

*The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*  
and the Pronouns of Address: Q1 (1603) versus Q2 (1604/5)

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This paper originated in a double interest in *you* and *thou*, the pronouns of address in Early Modern English. On the one hand, it was born out of a desire to test if those Shakespearean plays which have been preserved in two or more early texts could cast any light on the uses of the pronouns of address. This could be, precisely, the case of *Hamlet*, which survives in three early texts: the Quarto of 1603, the Quarto of 1604/5 and the First Folio of 1623. On the other hand, this paper grew from a dissatisfaction with the way in which theories on the Early Modern English pronouns of address have been used to explain the use of *you* and *thou* in Shakespeare's plays.

As far as I know, the body of knowledge which we possess about the history of the textual transmission of Shakespeare's plays has been consistently ignored by studies of the pronouns of address in Early Modern English. It is not surprising that Shakespearean scholars interested in the pronouns of address have so far ignored the existence of Quartos and Folios and have based their research of the uses of these pronouns on a single text: after all, editorial tradition has often assumed that Shakespeare produced a perfect manuscript when he wrote each of his plays and the text of that manuscript has suffered successive manipulations and corruptions. Within this tradition, the task of the editor has been to retrieve, as best she can, that pristine quality of the lost Shakespearean original.

It is more surprising that those who are not - or not only - interested in the plays of Shakespeare as literary works, but who are interested in the language of the English Renaissance and historical linguistics or in sociolinguistics and the study of Style, have equally neglected the abundant data which can be obtained from a simple collation between the First Folio version of one of Shakespeare's plays and an earlier version (such as a so-called 'bad' Quarto) of the same play. Although there are many Shakespearean plays of which we only possess the version preserved in the First Folio, we are lucky to have a play such as *Hamlet*, for which no less than three early texts have been preserved.

The so called 'bad' Quarto (1603), is a non-authoritative edition which is believed not to have a direct link with Shakespeare's autograph. It is supposed to be a reported text, that is, the result of memorial reconstruction, and diverse theories have been put forward to account for its existence: it may have been the work of the player who took the part of Marcellus, or it may have been put together by a company of players that was on tour and did not have the 'Booke', or it may have been taken down in successive performances by a hired stenographer. None of these theories have been sufficiently proved and it has even been suggested that Q1 could represent an earlier version of the play which Shakespeare later revised (Urkowitz 1986). The second edition of the play, the 'good' Quarto of 1604 / 1605, is held to descend directly from Shakespeare's own 'foul papers' or autograph and since Dover Wilson published his old Cambridge edition of the play in 1934, it is supposed to be the nearest we can get to Shakespeare's first thoughts. Finally, the First Folio version of 1623, is believed to bear traces of the 'prompt-book' kept in Shakespeare's playhouse and it is assumed that it preserves the play as it was performed in the Globe. Most contemporary editors of the play conflate Q2 and F, so that no line Shakespeare wrote is lost. Recently, some editors have given priority to Q2, like H. Jenkins in his edition for the Arden Series (1982) and

some editors have done the same with F: Edwards in his New Cambridge edition (1985) puts square brackets around Q2-only lines and G. R. Hibbard, in his Oxford edition (1987), removes these lines from the main text and places them in an appendix.

These three texts vary in length: Q1 is the shortest, being almost half the size of Q2, which is the longest. Q2 and F differ sometimes only in matters such as punctuation and single word variants but there are also more substantial differences between the two texts, since there are lines in Q2 which do not appear in F, and *vice versa*, there are lines which appear in F and which are absent from Q2. Given these differences between Q2 and F, it is remarkable that these two authoritative texts present few, if any, different readings when it comes to the pronouns of address. Q1 and Q2, however, differ on a number of occasions, partly because Q1, being considerably shorter than Q2, has less instances of pronouns, but it is possible to find lines which are present in both texts and which are identical except for the choice of pronoun.

The occurrence of either pronoun in exactly the same line, in exactly the same dramatic context, is something which Brown and Gilman's famous theory of the pronouns of power and solidarity (Brown and Gilman 1960) cannot deal with easily. Brown and Gilman's theories on the pronouns of address still seems to have a currency which is no longer deserved: the work of Quirk (1971) and Wales (1983) on *you* and *thou* has shown that Brown and Gilman's model of the pronouns of power and solidarity cannot account for the complex use of the pronouns of address in Early Modern English dramatic texts. Brown and Gilman (1960;1989) assume that *you* and *thou* function in Renaissance plays more or less like other European V-pronouns and T-pronouns, that is, like *vous* and *tu* in French, *du* and *Sie* in German and *tu* and *usted* in Spanish. The use of pronoun is then regulated by relations of superiority and inferiority or by the degree of intimacy existing between the speakers. The only difference is that there are cases in which dramatic characters shift from *you* to *thou* or from *thou* to *you* momentarily and this is due to an 'expressive' or 'emotional' use of the pronominal system: the switch from one pronoun to the other indicates that the speaker is moved or emotionally aroused, so an alteration in the expected pattern of address indicates the expression of transient feelings or affective moods.

