shakespeare has given us a universal language medium in which are crystalized the battle hymns, the intellectual conceptions and the spiritual aspirations of the Anglo-Saxons.”

(Rutherford, N.J. and Bennett, E.H., 1918-1922, *English Speaking World*, Vol.2  
(8): 14)

- No dictionary has treated Shakespeare's language as **relative**, i.e. put Shakespeare's usage in the context of that of his contemporaries.

**good** (n.) 1 goodwill, goodness **H8** IV.E.60 [Griffith to Katherine, of the fall of Wolsey's foundation at Ipswich] *Unwilling to suffer the good that did it*  
2 good fellow **Rw** II.Chorus.9 [Gower alone, of Pericles] *The good in conversation ... / Is still at Tarsus*; **Tem** I.1.3, 15; **Tim** II.II.75  
3 interest, advantage, benefit **Cor** II.I.234 [Sicinius to Brutus, of Coriolanus] *It shall be to have them as our good wills, / A sure destruction*

**good, do** prosper, succeed, triumph **2H6** IV.ii.14 [Dick to Cade] *If we mean to thrive and do good, break open the gaols*

**good, do one** 1 make prosper, enable to succeed **MA** I.I.269 [Claudio to Don Pedro] *your highness now may do me good*; **2H6** I.ii.77; **3H6** III.ii.38

2 be of use to, provide assistance to **2H6** III.I.219 [King to all, of Gloucester's appeal] *... that I have done and cannot do for you*

**good** (adj.) 1 [intensifying use] real, genuine **AY** I.I.25 [Celia to Rosalind] *love no man be good earnest*; **Tim** II.II.232

2 kind, benevolent, generous **Tim** I.I.242 [Timon to Apemantius] *if thou wert not ashen, I would be good to thee*; **Tim** III.A.24

3 kind, friendly, sympathetic **LLN** II.274 [Rosaline to all] *The King was weather-wise for a good word*

4 amenable, tractable, manageable **TS** I.I.127 [Hortensio to Gratiano, of a husband for Katherine] *there be good fellows in the world, as a man could fight on them*

5 honest, virtuous, honourable **Cor** II.I.58 [Menenius to Brutus and Sicinius, of their supporters] *they lie deadlier than tell you have good faces*

6 reasonable, appropriate, proper **CE** II.I.70 [Antipholus of Syracuse to Dromio of Syracuse] *learn to jest is good now*

7 just, right, commendable **2H6** II.I.28 [Suffolk to Gloucester, of malice] *so more than well becomes / So good a quarrel*

8 intended, right, proper **Rj** II.45 [Mercutio to Romeo] *Take our good meaning*

9 high-ranking, highborn, distinguished **Rz** I.I.40 [Bolingbroke to Mowbray] *Thou art ... a miscreant, / Too good to be so* **⇒** better (adj.)

10 rich, wealthy, substantial **Cor** I.I.15 [First Citizens to all] *We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good*; **2H4** IV.3.15; **MW** I.II.12

**good, 'tis** very well **Th** I.I.412 [Saturninus to Bassianus] *'Tis good, sir. You are very short with us*

**good** (adv.) [intensifying use] really, genuinely **2H4** II.II.44 [Falstaff to Bardolph] *the sack that thou hast drunk we would have bought us light as good cheap at the dearest chandler's in Europe*

**good-conceited** (adj.) cleverly devised, ingeniously composed **Cym** II.II.16 [Cloten to musicians, of their playing to Imogen] *a very excellent good-conceited thing*

**good deed** (adv.) in truth, in reality **WT** I.II.42 [Hermione to Leontes] *yet, good deed, Leontes, / I love thee not a jar o'th' clock behind / What lady she her lord* **⇒** DISCOURSE MARKERS, p.127

**good-den / e'en / even / morrow** **⇒** GREETINGS, p.206; FAREWELLS, p.170

**good-faced** (adj.) smooth-faced, pretty **WT** IV.ii.112 [Autolycus to Clown] *good-faced sir ... sweet sir*

**good life** comfortable position, respectable way of life **MW** II.II.112 [Mistress Page to Mistress Ford] *defend your reputation, or bid farewell to your good life for ever* **⇒** song of good life

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*Crystal & Crystal* (2004:201-202):

- (1) [intensifying use] real, genuine ('love no man in good earnest').
- (2) **kind**, benevolent, generous.
- (3) **kind**, friendly, sympathetic.
- (4) amenable, tractable, manageable.
- (5) honest, virtuous, honourable.
- (6) seasonable, appropriate, **proper**.
- (7) just, **right**, commendable.
- (8) intended, **right**, **proper**.
- (9) high-ranking, highborn, distinguished.
- (10) rich, wealthy, substantial.

