

LANGUAGE IN ROMEO AND JULIET

by

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B.A., Central College, 1975

A MASTER'S REPORT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements of the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1980

Approved by:

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Because most English teachers cover a Shakespearean work at least once during their career, I have undertaken this report and designed it as an instructor's aid. The language changes that have taken place since Shakespeare's time present many problems for today's students, problems which today's teachers cannot always answer.

For the purpose of this study, I chose the play Romeo and Juliet. It may not be Shakespeare's finest work, but it is widely anthologized and the plot is one that is common even in this society. The fact that the play is frequently performed, that it has been adapted to more modern terms in West Side Story, and that there is an appealing movie version available makes the choice seem even more logical. Because the hero and heroine are close to the same age of the students, there is an extra bond between the two distant generations. Most students can identify easily with the young lovers. Since Romeo and Juliet is so widely published it is possible to find many good editions on the market. I chose the Signet Classic because it is readily available and inexpensive, and because its editing flaws are infrequent. Line numbers refer to the Signet edition, but any other text will have similar line numbering so that it is possible to apply this discussion to any other text.

The question the teacher must answer is "Why do the students resist Shakespeare in the original form and yet enjoy and understand the paraphrased version?" The main reason is that the language becomes an obstacle. The differences that hinder today's students are of two kinds: (1) changes which by today's standards make Shakespeare's normal everyday

speech sound too formal, and (2) certain resources that writers could use then that have been lost and hence are no longer appreciated. In Early Modern English (EModE), which stretches from approximately 1500 to 1700, many of the transitions between Old English and Modern English are very noticeable. An example is the use or omission of auxiliary do. Around the turn of the 17th century, do was optional in questions and negative statements, and it could be used in a declarative sentence without signalling special emphasis.¹ Examples of the unusual use of do can be found throughout the works of Shakespeare. G. L. Brook cites some of the best ones in his book The Language of Shakespeare. From Richard the Second, III,ii,100 comes the question, "Revolt our subjects?",² and a negative omission can be found in the second part of Henry the Fourth, IV,i,107, "It not appears to me."³ The use of do that does not add emphasis appears often too, as in the example from Julius Caesar, III,ii,65, "I do entreat you, not a man depart."⁴ Since these sentences now sound unusual, readers may feel they were meant as examples of formal speech, whereas the truth may be that all people spoke similarly.

Besides the language conventions just mentioned we must consider special resources which include the thou and you distinction, which was followed closely before and during the EModE period. The options of thou and you are varied and complex. You was always required when addressing a plural audience, and it was also accepted as the signal of a formal or respectful relationship when used in the singular. Either thou or you could be used as an insult or to show extreme emotions when it was used in its opposite context. While Capulet, as Juliet's

father, should address her using the familiar form thou, his switch to you when he is angry would have been noticed and understood by the Elizabethan audience.

Another special resource involves the choice of one pronunciation over another. The pronunciation options were created by an occurrence labeled the Great Vowel Shift, which altered the long vowels. This gradual shift covered many years, affected dialects differently, and did not change all loan words in the same manner.

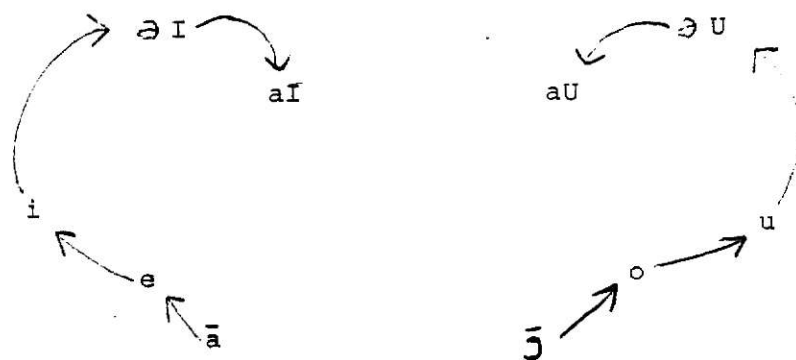
This study is concerned with those pronunciations that create difficulties in understanding for today's students; and also with morphological options that allowed for a choice between thou and you, and the endings -eth or -es on the third person singular verbs; with vocabulary alterations; and with sentence structures that now seem unnatural. The final section of the study is a look at two characters who represent two extremes of language use, the illiterate and informal compared to the very formal.

PRONUNCIATION

Between Middle English, a time period covering approximately 1350-1500, and our Modern English, the language has undergone many pronunciation changes. This slow, gradual process was hardly noticeable during any one lifetime because both the old and the new forms were used side by side. The major change that occurred is called the Great Vowel Shift, which affected the long vowels. Some of the changes were completed by the 1590's and others occurred after Shakespeare's death. These latter changes are the ones that upset the Elizabethan

rhymes for us. Since each regional dialect underwent the shift at a different rate, Shakespeare had even more possible variety by picking a dialectal pronunciation to suit his purpose.

