

The Use of THOU in G.B. Shaw's Plays

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THOU and *YOU* in the 20th century

OE		ME – 16c	17c – 20c	Late 20c
Thou	sg.	familiar	marked	archaic
You	[pl.]	polite	unmarked	common core

Wales (1996: 77)

Thou in 17-20c: marked

MRS. PEACHUM: If **you** must be married, could **you** introduce no-body into our Family but a Highwayman? Why, **thou** foolish Jade, **thou** wilt be as ill-us'd, and as much neglected, as if **thou hadst** married a Lord!

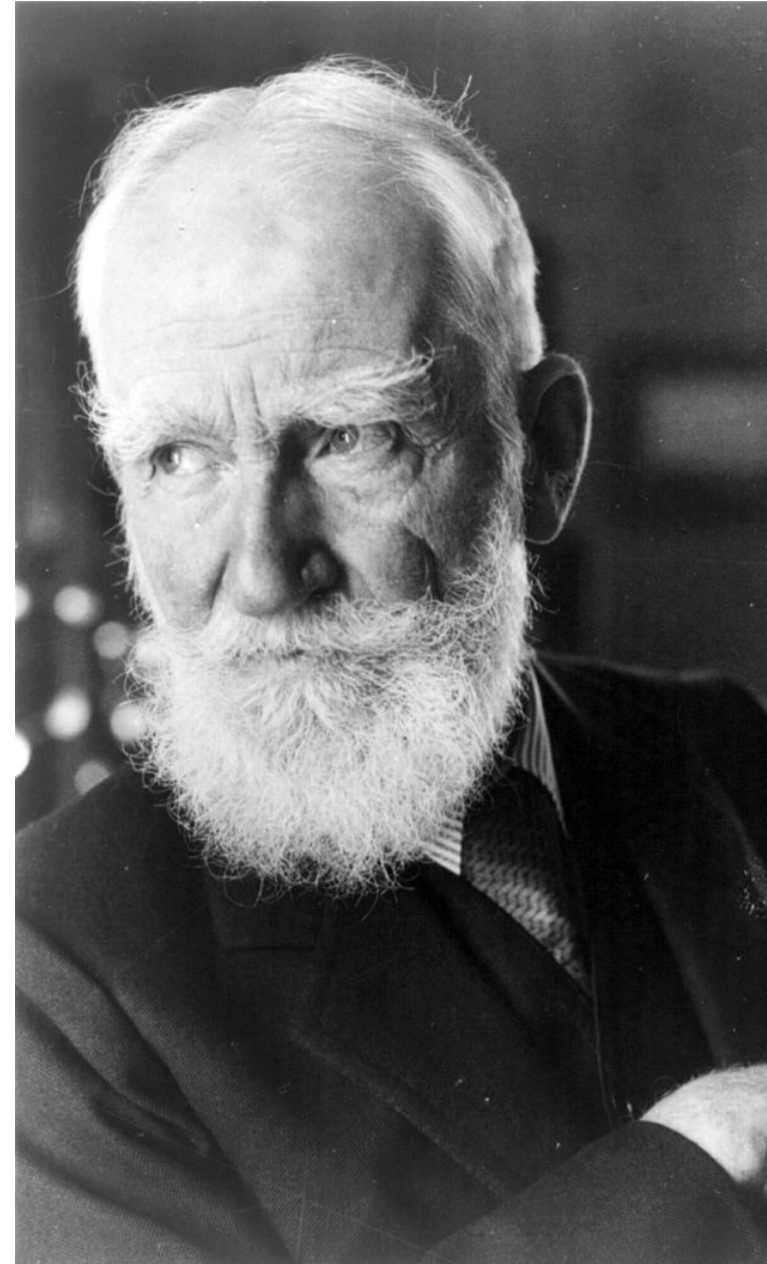
(John Gay, *Beggar's Opera* (1728)) (cf. Nonomiya 2021: 75)

Thou in the 20-21c: archaic, biblical



George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

- Over 50 plays
- Plays span: 1892 – 1950
- From Ireland, moved to England in his 20s
- His works are mostly in Standard English (Hickey 2003)



The corpus

- 29 plays available at Project Gutenberg (1893-1920)
- Tokens of THOU (*thou, thy, thine, thee, thyself*) were collected using Wordsmith
- Dialogues only (no prefaces etc.)
- Tokens in quotations were excluded

The plays containing *thou*

Title (Year)	Year
<i>Caesar and Cleopatra</i>	1898
<i>Captain Brassbound's Conversion</i>	1899
<i>Admirable Bashville</i>	1901
<i>Man and Superman</i>	1901-02
<i>Major Barbara</i>	1905
<i>Dark Lady of Sonnet</i>	1910

The distributions of *thou* and *you* in each play

Title	<i>thou</i>	<i>you</i>
<i>C&C</i> (1898)	28	769
<i>Brass.</i> (1899)	21	700
<i>Bash.</i> (1901)	137	100
<i>Super.</i> (1901-02)	1	1643
<i>Barbara</i> (1905)	1	1073
<i>DLS</i> (1910)	8	138

Qualitative analysis

Various uses of THOU in the corpus

1. The “present-day” use of THOU
2. The “17-20c” use of THOU
3. Others

(1A) Archaism/Orientalism

CADI OF MOROCCO:

As I live, O Cadi, and **thou**, moon of loveliness, **ye**
shall be led back to Mogador with honor. And **thou**,
accursed Brassbound, shall go thither a prisoner in
chains, **thou** and **thy** people.