## Encyclopaedia of Shakespeare's Language

Definition preview: definition 104 for entry [good\\_ADJ](#)

**good\*\*\*\*** *adj.* (good, better, best):

1. A polite address: '(my) good Lord/friend/Sir/Master/Lady/Madam/etc.'. Typically used when meeting or parting, thanking or making suggestions. *But (good my Lord) do it so cunningly* TGV, III. 1.
2. Honest, truthful, principled; of high moral standards. (This sense also shapes the discourse markers '(in) good faith/sooth/troth', which mean truly or honestly). *a man of good repute, carriage, bearing, & estimation* LLL, I. 1.
3. Positive rather than negative. Typically, contrasted with 'bad'. *Is thy news good or bad?* ROM, II. 5.
4. In one's favour, especially favourable wishes or blessings. *The Gods be good to us* COR, V. 4.
5. A welcoming, cheerful manner. *Therefore for Gods sake entertain good comfort, And cheer his Grace with quick and merry eyes* R3, I. 3.

**good will** As now.

**good morrow** Good morning.

**good night** As now.

**bacon** (n.) porker, fat one; also: rustic 1H4 11.ii.89 [Falstaff to Travellers] *On, bacons, on!*

**bacon-fed** (adj.) [= fed on bacon] rustic, peasant, hillbilly 1H4 11.ii.83 [Falstaff to Travellers] *whoreson caterpillars, bacon-fed knaves*

**bad** (adj.) worthless, lowly, of no value 3H6 V.vi.91 [Richard alone, of the succession] *Counting myself but bad till I be best* ➔ worse (adj.); worst (n./adj.)

**bade** (v.) ➔ bid (v.)

**badge** (n.) 1 outward sign, symbol, mark R2 V.ii.33 [York to Duchess of York, of Richard] *His face still combating with tears and smiles, / The badges of his grief and patience*; LL V.ii.749; Sonnet 44.14

## Encyclopaedia of Shakespeare's Language

Definition preview: definition 15 for entry [bad\\_ADJ](#)

**bad\*\*\*** *adj.* (bad, worse, worst)

1. Negative or not desirable; often a contrast to GOOD. *for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.* HAM, II. 2.
2. Morally reprehensible; corrupt. *Bad child, worse father.* PER, I. 0.
3. Of poor quality, low value or worth (e.g. humours, fruit, words). *receiving the bad Air* JC, I. 2.
4. Spiralling badness. *and let worse follow worse, till the worst of all follow him laughing to his grave.* AC, I. 2.

ORIG: 'bad' is rendered as 'pad' in Welsh dialect.

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# Bad in King Lear (= 20)