Quirk (1971) and Wales (1983) have suggested instead that at the end of the 16th century the use of the pronouns of address in Early Modern English differed considerably from their equivalents in other European languages. In Shakespeare's English, *you* had become already the most frequently used pronoun of address between members of most social classes, at least in London and the Court. Wales (1983: 121) has shown that contemporary grammarians thought this to be the case. Together with this increasing predominance of *you*, there were residual uses of *thou* which we may or may not be able to account for: *thou* was still used in a variety of contexts and situations (such as religious language and dialects), but whenever it was used, it would contrast with *you*: in other words, whenever *thou* was selected, it would be selected for a reason. Equally, if *thou* had been selected and the speaker suddenly reverted to the use of *you*, this contrast would also be meaningful: 'Although *you* is the general unmarked form beside which the use of *thou* is conspicuous, the position is that in a relationship where *thou* is expected, *you* can likewise be in contrast and conspicuous.' (Quirk 1971: 71). Wales has also pointed out (1983: 115), that despite the existence of this contrast between *you* and *thou*, in some cases, the semantic content of the Early Modern English pronouns of address must have been almost identical, since this would explain the apparently incomprehensible fluctuation and the eventual disappearance of *thou*, which had begun to become redundant.

Generations of Shakespearean scholars and linguists (myself included, I must admit) have spent time elucidating the meanings and contextual nuances of *you* and *thou* in Shakespeare's plays<sup>1</sup> and it is often difficult to accept that there may be cases in which the contrast between the two pronouns of address is meaningless, that is, that perhaps both pronouns could be equally

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Abbot, E. A. (1869), Brown, R. and A. Gilman (1960), Brown, R. and A. Gilman (1989), Byrne, St. G. (1936), Calvo, C. (1992), Calvo, C. (1994), Hope, J. (1994), McIntosh, A. (1963), Muir, K. and S. Schoenbaum (1971), Quirk, R. (1971), Sebeok, T. A. (1960), Wales, K. (1983), Wales, K. ed (1994).

selected at a given point in discourse. The choice of *you* or *thou* in a particular context may have been dictated only by the speaker's own idiolect. In the case of dramatic texts, the choice of pronoun may have been an artistic choice, a literary device, but even in the context of artistic creation, the choice may have been entirely a matter of personal preference between two pronouns which denoted second person singular reference and did not connote much. The existence of the first and second Quartos of *Hamlet* offers a good chance to observe how either pronoun could equally be used in exactly the same utterance or in a very similar context.<sup>1</sup>

In Act II, scene ii, when Polonius reports to the King and Queen how he has admonished his daughter Ophelia to reject Hamlet's advances, Q1 and Q2 present a different pronoun of address in a line which is otherwise identical:

Q1

*COR.* Now when I saw this letter, thus I bespake my maiden:  
*Lord Hamlet is a Prince out of your starre,*  
 And one that is vnequall for your loue:  
 Therefore I did commaund her refuse his letters, (D4;ll.800-803)

Q2

*POL.* And my young Mistris thus I did bespeake,  
*Lord Hamlet is a Prince out of thy star,*  
 This must not be: and then I prescripts gaued her (E4v;LTN 1169-1171)

This could be taken to indicate that the 'pirates' who produced Q1, ignorant as we must necessarily pose them, bent on pecuniary profit and nothing else, were careless enough to fail to notice the nuances of the *thou* of affection which Polonius has for Ophelia in Q2 and, due to their incompetence, memorially reconstructed this line as '*your starre*'. There is a problem, however, with constructing explanations such as this one, based on artistic merit and on the superior literary talent of William Shakespeare: we are inevitably doomed to find evidence to the contrary sooner or later. Towards the end of the 'closet scene', when Hamlet has seen his father's ghost and Gertrude begins to suspect that his son is mad, it is Q2 the text which selects the neutral *you* and Q1 the text which prefers the non-neutral *thou* of supposedly emotional overtones and superior literary achievement:

Q1

*QUEENE.* Alas, it is the weakenesse of thy braine,  
 Which makes thy tongue to blazon thy hearts grieffe: (G3; ll.1580-1581)

Q2

*GERTR.* This is the very coynage of your braine,  
 This bodillesse creation extacie is very cunning in. (I4; LTN 2520-2521)

The choice of pronoun has been reversed here and Q1 has *thou* where Q2 has *you*. If we accept our earlier explanation for the *thou* of Polonius to Ophelia, we are now forced to grant that the pirates improved Shakespeare's choice of pronoun, since in Q1 the Queen, who has not seen the Ghost, addresses Hamlet with a pronoun which shows her emotional state, her confusion when she hears her son holding a conversation with the air, her sadness when she suspects her son might be after all really insane.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Q1 and Q2 *Hamlet* have been taken from the parallel text edition of the three-text *Hamlet* in Bertram and Kliman 1991.