(Captain Brassbound's Conversion)

(cf. Nonomiya (forth.))

(1B) Supernatural beings

Send us **thy** voice, **Father Nile**.

(Caesar & Cleopatra)

Allah upon **thee**

(Captain Brassbound's Conversion)

(1B') Pseudo-biblical *Thou*

UNDERSHAFT:

I moralized and starved until one day I swore [...] that nothing should stop me except a bullet, neither reason nor morals nor the lives of other men. I said “**Thou shalt starve ere I starve**”; and with that word I became free and great.

(Major Barbara)

(2) marked use of *thou*

1. FTATATEETA: (*She turns sternly to Cleopatra, who quails like a naughty child.*) Who is this **you** have with **you**; and how dare **you** order the lamps to be lighted without my permission? [...]
2. *Ftataeteeta, crushed, kneels before Cleopatra, who can hardly believe her eyes.*

FTATATEETA (*hoarsely*). O Queen, forget not **thy** servant in the days of **thy** greatness.

(Caesar & Cleopatra)

(3) lower-class (Shakespearean)

FIRST PORTER: Beware what **you** do, **sir**. [...] This boat is too small for such a load.

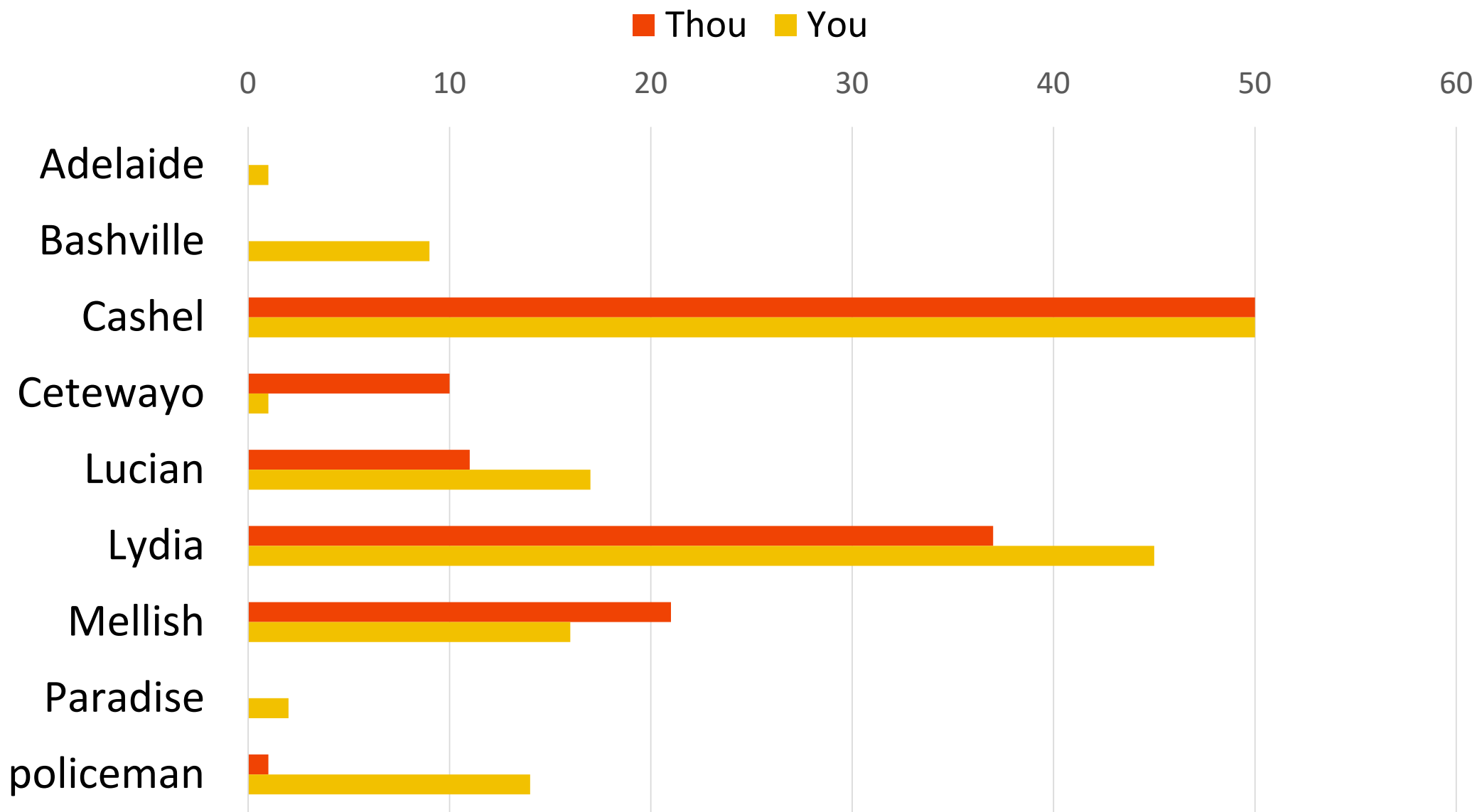
BOATMAN: Oh **thou** injurious **porter**! Oh **thou** unnatural son of a **she-camel**! (*To Apollodorus*) My boat, **sir**, hath often carried five men. Shall it not carry **your lordship** and a bale of pigeons' eggs? (*To the porter*) **Thou** mangey **dromedary**, the gods shall punish **thee** for this envious wickedness.