The diagram below shows the movement of the long vowel sounds that gradually took place.⁵ The location on the chart roughly corresponds to the location in the mouth where the sound is formed. The diphthongs formed first and left the opening for the next vowel to assume. During the EModE period in some dialects the diphthongs were still forming and the change had developed only as far as the schwa compound at the top of the scale.



The Middle English hus, pronounced like modern goose, became our house with the diphthong /aU/, while the front vowel /i/, the sound in modern he, became /aI/, as in I. The long /o/ took on the /u/ sound of moose.⁶ The "open o" /ɔ/ moved up to /o/ and changed the ME hom to modern home. (According to Charles Barber's Early Modern English, the letter o had more alternative sounds than now. Rome and come could be pronounced like room and tomb, and love rhymed with prove and move.⁷)

While the /o/ was changing, the front vowels /e/ and /ā/ were also shifting. Until /e/ had completed its shift to /i/, there was a difference between the sound of see and sea, and meet and meat.⁸ The shift in /ā/ made a difference between the Old English nama and our name. The EModE hast and haste had the sound of /ā/, so haste rhymed with fast; but have /e/ rhymed with grave. Only the long vowels changed, but often their spelling and dialectal differences kept the sounds from changing uniformly, which now creates many unusual pronunciations for similar spellings.

A final pronunciation change has limited the value of the final y, by eliminating two possible sounds. The unstressed syllable carries our usual sound of /i/ as in joy, but during Shakespeare's time it could have an added secondary stress which elongated that value,⁹ like spōndē. Another option, which was frequently used by Shakespeare, was a secondary stress that gave the y a value that would rhyme with any /ɔI/ ending.¹⁰ This allowed words ending in y to be paired with words like die.

Pronunciation is of little concern except where rhyme or meter are altered by the change. Since most of Romeo and Juliet is in blank verse or rhymed couplets and three sonnets--the two Prologues and I, v, 95-112--

it is easy to find examples of the options that were employed by Shakespeare. Even the Prologue contains one instance of a change. Since the sonnet pattern requires that every other line should rhyme, it is obvious that love (line 9) and remove (line 11) are paired. For Shakespeare they would have each contained the /u/ sound of move. Other than that, the sounds have remained the same.

Most of Act I, scene 1 does not cause problems because it is in prose; however, the Prince's long speech is in blank verse and requires an added stress for the iambic pentameter in two lines. The Signet Classic edition marks the words with a secondary accent to indicate the stress. In line 85, "Profaners of this neighbor-stainèd steel," needs both beats of stainèd, and line 91 needs movèd as two syllables also: "And hear the sentence of your movèd Prince." The introduction of Romeo brings many of the rhymes, which is appropriate to his love-sick mood. His lines rhyme throughout the passage or in couplets to signal the end of his speech. There are places which should receive special attention. Lines 184-5 end with is and this, which are still eye rhymes but now sound different because is has a /z/ for its final sound. Originally they both had the /s/ phoneme. There is continuous rhyme from line 187 to 201 with the exception of one odd line (195). It is possible that a line has been lost, for it is not likely that an odd line served any function. This passage ends with here and where, which both had the sound of modern where.

One of the best guides for finding a rhymed pair is to look among lines that still rhyme. An unlikely pair, such as feast and quest (I, ii, 20-1 and I, v, 76-7), is noticed because of an eye rhyme or

similarity. According to E. J. Dobson in English Pronunciation 1500-1700 Vol. 2, the word feast has an unusual history. It is of French origin and the vowel underwent a change because of its final -st.¹¹ The word feast had the sound of best, which is its rhyme partner in lines 101-2 of the second scene.

Scene iii has very little rhyme except Lady Capulet's speech (80-94) and the rhymed couplets which serve as cue (96-99) and scene end rhymes (105-6). Lines 87-88 lover and cover still rhyme for us as both went through the same shift but love (96) and move (97) have ended up different.

In scene v Romeo contributes many rhymed lines, including the sonnet he shares with Juliet. None of their lines present any problems except the introductory lines 93-4 spoken by Tybalt:

"I will withdraw; but this intrusion shall

Now seeming sweet, convert to bitterest gall."

Shall had a strong and a weak form that existed side by side and either option could be used as the poet desired. The strong form rhymed with gall, while the weak form with the vowel sound of ash /ʌ/ is the one that has remained.¹²

Since Act II begins with a sonnet, it is a good place to look for additional lines that rhyme. The only two that cause any problem are lines 5 and 7, which end with again and complain. The sound of our complain would have been used for both words. A similar rhyme is found in Act III, scene i, 123-24 in again and slain.

One of the most unusual and most often missed rhymes links the

end of Act II, scene 1 with line 1 of scene 2. Because of the way the Signet Classic is printed with the new act beginning a new page the rhyme is not obvious. While the words found and wound still have similar spellings, the pronunciation of wound that we now use was that of a regional dialect until it became the accepted form.¹³ Wound is also rhymed with sound in IV,v,128 and 130.

Throughout the rest of the play there are many examples of unusual variations in pronunciation. They are cited in the order they occur in the play.

Act II, scene iii between Friar Lawrence and Romeo is completely in rhyme pattern AA BB CC.... Notable items appear in eight couplets.

