ADDRESS PRONOUNS IN LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH

Alexander T. Bergs

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, at least after the publication of Brown and Gilman’s seminal study (1960) and Finkenstaedt’s major work on you and thou (1963), quite a lot of research has been carried out on the structure, function and development of address pronouns in English. From that point of view, it seems perhaps imprudent to try to tackle the phenomenon once again. And yet, while the structure and function of the address pronoun system in middle Middle English, e.g. in Chaucer (Nathan 1956; Sell 1985; Mazzon 2000), and in Early Modern English, e.g. in Shakespeare (Barber 1981; Brown & Gilman 1989; Calvo 1992; Mazzon 1995; Bruti 2000; Busse 2001, 2002) have been studied extensively, the transitional period, from about 1400-1550, has been given considerably less attention. This paper tries to shed some more light on this temporal and textual gap in that it looks at the use of address pronouns in four major collections of personal letters from that period: the Paston, Cely, Plumpton and Stonor Letters. It will show how some of the data from the collections actually do not fit into the neat and tidy picture that has been drawn on comparisons between, say, Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s usage. In fact, it will be argued that the data presented in this paper supports Jonathan Hope’s (1994) claim for a careful revision of current theories on the basis of a distinction between spoken and written language. However, the results of the present study also demonstrate that early letters, from a Biberian, text-typological point of view (Biber 1988, 1994), do not fall together with drama, as Hope suggests, but form a distinctive category of their own, to be located, roughly, in the middle of the oral-literate continuum.

2. THE STORY SO FAR

The Old English (OE) address pronoun system can be generally portrayed as in table (a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SING</th>
<th>DUAL</th>
<th>PLUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>þū</td>
<td>gē</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>þin</td>
<td>incēr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>þē</td>
<td>inc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>þē</td>
<td>inc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A: The address pronoun system of Old English (simplified)
By the late Middle English period, the dual had disappeared, *fit* had diphthongized into *thou*, and the plural forms had all acquired (or maybe, rather, firmly established) glides in the onset: *ye, your, you*. Thus, the late ME paradigm looked more like table (b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SING</th>
<th></th>
<th>PLUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td><em>fit</em>/<em>thou</em></td>
<td>30*'you'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td><em>fit</em></td>
<td><em>your</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td><em>he</em></td>
<td><em>you</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td><em>he</em></td>
<td>30*'you'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B: The address pronoun system of Late Middle English (simplified)

The story from here on, as it is generally told, involves two different, but probably related developments. On the one hand, *ye*/*you* had spread into the singular, maybe in imitation of Romance polite usage, finally ousting both *thou* and *thee*. On the other hand, *you* had also spread into the nominative plural. Eventually, of course, it became the "unmarked form" for all cases and numbers. The linguistic reasons and motivations for these changes prove to be complex: "even such a seemingly small step as that by which the old declension of *ye* (nominative) and *you* (accusative and dative) has given way to the modern use of *you* in all cases, has been the result of the activity of many moving forces" (Jespersen 1946:170). Some of the "moving forces" include:

1. Confusion of the regular nominative form *ye* [*ja*] with the weak form of the plural pronoun *you* [*ja*], with ensuing form-function realignment, or the reallocation of *ja* in the singular as belonging to *you* (see, e.g., Morris 1896:179).

2. Analogical extension of *you* into the nominative on the model singular *thou* (perhaps facilitated by superficial phonetic similarities [*0ar*] [-*0ar*] *~* [*jau*] [-*jatu*] [-*ju*], maybe as dialectal forms due to accent shift - pace Wyld (1927:229), who thinks that "certainly the two forms had not the same vowel".

3. The general tendency of oblique forms to assume the subject function—one of Sapir's (1921) famous drift phenomena" (Nevalainen 2000:345).

*Thou* in Early Modern English gradually lost its macro-pragmatic function of signalling social distance (social superiors used *thou* to social inferiors) and acquired a new micro-pragmatic function of signalling emotional distance, such as contempt, or emotional proximity and affection, if used by both interlocutors. As the latter, it very much resembled *du* in Modern German, which signals familiarity and affection if used by equals who either have tacitly agreed upon its use or who are socially legitimized to use it (e.g. brothers and sisters, fellow students), but which can also signal scorn, contempt and verbal humiliation if used by someone without consent or birth right. Coming back to the history of English: as is well known, *thou* sooner or later left the system completely, and was replaced by *you*, except perhaps in archaic and non-standard use (see Wales 1994; Finkenstaedt 1963.225f), so that we end up with the present-day system, shown in table (c).

SING/PLUR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NOM</th>
<th>GEN</th>
<th>DAT</th>
<th>ACC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>you</em></td>
<td><em>you</em></td>
<td><em>you</em></td>
<td><em>you</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table C: The address pronoun system of present-day English

Diagrammatically, then, the development may be sketched as in figure (d).

Singular

- Thou

Plural

- Ye

- You

(stable variable *ye* minor variant)

Figure D: The development of the English address pronoun system from 1300-1700

This, more or less, is the story as it is often told in introductory textbooks on the history of English (e.g. Blake 1996:219; Barber 1993: 123, 186f). However, as Roger Lass points out, "the history of this system is intricate and not well understood (alternatively, not entirely coherent). There is however [...] an extensive and positive literature of making it seem clearer than it is" (1999:148). And when we look at the data from the interim period, i.e. 1400-1550, we find indeed some evidence that what has just been outlined is not exactly the whole story.

