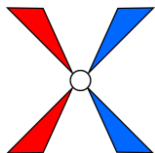


280 DB

bncdoc.id	CRV
bncdoc.author	Vickers, Brian
bncdoc.year	1989
bncdoc.title	Returning to Shakespeare.
bncdoc.info	Returning to Shakespeare. Sample containing about 40640 words from a book (domain: arts)
Text availability	Worldwide rights cleared
Publication date	1985-1993
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David Lee's classification	W_ac_humanities_arts

<p><280/c></p>  <p>Key: Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p>	<p>11 instances; He in Sonnets 127-52: 22 instances; total 33). Extremely small are the figures for We/Us/Our, where this refers to an aspect of experience shared by the poet and his friend (Sonnets 1-126: 10 times) or mistress (Sonnets 127-52: twice); also the plural You or Ye (once only) and the plural They (twice). In other words, the I and Thou forms predominate over all other personal pronouns by a factor of more than 13 to 1. The statistics confirm what a detailed reading will tell us, that the majority of the Sonnets move with astonishing frequency on the axis from I to You and back again. They enact a transaction, one that is constantly being made, broken, and remade, coming under doubt and suspicion, collapsing with proof of infidelity or betrayal by either side, being slowly rebuilt as doubt gives way to confirmation. The phases of the relationship are reflected in the constellation of the pronouns - or rather, they are created by the pronouns. Critics vie with each other in discovering the dominant qualities of the Sonnets: one chooses imagery, another stresses repetition, or symmetry, or antithesis. But the truly dominant, characterizing feature is the use of pronouns and the movement between them: take those away and you destroy the relationship out of which the poems derive. Discussion of Shakespeare's use of pronouns has been, so far, largely focused on the plays, in particular on the distinction within the second-person form between singular and plural, Thou and You. There are scattered remarks on this topic in the standard reference books on Shakespeare's grammar, an early American dissertation, and several articles of greater or lesser linguistic expertise. To anyone familiar with the conventions of the second-person singular in modern European languages it is no surprise to learn that Shakespeare preserves the distinction You/Thou primarily to express the relationship far/near, as when a parent addresses a child (or a master a servant) as Thou and receives You in reply. These have been called the pronouns of power and solidarity respectively. More interesting is the discovery that while You is the stylistically unmarked form, more matter-of-fact, 'not impolite' or 'not informal', Thou can express both intimacy and anger, or indeed any increase in the emotional tone of a conversation. We find scenes in which two characters on an equal footing move back and forth between Thou and You according to mood (Hal and Falstaff); others where both characters use Thou, one expressing affection, the other hostility (Richard III wooing Lady Anne); others where the shift from You to Thou expresses a crucial shift of intimacy (Goneril to Edmund) or acceptance (Brabantio to Roderigo). The critic of the plays must pay attention to register, those variations in language as used in particular social contexts, but also to rises and falls in the emotional temperature within a scene. Neither of these approaches is relevant to the Sonnets, obviously enough, but a third certainly is, namely the question of euphony, the difference between 'Do you think that they are</p>
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threatening?’ and ‘Thinkst thou that they threaten?’ As Vivian Salmon has shown, awkwardness in pronunciation, ‘where the - st suffix of the Thou- form stood in close proximity to consonants whose assimilation was difficult, or would have resulted in syntactic ambiguity’, led to a preference for the You form or for one retaining Thou but adding an unstressed do, as in ‘What didst thou lose?’ or ‘It was ourself thou didst abuse’. The question of variations between Thou and You in the Sonnets has been discussed rather fruitlessly. Just as characters in the plays switch from Thou to You and back in a way that seems to us to have no evident rationale, so in the Sonnets Shakespeare uses both forms indifferently, and indeed switches from one to the other within one poem (Sonnet 24). Attempts have been made to distinguish the two forms by close reading of ‘groups’ or ‘sequences’ within the collection, but such attempts either to arrange the order of the 1609 Quarto into some new scheme, or to read a consistent development within it are equally misguided. It is not a coherent and steadily developing sequence but a collection of poems, including variations on themes which result in both repetitions and overlapping. Attempting to distinguish the two forms, Frances Berry arrived at the strange result that Thou in the Sonnets is ‘remote’ and ‘betokens distant admiration’, while You is ‘more intimate’. Andrew Gurr claimed to detect ‘a rather remarkable pattern of shifts between ‘you’ and ‘thou’’, only to admit that the ‘sequence’ as a whole showed ‘a remarkable display of inconsistency’ and so concentrated on Sonnets 1-17. There he found a whole drama of ‘switches’ and changes, ‘the first open declaration of a real intimacy’ coming in Sonnet 13, with ‘the humble poet’ thereafter oscillating between Thou and You according to how things stood between him and his ‘wealthy aristocrat’. By this close reading Gurr could claim that ‘the phrase ‘your image’ in 59 becomes ‘thy image’ in 61, in a change marking a distinct chill in the relationship’. These changes, switches, and sequences