

The Language of Shakespeare

His ~60,000 words to our ~3000 vocabulary

3 little pigs retold in the likes of Shakespeare's language

PRONOUNS

thy = your (used before a consonant) "thy coat" = your coat

thine = your (used before a vowel) "thine arm" = your arm

thou = you (subject) "Thou shalt not kill." = You shall not kill

thee = you (object) "My country, 'tis of thee..." = My country, it is of you...

VERBS

thou hast = you have

he hath = he has

thou wilt = you will

thou shalt = you shall

would that = I wish that "Would that I were rich!"

thou dost = you do

he doth = he does

thou didst = you did

thou art = you are

GENERAL RULES: thou + verb + est = you verb

Examples: thou seemest = you seem

thou thinkest = you think

thou goest = you go

he + verb + eth = he verb

Examples: he seemeth = he seems

he thinketh = he thinks

he goeth = he goes

CONTRACTIONS:

e'er = ever, always

ne'er = never

o'er = over

'tis = it is

'twill = it will

OTHER USEFUL WORDS:

ay or aye = yes (pronounces "I")

nay = no

hither = from here or to here : "Come hither, I need to talk to you."

thither = from there or to there : "Let's go thither for lunch."

whilst = while ere = before

prithee = please, I beg you (also literally, "I pray you")

sirrah = thy way you speak to your servant or to someone from a lower social class

errand for me."

morry = in truth, certainly

anon = soon, in a little while

an = if

"Sirrah, run this

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Much of the information below (excluding the examples) has been adapted from the book: Teaching Shakespeare by Rex Gibson (Cambridge University Press 1998).•

Imagery- The use of emotionally charged words and phrases which create a vivid mental picture in one's imagination. These verbal expressions "paint" immediate pictures in the mind of the audience. The images are taken from many sources: nature, the seasons, the sea, sport, hunting, farming, banking, education, medicine, sailing etc. In short life in Elizabethan England provided the material for Shakespeare's images. These images are most often created by comparisons:

Simile- Comparison using words such as "like" and "as"

*ROMEO : O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;*

Metaphor - Comparison without "as" and "like" which suggests two different things are actually the same.

*ROMEO [To JULIET] If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.*

Personification- this is a special kind of imagery that turns all kinds of things into persons: death, time, war, love, etc. are given human feelings and attributes. *Capulet* (Juliet's father) tells *Paris* (Juliet's fiance) that Juliet is dead. This was to be the day of the wedding. Notice how Death is personified.

*O son, the night before thy wedding day
Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies,
Flower as she was deflowered by him.
Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir,
My daughter he hath wedded. •*

Stylistic elements - Shakespeare "plays" with the language, molding it like clay, making it serve his purpose. Placing certain words together or letters together or using rhyme or using puns etc enriches the sounds and the meaning and ultimately the experience that audience has when viewing the play.

Antithesis - placing words or phrases which are opposites close to each other. The essence of any drama is conflict and Shakespeare intensifies the conflict by using antithesis (Good-evil, love-hate, light-dark, power-weakness, fate-free will, war-peace etc.)

*Juliet about Romeo: "My only love sprung from my only hate
Too early seen unknown, and known too late."*

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Oxymoron - Two opposing words next to each other which seem impossible at first glance but actually contain a striking truth.

Juliet says goodbye to Romeo: Parting is such sweet sorrow.

Repetition - repeating letters, sounds, words, phrases, sentences for dramatic effect.

Alliteration- the repetition of consonants (b,c,d,f,g,h,j etc.) usually at the beginning of words.

Assonance - the repetition of vowel sounds (a,e,i,o,u).

"For men so old as we to keep the peace."

- (Act I/Scene 2/Line 3)

"my young lady asked for, the nurse cursed in the pantry..."

- (Act I/Scene 3/Lines 101-102)

"Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks"

- (Act 5/Scene 3/Line 95)

Onomatopoeia - using words to convey the sound of what they describe.

Juliet's nurse (maid servant) tells Romeo about her:

He that can lay hold of her

Shall have the chinks.

"Chinks" probably means money.

Rhyme- matching sounds at the end of lines. These are used often even at certain parts of blank verse (unrhymed speech). A rhyming couplet often indicates the end of a scene, (there was no curtain or screen on the stage in a Shakespearean theatre), or a farewell, or a blessing or a prophesy. There are approximately 500 rhymes in Romeo and Juliet.

Lists - Shakespeare often wrote long lists to emphasize a point. Juliet does not wish to marry Paris. She has promised her love to Romeo. She lists the things she would rather do than marry Paris.

O bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,

From off the battlements of any tower,

Or walk in thievish ways, or bid me lurk

Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears, Or...

Puns - double meaning created when one word has two or more different meanings. This can be comic or ironic. Many puns are difficult to understand because the meanings of words have changed. Many of the puns in Romeo and Juliet are sexual in nature. There are many other elements that could be mentioned when discussing the language of Shakespeare. Above is a limited list of some of the most obvious elements.