KL_2_1	upon my Father ? I know not Madam , t is too	<u>bad</u>	, too bad . Yes Madam , he was of that consort
KL_2_1	I know not Madam , t is too bad , too	<u>bad</u>	. Yes Madam , he was of that consort . No marvel
KL_4_1	They kill us for their sport . How should this be ?	<u>Bad</u>	is the Trade that must play Fool to sorrow , Angering itself
KL_2_2	I 'll answer that . My Sister may receive it much more	<u>worse</u>	, To have her Gentleman abused , assaulted . Come my Lord
KL_4_2	I told him you were coming , His answer was , the	<u>worse</u>	. Of Gloucester 's Treachery , And of the loyal Service of
KL_4_1	than ever I was . T is poor mad Tom . And	<u>worse</u>	I may be yet : the worst is not , So long
KL_3_3	you nothing . There is division between the Dukes , and a	<u>worse</u>	matter than that : I have received a Letter this night ,
KL_5_3	with this paper shall I stop it : hold Sir , Thou	<u>worse</u>	than any name , read thine own evil : No tearing Lady
KL_1_2	Letter . Abhorred Villain , unnatural , detested , brutish Villain ;	<u>worse</u>	than brutish : Go sirrah , seek him : I 'll apprehend
KL_4_1	is it can say I am at the worst ? I am	<u>worse</u>	than ever I was . T is poor mad Tom . And
KL_2_2	They could not , would not do it : t is	<u>worse</u>	than murder , To do upon respect such violent outrage : Resolve
KL_4_1	that I embrace : The Wretch that thou hast blown unto the	<u>worst</u>	, Owes nothing to thy blasts . Enter Gloucester , and an
KL_4_1	is not , So long as we can say this is the	<u>worst</u>	. Fellow , where goest ? Is it a Beggar-man ? Madman
KL_5_3	are not the first , Who with best meaning have incurred the	<u>worst</u>	: For thee oppressed King I am cast down , Myself could
KL_4_1	to be contemned , Than still contemned and flattered , to be	<u>worst</u>	: The lowest , and most dejected thing of Fortune , Stands
KL_4_1	O Gods ! Who is it can say I am at the	<u>worst</u>	? I am worse than ever I was . T is poor
KL_4_5	enough : dost thou squiny at me ? No , do thy	<u>worst</u>	blind Cupid , I 'll not love . Read thou this challenge
KL_4_1	poor mad Tom . And worse I may be yet : the	<u>worst</u>	is not , So long as we can say this is the
KL_4_1	in fear : The lamentable change is from the best , The	<u>worst</u>	returns to laughter . Welcome then , Thou unsubstantial air that I
KL_2_2	look well favoured When others are more wicked , not being the	<u>worst</u>	Stands in some rank of praise , I 'll go with thee



# *Bad in King Lear (= 20)*

Speaker	No. words for Speaker	No. hits for Speaker	Freq. per 1000 words
Edgar	1730	9	5.2
Oswald	622	1	1.6
Gloucester	3004	4	1.3
Cordelia	965	1	1
Albany	983	1	1
Regan	1628	1	0.6
Lear	6800	3	0.4

Edgar (soliloquy):

Yet better thus, and known to be contemned,  
Than still contemned and flattered, to be **worst**:  
The lowest, and most dejected thing of Fortune,  
Stands still in, lives not in fear:  
The lamentable change is from the best,  
The **worst** returns to laughter. Welcome then,  
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace:  
The Wretch that thou hast blown unto the **worst**,  
Owes nothing to thy blasts.

[...]

Old Man:

How now, who's there?

Edgar (aside):

Who is it can say I am at the **worst**?

I am **worse** than ever I was.

Old Man:

Tis poor mad Tom.

Edgar (aside):

And **worse** I may be yet: the **worst** is not,  
So long as we can say this is the **worst**.