We begin with lines 14 and 15 as an example of the variable sound of the final y, which allows qualities to rhyme with lies, and then move on to lines 43 and 44, which contain a very special distinction. While we currently say the name Rosaline with a schwa as the sound of the i, for the purpose of Shakespeare's rhymes it must be pronounced with the full diphthong /ɔɪ/ or it will not rhyme with mine (44), brine (69), or thine (77).

It should be noted that then and again are paired in lines 47 and 48 just as we would rhyme them. In the following line enemy is given our customary /i/ sound so that it rhymes with me (50), but remedies (51) has the /əɪ/ sound to match lies (52).

These last four examples show some of the options that were possible because of the various speeds that dialects changed. Lines 75 and 76 rhyme because sit and yet could both contain the sound /I/. Grave (83) and have (84) both had the vowel sound in faith.¹⁴ Eye rhymes are good

indicators of former true rhymes like prove (92) and love (93), which would both have sounded like move. However, the appearance of a word may be deceiving as in the case of haste (93) and fast (94); while we would give the a of haste a long value because of the final e, Shakespeare used a short a to make it rhyme with fast.¹⁵

Act III, scene i contains two good examples besides the again/slain rhyme of lines 123 and 124. In lines 148 and 149 child and spilled are paired. Spilled would have been pronounced with a long i instead of our short i. Later in lines 196 and 197 the words haste and last are used together just as haste had been paired with fast.

The final rhyme problem of Act III is found in scene iv, lines 7 and 8. These two lines are divided between Capulet and Paris so the rhyme is missed unless the reader is alert to speech link and scene end rhymes that were frequent in Elizabethan drama. According to Frederick Ness in The Use of Rhyme in Shakespeare's Plays these two lines are among the 498 lines that rhyme in Romeo and Juliet.¹⁶

"I would have been abed an hour ago." (7)

"These times of woe afford no times to woo." (8)

A problem exists for us because ago now rhymes with woe and not with woo. This is one of the lines that would be unintelligible if it were changed to the EModE pronunciation.

The two final examples of pronunciation changes are found in Act V, scenes ii and iii. In scene ii, lines 28 and 29 come and tomb are rhymed, with both having the sound of tomb. Lines 119 and 120 in scene iii act as an entrance cue or scene shift.¹⁷ Apothecary would have had the /OI/ value for the final y to make it rhyme with die.

Because of the Elizabethan staging customs which called for rhymes to cover an entrance or exit of a major character, to link speeches, or to indicate the end of a scene, many scattered couplets exist throughout the play. Shakespearian scholars such as Fredrick Ness and Helge Kokeritz have identified the couplets that are no longer obvious because of pronunciation changes, and have studied the dialect variations that allowed Shakespeare to make these words rhyme.

MORPHOLOGICAL CHANGES

One distinct advantage of the Early Modern Period that Shakespeare made wide use of was the option of picking between two forms of a word. This includes the pronouns thou and you and their forms, and the verb forms that use the -eth suffix that creates an extra syllable compared to the -es on a third person singular verb. Thou and you are used to show the tone of the passage, while the verb forms are used to fit the rhyme or meter of the line.

Of the words thou and you it is often said that the choice signifies the closeness of the relationship between the speakers. The significance may actually be much subtler, for the same couple may switch words as the situation changes. While you is usually a symbol of respect and indicates a formal relationship, it can also be used to express anger or deep concern.¹⁸ However, you was required when addressing a group. The informal thou was usually used between close friends, but it was also used by a person of high rank speaking to someone of a lower rank. When someone of an equal rank used thou with the proper derogatory tone of voice, it was an adequate insult to start a

fight.

The first scene of Act I provides an example of the difference between thou and you. Sampson and Gregory address each other as thou, but they switch to you when confronting the Montague servants. Tybalt's use of thee to Benvolio, his enemy, might be seen as an attempted insult, as might the line "Thou villain Capulet!" (I,i,82) spoken by Montague.

Scene ii starts with the conversation between Capulet and Paris, who use you to address each other with respect. The servant uses you to address Romeo. While Benvolio and Romeo had been using thee to address each other, Benvolio switches to you in line 97, "Tut! you saw her fair, none else being by." It may be that Benvolio uses you throughout this passage because he is becoming irritated at Romeo's love-sick foolishness.

Throughout the next scene Juliet uses you to her mother and thou to her nurse. Lady Capulet uses both forms but it is possible to note a difference in the tone of the conversation. She addresses the nurse as thou, and Juliet as you. Although the connection between mother and daughter is close, the subject of marriage is serious enough that the mother wants to use the more formal tone for her announcement.

As a general rule, friends speak to each other in the thou forms and to people of a higher class as you. There are a few significant exceptions, however. During the Capulet party, Capulet calls Tybalt both you and thou, as his mood changes (I,v,62-90).

"Why, how now, Kinsman? Wherefore storm you so?" (62)

"Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone." (67) (an attempt to pacify the angry Tybalt)

"You'll make a mutiny among my guests!

You will set cock-a-hoop. You'll be the man!" (82-3)

As his rage builds throughout the passage, Capulet retains the you form.

