



# Shakespeare's Weird Words

## #1: Unusual pronouns and verb forms

### Unusual Pronouns

In Shakespeare's day, English had two different ways of saying *you*, just like French, Spanish, Italian, and many other languages do today. *You* was used in formal situations or to address more than one person. Surprisingly, the now unfamiliar *Thou* was used in less formal, more friendly situations. It can be fun to notice which words Shakespeare's characters are using with different people or in different situations. Sometimes it's surprising!

Weird word	Meaning	Example
thou	you (subject)	<b>Thou must be patient.</b> In <i>King Lear</i> , the aging King says these words to an old friend, Gloucester.
thee	you (object)	<b>O, how I love thee!</b> In <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Titania says these words to Nick Bottom.
thy	your (possessive)	<b>Give me thy hand.</b> More than 20 different characters say this to shake hands, make a promise, say goodbye, and more.



### Unusual verb forms after *thou*

In Shakespeare's plays, the verb that comes after *thou* usually ends in *st*. There are countless examples: *thou see'st*, *thou make'st*, *thou speak'st*, to list a few.

Weird words	Meaning	Example
thou art	you are	<b>Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.</b> In <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Titania is under a spell and says this to Nick Bottom, whose head has been transformed into that of a donkey.

## Unusual verb forms after *thou* (continued)

Weird word	Meaning	Example
thou dost	you do	<b>If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.</b> In <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i> , Juliet prompts Romeo with this direct instruction.
thou hast	you have	<b>Thou hast done well.</b> In <i>The Tempest</i> , the magician Prospero gives the magical spirit Ariel this compliment.
thou wast	you were	<b>...in thy youth thou wast as true a lover That ever sighed upon a midnight pillow.</b> In <i>As You Like It</i> , Sylvius tries to make Corin feel a little better after suggesting that old people can't understand love.
thou wilt	you will	<b>O, thou wilt speak again of banishment.</b> In <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i> , Romeo doesn't want to hear Friar Laurence talk anymore about banishment.



## Unusual verb forms after *he, she, or it*

Sometimes there's a *th* at the end of a verb in what's called the third person singular form. These are some examples, but it can happen with all sorts of verbs.

Weird word	Meaning	Example
she doth	she does	<b>O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!</b> In <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i> , Romeo describes Juliet's beauty in this unusual way just before their first encounter.
he hateth	he hates	<b>The more I love, the more he hateth me.</b> In <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Helena is talking about Demetrius.
he hath	he has	<b>What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.</b> In <i>Macbeth</i> , Duncan declares that the disgraced Thane of Cawdor's title will be given to Macbeth.
quoth he	said he	<b>'Will you come home,' quoth I; 'My gold,' quoth he.</b> In <i>The Comedy of Errors</i> , Dromio recounts an exchange with Antipholus.

Sources for definitions:

*Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary & Language Companion*, by David Crystal and Ben Crystal (Penguin, 2002).  
Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed through the Vancouver Public Library (2020)

## Explore

Using your newfound knowledge, see if you can figure out what each of these lines means:

<b>Speak'st thou in sober meanings?</b>	<b>He hath confess'd.</b>
<b>Dost thou not know?</b>	<b>I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.</b>
<b>I shall miss thee: But yet thou shalt have freedom.</b>	<b>This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.</b>
<b>O, who hath done this deed?</b>	<b>O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou!</b>
<b>Why uncle, thou hast many years to live.</b>	<b>Smilest thou?</b>
<b>Thou art a soldier only: speak no more.</b>	<b>Let me enfold thee and hold thee to my heart.</b>
<b>Blistered be thy tongue for such a wish!</b>	<b>I can here disarm thee with this stick And make thy weapon drop.</b>
<b>Thou should'st not have been old till thou had'st been wise.</b>	<b>Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.</b>



## Create!

Now that you're familiar with these words, try using them in your own writing.

## So, who says these lines?

Here's who says each of the quotes on page 3, and in which play.

**"Speak'st thou in sober meanings?"**

Orlando in *As You Like It*

**"He hath confess'd."**

The title character in *Othello*

**"Dost thou not know?"**

Antipholus of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors*

**"I wasted time, and now doth time waste me."**

The title character in *Richard the Second*

**"I shall miss thee:  
But yet thou shalt have freedom."**

Prospero in *The Tempest*

**"This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not."**

Friar Laurence in *Romeo & Juliet*

**"O, who hath done this deed?"**

Emilia in *Othello*

**"O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou!"**

Orsino in *Twelfth Night*

**"Why uncle, thou hast many years to live."**

The title character in *Richard the Second*

**"Smilest thou?"**

Olivia in *Twelfth Night*

**"Thou art a soldier only: speak no more."**

Antony in *Antony & Cleopatra*

**"Let me enfold thee and hold thee to my heart."**

Duncan in *Macbeth*

**"Blistered be thy tongue for such a wish!"**

Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet*

**"I can here disarm thee with this stick  
And make thy weapon drop."**

Prospero in *The Tempest*

**"Thou should'st not have been old  
till thou had'st been wise."**

The Fool in *King Lear*

**"Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know."**

Hotspur in *Henry the Fourth, Part 1*

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