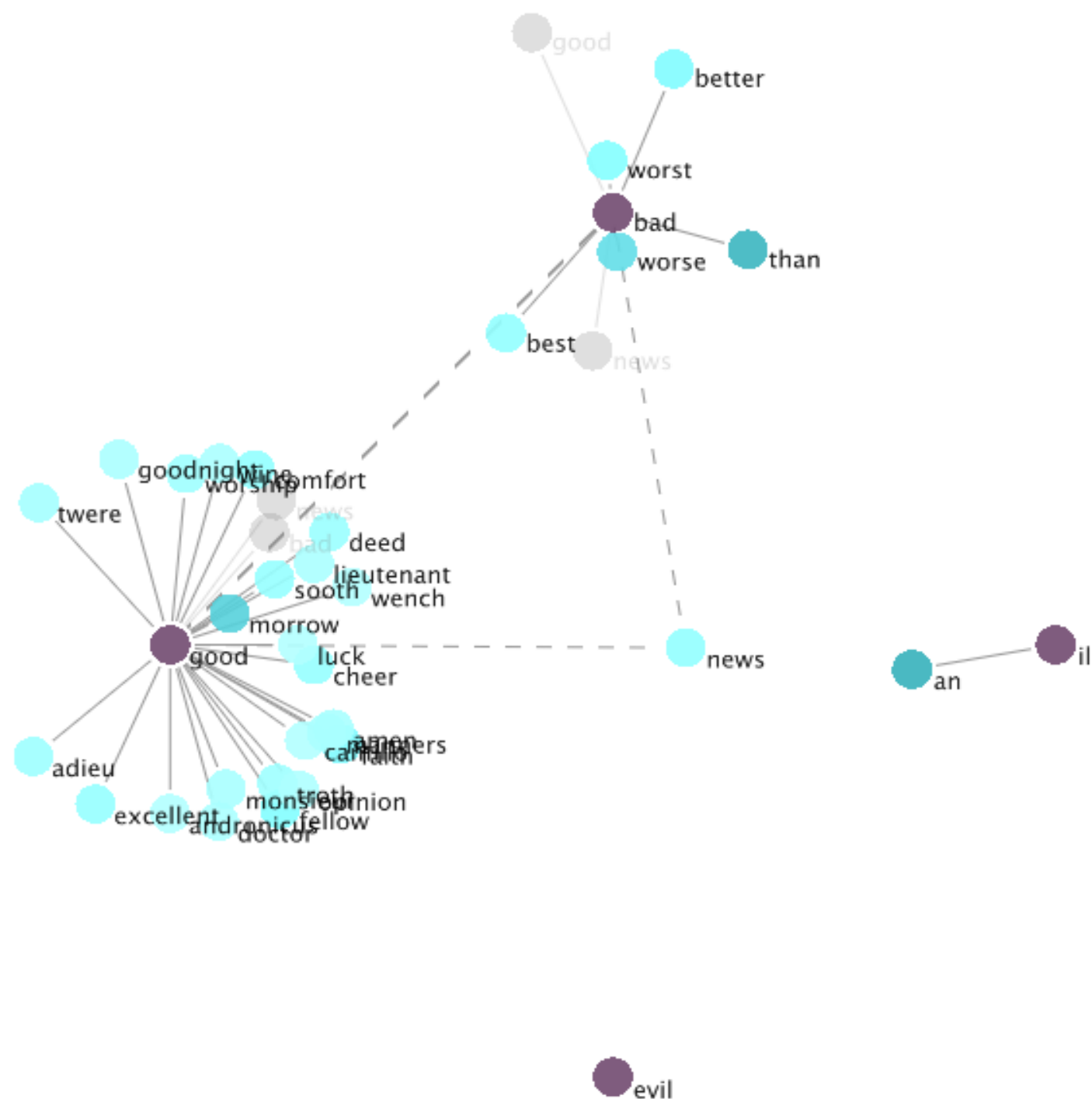
[...]

Edgar (aside):

How should this be?

**Bad** is the Trade that must play Fool to sorrow  
Angering itself, and others.

(KL, IV. 1)



**Do the word-networks of *good*, *bad*, *ill* and *evil* overlap? Are there strong links amongst them?**  
*(ill = 120)*  
*(evil = 21)*

# Does Shakespeare's usage reflect that of his contemporaries? A glance at collocates in EEBO 1560-1640

<i>Good</i> (= 577,864)	<i>Bad</i> (= 28,137)	<i>Evil</i> (= 61,561)	<i>Ill</i> (= 46,366)
Works Cheer Evil Advisement Hap Deeds Sooth Wallace Readers Christian	Bad Witch Adieu Worse Good Dealing Success Humours Usage News	Dooers Willers Concupiscences Conditioned Speakers Livers Adulteries Cogitations Favoured Eschew	Favouredly Willers Hap Favoured Conditioned Beseeming Speed Presage Husbandry Entreated

## Concluding remarks

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- We hope we have shown:
  - Shakespeare's language is relative, as is all language.
  - Our approach to meanings is very different from the traditional dictionary approach.

# Concluding remarks

- Regarding *good*, *bad* and related words in Shakespeare:
  - *Good* has a central role in social interaction, reflecting the dialogic nature of plays.
  - *Good* and *bad* both have senses that orientate to (Christian) morality/ideology (even stronger in wider EModE, especially *good*).
  - *Evil* and *ill* are only loosely connected to *good* and *bad* in Shakespeare (but in wider EModE *good* and *evil* are connected, often by contrast).
  - *Good-bad-news* connection seems to be a playwriting feature, creating dramatic tension (wider EModE shows *bad-news* connection; *good-bad* are also connected, but not through *news*).
  - *Bad-worse-worst* connection seems to be a playwriting feature, indicating a sense of spiralling decline, e.g. in Edgar's self-talk.



# References

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