As Romeo and Juliet meet and exchange kisses, Romeo's yearning for intimacy is expressed with thou, and Juliet's attempt to be reserved is aided by the use of you (I,v,99-112). By the time Juliet has come to her balcony she admits her love for him with the famous expression (II,ii,33) "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" The two lovers use thou to each other throughout the rest of the play.

Friar Lawrence's choice of thou and you may seem sporadic, but it does fit a pattern. Because of his close association with Romeo, made obvious in (II,iii,47) "That's my good son! But where hast thou been then?", and his affection for Juliet, the natural form would be thou. Why, then, on two occasions (III,iii,166-171, and IV,i,122) does the Friar use you? The answer may lie in the function of his line in those scenes and the mood of the situations. Both cases are the end of the scene, and in each case the tone is forbidding, as the young lovers embark on a dangerous, ill-fated move. In scene III,iii,166-171 it gives a sense of urgency and concern as the Friar instructs Romeo on leaving town, and later in IV,i,122 when he tells Juliet about the use of the drug. The Friar must realize the seriousness of what he urges them to do.

The fight that starts Act III also contains some curious switches

from thou to you. Tybalt begins the confrontation with you but quickly changes to an insult with (III,i,46) "Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo." Used in this context with the verb consort, this phrase is intended to start a fight--which it does. Tybalt's use of thou to Romeo must be an insult, but Romeo uses thou to express his love for Tybalt because he is of Juliet's family.

Juliet's long epithalamium ode in scene ii brings up another point about thou and you. The inanimate objects that she and Romeo address are termed thou, which may be because of the intimacy the youth feels toward them. In line 11 as she addresses night it becomes more of a plea for what she wants,

"Thou sobersuited matron all in black...(III,ii,15) with
thy blank mantle... Come, night; come, Romeo;...

As the play progresses toward its tragic end, the lovers come into contact with other singular objects, which they address with the forms of thou. While there is no proof that thou is used to show the close ties between the character and the object, examination of the lines shows that this is a possible explanation.

"Come, cordial and not poison, go with me
To Juliet's grave; for there I must use thee." (V,ii,85-6)
"Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,
Gorged with dearest morsel of the earth,
Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open,
And in despite I'll cram thee with more food." (V,iii,45-8)

And ending with Juliet's death scene,

"Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!

This is thy sheath; there rust and let me die."

(V,iii,169-70)

One final example of how there can be a change of feeling created between two persons, and shown by the use of thou and you, is seen in the dialogue between Capulet and Juliet. When she refuses to do his will she is you, often coupled with harsher terms, and when he laments her death she is again returned to the loving status of thou. Early on an angry Lady Capulet proclaims,

"Here comes your father. Tell him so yourself.

And see how he will take it at your hands." (III,v,125)

While Capulet is still concerned about her tears and does not yet know of the problem, he tries to calm her.

"...In one little body

Thou counterfeits a bark, a sea, a wind:

For still thy eyes, which I may call the sea

Do ebb and flow with tears; the bark thy body is,

Sailing in this salt flood; the winds, thy sighs,

Who, raging with thy tears and they with them,

Without a sudden calm will overset

Thy tempest-tossed body..." (III,v,131-8)

What an abrupt change to this reaction so soon after:

"Out, you greensickness carrion!

Out you baggage! You tallow face!" (III,v,157-8)

"And be you mine, I'll give you to my friend;

And you be not, hang, beg, starve die in the streets"

(III,v,193-4)

After Juliet's supposed death is discovered, Capulet's most lyrical expressions tell of his love for her:

"Death lies on her like an untimely frost

Upon the sweetest flower of all the field." (IV,v,28-9)

"Dead art thou-alack, my child is dead,

And with my child my joys are buried!" (IV,v,63-4)

Because of the emotion released by the tragic deaths, Capulet and Montague are able to shake hands in peace and address each other with thou forms in friendship and equality:

"O brother Montague, give me thy hand." (V,iii,296)

"But I can give thee more;" (V,iii,298)

While these forms may have no obvious function to our ear, the audiences of Shakespeare's time, and even past the middle of the 17th century, would have noticed the inappropriate use of either form.¹⁹

The other morphological option of -eth is much easier to find an example of, and to understand. In 1500 the -eth form was standard, but as the use of the -es form spread down from the northern dialects, it gradually took over.²⁰ According to Barber, the -es was common in educated speech by 1590, and was the form used normally in plays, while -eth was reserved for more formal kinds of writing.²¹ However, the words hath and doth seem to have been the preferred forms for has and does.²² One good example of the function of -eth is found in Juliet's lines:

"Some say the lark makes sweet division:

This doth not so, for she divideth us." (III,v,29-30)

In this case divides would not have fit the meter of the line, so the -eth suffix was the logical choice. However, the use of makes in the first line shows Shakespeare's flexibility to use either form.

Both the thou and you distinction and the -eth options gave Shakespeare freedoms that we no longer have at our disposal. Our untrained ears are not always aware of the slight but necessary functions they serve.