When Hamlet meets the players earlier in the play, there is another occasion in which the pirates seem to have ‘improved’ Shakespeare’s text, if the use of *thou* is explained as the *thou* of affection:

Q2

HAM. Follow him friends, weele heare a play to morrowe; dost *thou* heare me old friend, can *you* play the murther of *Gonzago*?

PLAY. I my Lord.

HAM. Weele hate to morrowe night, *you could for neede study a speech of some dosen lines, or sixteene lines*, which I would set downe and insert in’t, could *you* not?

PLAY. I my Lord. (F4v; LTN 1576-1583)

Q1

HAM. Come hither maisters, can *you* not play the murder of *Gonsago*?

PLAYERS. Yes my Lord.

HAM. *And could’st not thou for a neede study me*

*Some dozen or sixteene lines,*

Which I would set downe and insert?

PLAYERS. Yes very easily my good Lord. (E4v; ll.1120-1126)

Like in the ‘closet scene’, Q1 has *thou* in a context in which Q2 has *you*. We are again forced to grant that Q1 improves Q2’s choice of pronoun, since in Q1 Hamlet addresses one of the players with the *thou* of affection and conspiratorial intimacy: ‘And could’st not *thou* for a neede study me / Some dozen or sixteene lines, / Which I would set downe and insert?’ Hamlet is addressing here the player whom he wants to enlist as his ally to test the King’s guilt while the Court watches the play within the play. With his pronominal choice, Hamlet acknowledges that he is asking a favour of this player. If this analysis is right, on this particular occasion then, the text of Q1 is, on artistic grounds, better than the text of Q2. Not many would agree, though, with the suggestion that the pirates, the thieves who stole the text of *Hamlet* and memorially reconstructed it, actually improved Shakespeare’s text.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the play, when Hamlet meets the player again to give him the speech and the instructions on how to perform it, we find that the reported text has a pronoun shift from *thou* to *you*. This is one of those single pronominal shifts which when it is thought to come from Shakespeare’s pen is attributed to his mastery at expressing temporary or ‘fleeting’ moods. Q2, said to represent Shakespeare’s intentions directly from his foul papers, shows no pronominal shift:

Q2

HAM. *Speake the speech I pray you as I pronoun’d it to you, trippingly on the tongue, but if you mouth it as many of our Players do, I had as liue the towne*

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<sup>1</sup> There is of course something else which has to be taken into account: Q1 looks as if it has not been set carefully at this point, because Hamlet is using the second person singular pronoun *thou* and the text assigns the answer to Hamlet’s question to the plural ‘players’. This could be a compositor’s error, since just before setting this speech tag, the compositor has set the same speech tag a couple of lines earlier to introduce the players’ answer to Hamlet’s question: ‘Come hither maisters, can *you* not play the murder of *Gonsago*?’ Later in Q1 the compositor seems to have made the same mistake, since the same speech-tag ‘players’ appears again before a line obviously intended for just one player: ‘I warrant you my Lord’ (Q1 F2; l.1230). So perhaps in this occasion the *thou* of affection is simply a compositorial error, a possibility not altogether remote given that the meanings of *you* and *thou* were becoming less and less distinct at the turn of the 17th century.

cryer spoke my lines, nor doe not say the ayre too much with your hand thus, but vse all gently, for in the very torrent tempest, and as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, *you* must acquire a beget a temperance, that may giue it smoothnesse, (G3v; LTN 1849-1855)

## Q1

*HAM. Pronounce me this speech trippingly a the tongue*

*as I taught thee,*

*Mary and you mouth it, as a many of your players do*

I'de rather heare a towne bull bellow,

Then such a fellow speake my lines.

Nor do not saw the aire thus with your hands,

But giue euery thing his action with temperance. (F2; ll.1206-1212)

Here again, either we accept that the pirates improved Shakespeare's text, or we blame the compositor who set the text of Q2 for the press, or failing this, we may have to accept that in some cases, free variation and the vagaries of speaker's idiolect is at the origin of the choice between *you* or *thou*. There is, of course, another option which is to suggest that between the printer's copy for Q1 and the printer's copy for Q2, Shakespeare revised - or enlarged as the title-page for Q2 says - the play we now call simply *Hamlet*. This option would probably meet with more trenchant opposition and perhaps some would prefer to accept after all the idea that the pirates, possibly out of a stroke of luck, improved Shakespeare's text. A third option, of course, is to question the importance of the *thou* of affection.

It seems to me that the lesson waiting to be learned from a comparison of the use of the pronouns of address in Q1 and Q2 is that the swift shifts of pronominal choice which we have been bent on deciphering and explaining as the expression of transient feeling could perhaps be, in some cases, the result of meaningless free-variation between the two pronouns of address or the product of corruption in the process of textual transmission.

I have tried to show how anyone looking into the mechanics of the pronouns of address in Early Modern English from a sociolinguistic angle may ignore the evidence contained in some renaissance plays which have been preserved in different Quartos, and if they choose to do so, they will do it at their own risk. Yet, it seems to me, Shakespearean scholars working on the pronouns of address cannot afford to ignore the rich data which can be obtained from the multiple-text condition of some of Shakespeare's plays.

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