FIRST PORTER: (*stolidly*) I cannot quit this bale now to beat **thee**; but another day I will lie in wait for **thee**.

(*Caesar & Cleopatra*)

Case study: *Admirable Bashville* (1901)

- Contains **THOU (137x)** and **You (100x)**
- Set in contemporary London
- The protagonists: a prizefighter, his trainer, a noblewoman
- Written in **blank verse**
- Some lines are **taken from Shakespeare** and **Marlowe**



1) Cetewayo, King of Zululand

Six wives and thirty oxen **shalt thou** have
If on the sand **thou** leave **thy** foeman dead.
Methinks he looks scornfully on **thee**.
[*To CASHEL*] Ha! **dost thou** not so?

(Admirable Bashville 2.2)

2) Cashel Byron

- *Thou* (50x), *You* (50x)
- a prizefighter
- his mother is a Shakespearean actress

“Nay, he speaks very well: he’s literate:

Shakespear he quotes unconsciously.” (2.1)

thou: Shakespearean parody (Cashel)

Ensanguined swine, whelped by a doggish dam,
Is this **thy** park, that **thou**, with voice obscene,
Fillst it with yodeled yells, and **screamst** my name
For all the world to know that Cashel Byron
Is training here for combat. [...]

Change **thy** initial and be truly hight
Hellish. As for **thy** dog, why **dost thou** keep one
And bark **thyself**? Begone.

3) *thou* as a marked form

- T/Y users: Cashel, Lydia, Lucian, Mellish
- switch between *thou* and *you*
- emotional distances
- heightened emotions / seriousness

3) marked: heightened emotion

Mellish: **You** have not punched the bag this blessed day.

Cashel: The putrid bag engirdled by thy belt
Invites my fist.

Mellish: [weeping]. Ingrate! O wretched lot!
Who would a trainer be? [...] But beware:
Without me **thou art** nothing. Disobey me,
And all **thy** boasted strength shall fall from **thee**.

(Bashville 1.1)

Conclusion

- ◆ *Thou* is rare in Shaw's plays
- ◆ Shaw uses THOU in various ways to get desired effects/atmosphere
- ◆ *Thou* in a transition period?

Selected bibliography

Busse, U. (2002) *Linguistic Variation in the Shakespeare Corpus: Morpho-Syntactic Variability of Second Person Pronouns*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Hickey, R. (2003) *Corpus Presenter: Software for Language Analysis: With a Manual and A Corpus of Irish English as a Sample Data*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Nonomiya, A. (2021) *Enregisterment of Thou in Eighteenth-Century Plays*, Kaitakusha, Tokyo.

Nonomiya, A. (forth.) “Second Person Pronoun *ye* in George Bernard Shaw’s Plays”, *Studies in Modern English* 37.

Wales, K. (1996) *Personal Pronouns in Present-day English*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

The plays in the corpus (1/2)

The Philanderer (1893)

Mrs Warren's Profession (1893)

Candida (1894)

The Man of Destiny (1895)

You Never Can Tell (1895-96)

The Devil's Disciple [*Devil*] (1896)

Caesar and Cleopatra [*C&C*] (1898)

Captain Brassbound's Conversion
[*Brassbound*] (1899)

The Admirable Bashville [*Bashville*]
(1901)

Man and Superman [*Superman*]
(1901-02)

John Bull's Other Island (1904)

How He Lied to Her Husband (1904)

Major Barbara [*Barbara*] (1905)

The Doctor's Dilemma (1906)

Getting Married (1907-08)

The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet
(1909)

Misalliance (1909)

Press Cuttings (1909)

The plays in the corpus (2/2)

The Dark Lady of the Sonnets [DLS]
(1910)

Fanny's First Play (1910-11)

Androcles and the Lion (1912)

Overruled (1912)

Pygmalion (1912)

Great Catherine (1913)

The Inca of Perusalem (1915)

O'Flaherty V.C. (1915)

Augustus Does His Bit (1916)

Heartbreak House (1916-17)

Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress
(1917)

Back to Methuselah (1918-20)