SYNTACTIC VARIATIONS

While the arrangement of Shakespeare's sentences do not fall outside the boundaries of acceptable English, some of his sentences do have unusual forms. The structures are not radically different, but they can create problems for young readers. Many readers since Shakespeare's time have even accused him of having no grammatical structure at all.²³ This is not true, but the freedom to arrange words differently or to leave out words altogether often makes it appear so.

The practice of leaving out the auxiliary verb do or any other verb from an earlier phrase was entirely acceptable. Now, in cases of negative and interrogative sentences the auxiliary do is required if there is no other auxiliary form. In the Elizabethan period, the lack of regulation in these cases, plus the use of do in a declarative sentence without added emphasis, offered much freer variation for Shakespeare. The regulation process began just after Shakespeare's time and by 1700 was completed in most dialects. As the use of do changed,

so did its stylistic function. Until about 1550 the use of do was confined mostly to formal or educated speech, but it became common in colloquial speech after that, especially in questions and negatives. There was a difference of certain dialects, and with certain verbs like care, come, doubt, know, mistake, speak, and throw, which resisted the use of do in negative sentences.²⁴

The sentence order of modern English is Subject-Verb-Object. That order was gaining popularity during the EModE period, but V-S-O order was still very common, especially when a change was needed for rhyme, meter or emphasis.²⁵ As the Prince says, "And, Montague, come you this afternoon" (I,i,103). Adverbs that commonly lead to inversion are then, now, so, yet, also, here, therefore, wherefore, and thus.²⁶ An example is, "Yet do I want you to stay." Sentence order can also be altered by the omission of the subject. This is often done with thou to show a colloquial style.²⁷ "And gladly shunned who gladly fled from me" (I,i,133).

If a reader is conscious of the options, most sentences in R & J can easily be deciphered. The opening confrontation between the two groups of servants depends much on the use of do.

A- "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?" (I,i,46)

S- "I do bite my thumb, sir." (47)

A- "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?" (48)

S- "No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you,
sir; but I bite my thumb, sir." (53)

G- "Do you quarrel, sir?" (54)

A- "Quarrel, sir? No, sir." (55)

S- "But if you do, sir, I am for you." (56)

This one passage contains frequent use of do in questions, both the use and omission of do in a declarative (47 and 53), and the use of do to replace the verb quarrel (56). Later examples of do omission include:

"O, where is Romeo? Saw you him today?" (I,i,119)

"It is an honor I dream not of." (I,iii,66)

"How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?" (II,ii,62)

"By whose direction found'st thou this place?" (II,ii,79)

"Came he not home tonight?" (II,iv,2)

"We will have vengeance for it, fear thou not." (III,v,88)

While many of these sample lines sound stilted and formal to us, they were widely used by all the people of the Elizabethan period. By taking each sentence as a single unit and carefully following punctuation signals a student is able to unscramble and reorganize the parts into a sentence that follows our modern construction rules, thereby clearly understanding the line.

VOCABULARY

Along with all of the pronunciation and morphological changes and the variety of sentence structures, the vocabulary changes have created many difficulties. Many words that Shakespeare used have completely dropped out of the language, while others have gone through such a change that the original meaning is no longer apparent. Often these changes have rendered a pun meaningless. According to Maureen Mahood's book Shakespeare's Wordplay, some estimates of puns in Romeo and Juliet

number up to 175.²⁸ While the modern readers will notice a few, most of the puns are lost. These differences, however, should not be a deterrent to our understanding, but an additional source of interest and information about the EModE period. I have chosen about two dozen unique words for closer inspection.

Since the words now obsolete are most easily spotted because of their peculiarity, it might be best to begin with them. One group of expressions can be combined and called the religious expletives. At the time Shakespeare wrote, these phrases were very common as they were used for both blessings and curses. As common usage grew, the phrases often were condensed to a single word, one that does not much resemble the original phrase. Marry (I,iii,63-et.al.) is used frequently throughout the play. It is glossed as "indeed", but its meaning was surely much stronger before it was condensed from, "By the Virgin Mary." "God-i-goden" (III,v,173) literally means "God give you good evening" but it is taken to mean "Go away with you", a dismissal. Another one of Capulet's explosions begins with "God's bread" (III,v,177), which obviously means a sacred host, but no clue is given as to why it is used as a curse.

Other words that have been dropped may add to the colloquial sound of the nurse's speech. One of her expressions in Act I,v,119 is really onomatopoeia. She says that whoever marries Juliet will have "the chinks," or plenty of money. Around 1573 this term meant "ready cash" because the metal coins made a clinking noise when jiggled. Another old word that is peculiar to the nurse's speech is jaunce (II,v,26). The original form has been dropped but we have the word jaunt that has a similar meaning. Before 1593 the word jaunce meant making a horse go up and

down. Its meaning was expanded to include any troublesome journey a person had to make, whether on horseback or not. Our word has a more pleasant connotation now.

There are two puns that are ruined because one word or one meaning of a word has been dropped. In Act I, scene i the opening pun centers around the word collier (2), meaning a coal or charcoal vender, who would be poor and thus often subject to insult and abuse. The pun worked with the pronunciation of choler (3), meaning anger, and collar (4), which was a slang expression for a hangman's noose. The word choler is used several times in the play because it was a popular expression of anger. The original Greek word meant "bile", which controls the temper, one of the four moods. Later in Act I, scene iv, the young men have a good time playing on the words of each other's speech. Most of the puns like, "Being heavy, I'll bear the light" (12) and "...nimble soles...souls of lead" (15) still work for us. However, the three uses of measure in lines 9 and 10 can cause a problem. "Let them measure (judge) us by what they will, We'll measure (a stately dance in 1509) them a measure (a unit of music) and be gone."

Many words from Shakespeare's time have now become obsolete, like the term hilding (III,v,169). While it was a useful term to label a good-for-nothing person, its usefulness diminished by the 1700's. As our language adds new words, old ones are discarded. A dictionary from 50 years ago could not contain all the new terms we have coined, and some of the words accepted then are now labeled archaic.

When it comes to words that have changed in meanings it is often hard to make sense of a line because our current meaning does not fit. In the first scene of Act I, an officer shouts for "clubs, bills and partisans" (75). While we currently use the word bills, and partisans is also common, they would not complete the sentence correctly. Bills and partisans in Shakespeare refer to weapons now obsolete. A bill was a large ax blade on a long handle that formed a spear point at the opposite end. A partisan was a similar antique weapon, and it carried the additional meaning of a supporter of a party or cause, one who is often prejudiced, unreasoning and fanatical. This definition fits both sides of the Montague-Capulet feud.

Other words that have changed in meaning have become more specialized. Just as we have words like jerk, ne'er-do-well, and cad, the Elizabethans had slang terms for people they disapproved of. In many cases the original word was aimed at a large group of people, but if we use the word now, it defines a much smaller segment of society. One such word is villain (I,i,82,et.al.). Originally it meant a low born, base-minded rustic and it was not until 1800 that the term meant evil or troublesome character of a plot. Villain was a good, all-purpose term to call an enemy. Wanton is another word that has taken on a more uncomplimentary meaning. Originally it meant a spoiled child, usually applied to boys. It wasn't until the late 1600's that it took on the context of lewd or unchaste behavior. Unchaste behavior is also connected with the word harlotry, but when Capulet uses the word to describe Juliet (IV,ii,14) it signifies only a disgrace brought on by shameful conduct, including disobedience

to a father's wishes.

The words division, cordial, utter, and chap all look very familiar; however, their original meanings are very dissimilar. When Juliet uses the word division (III,v,29) she does not mean a math function but instead a musical term that was widely used until the 1800's. It represents music that is played rapidly because each long note is divided into several short ones. Both utters (V,i,67) and cordial (V,i,85) are used by Romeo during the scene with the apothecary. Until the 1860's utters meant to dispense or sell. Around 1600 it took on the additional meaning of "to express in words". This later application is the one that has survived. The cordial Romeo speaks of was any food, medicine, or beverage that invigorated the heart. While he applies the word to poison, we apply it to alcohol. Of all of these changes, chap may be the one word that seems the most unusual. We now have several meanings for this word but they would seldom include Juliet's meaning in line 83 of Act IV scene i. The records of 1555 show that the word chap meant either of the two bones in the jaw. With either definition the word chapless creates an unpleasant mental image.

The final word of this vocabulary section stands alone because of its special history. The word cankered (I,i,98) was often spelled cancered until the 1700's. It meant any spreading sore or ulcer. From it are derived our words canker and cancer. Because scholars have been intrigued by such developments they have produced works like the Oxford English Dictionary, which provide a reservoir of knowledge for any interested student.

TWO STYLES: THE NURSE AND THE PRINCE

After going through examples and explanations of the linguistic options that were available to Shakespeare, it may be helpful to consider the individual styles of two characters in Romeo and Juliet. The two characters I have chosen are the nurse and the prince, as these two represent the extremes on the social and educational scale. While their differences in speech patterns may not be too obvious to us, the Elizabethan audiences would have been very aware of the minute details that make up their dialects.

The character of the nurse may be one of the best character sketches of the play. What she says and how she says it are entirely different from anything Lady Capulet would ever say. The nurse's bawdy innuendoes and religious exclamations, not to mention her remarks on biological functions, are far beneath the upper class women. The nurse's speeches are written to sound very much like ordinary speech. According to Charles Barber in Early Modern English, there are many little details that make speech seem real and informal. Simple sentences that contain slang or colloquial terms and bits of proverbs suggest natural speech because they do not sound prepared as formal writing would. Other indications of informal speech include exclamations and oaths, utterance-initiators such as well or oh, and ellipsis or contracted forms of words. When people speak rapidly they often stop and start, change their topic, and change the grammatical construction of their sentences.²⁹ While these traits are not noticeable in spoken English, their existence in written form is very obvious, and for that reason they are not common. The nurse's speeches exhibit

all of these qualities and they are worth noting.

The nurse's pronunciation peculiarities are obvious, if not frequent. In Act II, scene iv, line 134, she uses confidence when she may mean conference. This may be a malapropism, or the word may have been a slang expression that was appropriate in this context yet is unknown now. Later in the same scene in line 212, the nurse describes Juliet's reaction to Paris' praise and says Juliet "looks as pale as any clout in the versal world." Clout is a dialectal pronunciation of what finally became our word cloth; the /ɒU/ form existed as the pronunciation in the less educated class.³⁰ The use of versal for universal is an example of the clipping of a word, which is allowed in informal speech.

Part of the nurse's pronunciation that makes her difficult to understand is her use of a as reduced forms of both on and he. The schwa was a common sound and many of the lower class used it for he in an unstressed position. Shakespeare and other contemporary writers used it in colloquial speech in comic or low-life scenes.³¹ In Act II, scene v, line 51, the nurse complains that her head and back hurt with, "My back a t' other side- ah, my back, my back!" In this case the a must mean on (also note the contracted form of the.) In Act I, scene iii, line 40, the nurse says, "'A was a merry man," and in this case the schwa sound means he.

As discussed under the heading of morphological changes, the -es was the common form used in plays. Therefore, the majority of the third person verbs used by the nurse have the -es suffix. In the nurse's long passage in Act III, v, 214-227 she uses such verbs as dares,

needs, stands, and excels. She does, however, use hath and doth, which were the forms preferred by Shakespeare.

The sentence structure of the nurse's speeches is both unique and common. Her passages are unique because they can be distinguished from any other character's, and they are common because they do sound very much like natural, everyday spoken English. Her sentences contain all the elements that Barber lists as attributes of informal speech. She interrupts her sentences with parenthetical phrases: "She and Susan (God rest all Christian souls) were of an age" (I,iii,18); and she changes her topic in mid-sentence, "Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous, and a kind, and handsome, and, I warrant, a virtuous, where is your mother?" (II,v,56-58). When the nurse brings the news of Tybalt's death (III,ii,37-70), she goes through a similar confusing jumble, until Juliet is not sure who is dead.

The option of using the auxiliary do or omitting it is very noticeable in the nurse's language. In her line, "Nay, I do bear a brain" (I,iii,29), she uses do, but not for emphasis; it is just a statement. Later in the second act, she uses do once but leaves it out nine lines later. "Do you not see that I am out of breath?" (II,v,30), asks a question in the modern way, but the negative sentence is "...you know not how to choose a man." These examples illustrate that what sounds unusual and perhaps elevated to us may have been very common and conventional then.

Perhaps the area where the nurse is most unique is her vocabulary. While the words the nurse uses do not play a key role in this study they are a large part of her style of speech. Because of

character sketches like the nurse we have some idea of the slang expressions of that time which were so short lived that they did not come down to us in any form. Many of the unclear lines are caused by her use of slang and bawdy terms. Her remark to Romeo in II,iv,208 cannot be glossed very well. It is not much clearer to say Paris would "take a slice" than to say Paris would "fain lay knife abroad," but its meaning is so obscure that not much else can be said. Because of the context and the nurse's character it must have a sexual connotation. She seems to be fond of bawdy expressions and sexual puns, which are liberally sprinkled throughout the play. The first line the nurse says is, "Now by my maidenhead at twelve year old I bade her come" (I, iii,2). Here she is using her virginity as a twelve year old to swear by, which may have been a common practice then because many girls were married at twelve or thirteen. Later in the same scene she makes the remark "Women grow by men" (I,iii,95), which obviously refers to pregnancy. A similar bawdy reference is made in Act II, scene v, lines 76-77:

"I am the drudge, and toil in your delight;
But you shall bear the burden soon at night."

Besides these bawdy remarks, it also appears that the nurse can compete in a name-calling contest with the best of them. When the nurse seeks our Romeo among Mercutio and his friends, she is able to exchange harsh and vulgar words that no lady should know or say. Her intentions are clear but a couple of the exact meanings are lost to us. In Act II, scene iv, lines 160-61 she announces, "Scurvy knave, I am none of his flirt-gills, I am none of his skainsmates." While it is not clear what she is not, it is obvious that the women that deserve

those names are not very nice ladies. Because the meanings have been lost it must be inferred that the words were slang expressions that were not widely used for any length of time.

Not all of the expletives that the nurse uses are bawdy; there are many that have a religious origin. While other characters use religious phrases, it is the frequency and the variety that sets the nurse apart. She seems to reflect the superstitious nature of the lower class by saying a blessing whenever the name of a deceased person is mentioned. In the third scene of Act I, she manages to use seven religious expletives in her small share of the total 100 lines. Her comments range from "God rest all Christian souls" (18), "...by th' rood" (36), to "God mark thee in his grace" (59).

While the character of the nurse has all the qualities of the uneducated lower class, the Prince represents her opposite. His three scenes may be short but they are powerful. Unlike the nurse who rambles on when she speaks, he keeps his announcements short and decisive, thus adding to the power. His speeches do not contain the characteristics of normal speech, such as changing topics halfway through. The main difference between the speeches of the two people may be attributed to the fact that the nurse speaks in prose, while the majority of the Prince's lines are in blank verse (I,i,84-106 and V,iii,266-295) or rhymed couplets (III,i,188-99). Both of these literary conventions dictate a precision and efficiency that is not found in normal extemporaneous speech.

The Prince's passages do not present any pronunciation problems as the standard dialect is the choice most often made. In his

rhymed passage haste and last are paired (III,ii,96-7), but this connection is easily noticed because it comes at the end of a long section of couplets. Pronunciation of his lines is not altered by the use of contractions or slurred expressions. Because of the required beats of the iambic pentameter of blank verse, each syllable in a line must be given its full value. Use is made of the option to give an extra stress to the dental suffix of a verb, thereby adding a beat to the line.

"Profaners of this neighbor-stained steel-" (I,i,85).

"And hear the sentence of your moved prince" (I,i,91)

His distinct diction is a sharp contrast to the often slurred, imprecise speech of the nurse.

The vocabulary of the Prince also points out some differences in the two character types. Such words as "pernicious rage" (I,i,87) do not have the sound of the typical working class vocabulary. While all of the expletives used by the nurse are at his disposal, the Prince is able to express his rage without them. Besides the words themselves, much of the Prince's distinction comes in the way he puts the words together. Even the structure of his sentences flows more smoothly and shows more maturity and education. A quick count of his total lines shows 24 sentences that are only two lines long, which is still quite short compared to the length of many of the nurse's lines. With lines like "Search, seek, and know how this foul murder comes" (V,iii,198), and "Look, and thou shalt see" (V,iii,213), he makes his point clear with a minimum of words. While his most common form is the short sentence, he is also in control of a long sentence, as is

proved by I,i,92-98, in which he requires seven lines for a one sentence reprimand of Capulet and Montague. There are seven similar sentences that are three lines or longer.

Through these differences in the Prince's speeches, it is possible to convey a very different type of character for him although he and the nurse are both bound by many of the same morphological and syntactic conventions. If only the thou/you and -eths/-es distinctions or the omission of do were compared the nurse and Prince would have many similar traits.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this study the emphasis has been placed on the problems that students and teachers may have with a Shakespearian work. The items that cause problems are inherent in the growth of a language, as change creates differences that are not immediately understood. While any living language shows a change in vocabulary, the English language has undergone a unique transition in pronunciation. This change is labeled the Great Vowel Shift, and it is responsible for the loss of many rhymes and puns.

Other changes that have taken place as the language has aged and matured have caused some rules to be dropped and new ones to be formalized. The use of thou has gradually been eliminated, as has the use of -eth on verbs, which now sounds archaic to our ears. Sentence structure rules have become much more defined and we now have very specific uses of do as an auxiliary verb, so that its use or omission is not arbitrary. It is important to remember that

these insights to Romeo and Juliet are not confined to a single play but common to most Elizabethan dramas, so this type of study could be undertaken for any Shakespearian play.

END NOTES

¹Charles Barber, Early Modern English, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p. 263.

²G. L. Brook, The Language of Shakespeare, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p. 112.

³Brook, p. 112.

⁴Brook, p. 113.

⁵Albert Cook III, Introduction to the English Language, (New York: Ronald Press, 1969), p. 174.

⁶Barber, p. 290.

⁷Barber, p. 331.

⁸Barber, p. 292.

⁹Barber, p. 326.

¹⁰Barber, p. 326.

¹¹E. J. Dobson, English Pronunciation 1500-1700, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 474.

¹²Barber, p. 321.

¹³Barber, p. 332.

¹⁴Dobson, p. 453.

¹⁵Barber, p. 292.

¹⁶Fredrick Ness, The Use of Rhyme in Shakespeare's Plays, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 126.

¹⁷Ness, p. 125.

- ¹⁸Barber, p. 200.
- ¹⁹Barber, p. 210.
- ²⁰Barber, p. 238.
- ²¹Barber, p. 239.
- ²²Barber, p. 239.
- ²³Charles Wrenn, The English Language, (London: Methuen, 1949), p. 164.
- ²⁴Barber, p. 267.
- ²⁵Barber, p. 280.
- ²⁶Barber, p. 281.
- ²⁷Barber, p. 284.
- ²⁸Maureen Mahood, Shakespeare's Wordplay, (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 56.
- ²⁹Barber, p. 55.
- ³⁰Barber, p. 313.
- ³¹Barber, p. 207.

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LANGUAGE IN ROMEO AND JULIET

by

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B.A., Central College, 1975

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1980

ABSTRACT

This report is designed to be an instructor's aid in teaching Romeo and Juliet. Since the English language has changed in so many ways since Shakespeare wrote in the 16th century, it is necessary to spend some time on the history of the language. In spite of the fact that the words and their arrangement often sound foreign now, they were a common form of expression then. Hence much can be gained by studying the language resources that existed during the Early Modern period. The resources covered in this report include pronunciation, morphological options (the difference between you and thou, and the option of using -eth or -es on a verb), vocabulary, and variable sentence patterns. The report ends with a brief survey of the speech of two distinct and opposite characters, the nurse and the prince.