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1. The Plumpton Letters

The collection of Plumpton letters (ed. by Joan Kirby, 1996), contains 252 documents with roughly 56,000 words, written between 1433 and 1551. Thus, judging from the temporal dimension only, we should expect all forms, *thou, thee, ye, you* to be present in this collection, perhaps even more so as a whole range of social relations (master—master, master—servant, servant—master) is represented here. However, only *ye* and *you* can be found. In the whole collection we find 548 instances of nominative *ye* and 81 instances of nominative *you* (i.e. 87% versus 13%). It probably lies in the nature of 'letters' that both *ye* and *you* usually refer to singular addressees. The number of plural uses in this and the other letter collections is certainly negligible. The oblique form is always *you*. The 81 instances of nominative *you* occur throughout the collection, though we witness a slight general shift, i.e. an increase in the later letters, composed by younger authors. All in
all, more than 35 different authors use nominative you so that any purely idiosyncratic phenomena can also be excluded. On the other hand, certain authors have a strong predilection for that form; German de la Pole, for example, one of the younger authors (d. 1551/2), uses it almost exclusively and contributes 21 occurrences, i.e. about 25%. So the overall distribution of forms clearly runs counter to what can be expected on the basis of our textbook knowledge.

3.2. The Stonor Letters

The collection of Stonor letters (ed. by Carpenter, 1996), contains 333 documents with roughly 90,000 words, written between 1290 and 1483. In this collection we find 703 occurrences of nominative ye (94%) and 41 occurrences of nominative you (6%). Again, not a single instance of either thou or thee. Oblique ye also does not occur. The 41 occurrences of nominative you can be found in only five different authors; some of these authors use it almost exclusively. Elizabeth Stonor, for instance, uses it in 16 cases; another author known as ‘Brian’ contributes nine instances in only one short letter from 1477. Both belong to the younger groups of authors, i.e. later generations. Despite the fact that this overall picture is a bit more fuzzy, these data, too, do not exactly fit into the textbook model described above.

3.3. The Cely Letters

In our third case study, the Cely Letters, the situation appears to be similar and yet different. In Hanham’s edition (1975) we have 247 documents, written between 1472 and 1488, with roughly 85,000 words. The empirical analysis of the data led to the following results: ye as subject occurred in 710 cases throughout the whole collection. Thou as subject occurred 53 times and in only five authors (John Dalton, 20; John Roosse, 19; Thomas Kesten, 7; Robert Cely; 4; William Cely; 3). Thee was very rare (32 instances) and was used almost exclusively by Richard Cely the elder. In some very few cases we can find ye as object as in “I woll not avyse ye” (George Cely, 1480, no. 109). Richard Cely the younger, for example, uses both ye and you in the same phrase in the same letter: “I prawe ye […] I prawe you” (1478, no. 19). This general picture is confirmed by studies such as Turek (2001) and Rutkowski (1999). Turek analyses eighty randomly selected letters from the collection, Rutkowski the first forty-three letters in Hanham’s edition. Essentially, they both come to the same conclusions: The Celys did not use thou at all (Rutkowski 1999:151; Turek 2001:40). Hanham comments on this by speculating that “between adults thee and thou were instantly recognized as insulting in intent” (1985:14). However, as has just been shown, we find some few occurrences of thee in the collection. Turek points out that although the general pronoun of choice in the oblique was you, Richard Cely the elder used thee in letters to his son when he wanted to signal the asymmetry of power relations, not necessarily insult (Turek 2001:36). After his son became of age, he used you more extensively and finally dropped thee altogether. Richard Cely the younger used thee only twice and in alternation with you in a letter addressed to a servant (“I prawe thee”; 1481, no. 126; Turek 2001:37). It is also very interesting to see that the two brothers Richard the elder and John, the first generation of Celys, are generally consistent in their distinction between nominative ye and oblique you. In the younger generation, i.e. Richard the younger, Robert, William and George Cely, this clear distinction is progressively blurred.

3.4. The Paston Letters

The Paston Letters were written between 1421 and 1503. In volume one of the authoritative edition by Davis (1971) we find 321 documents with roughly 250,000 words. The figures for this collection can be found in table 3. Throughout the whole corpus there are 2,413 instances of nominative ye and only 17 of you. Nominative you occurs for the first time in 1471 and only in the letters of John II (3), John III (2), Walter (9) and William III (3), who all belong to the second generation of speakers, born after 1420. As regards the thou-pronouns, we see a reversal of the situation in the Cely letters: thee is not used to any noteworthy extent, whereas thou is used at least occasionally. And while the quantity of thou is still negligible, the quality of these few occurrences is very interesting. It occurs only fifteen times, first in 1452, in a Memorandum on French Grammar, written by William Paston II. In this memorandum William glosses a few lines of French text, and he explains that French tu should be translated as thou, and vous as ye:

Item, as in Latyn distincion is be-twix pe femynyn gender and pe masculyn gender, so is in this language; were fore rith necesssary is it to knowe pe pronouns and pe declinacions of pe verbs in pe maner hereafter following: je or moy tu il nous vous iyz I thow he w[c]e thee (William Paston II, 1452, no. 82)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Thou</th>
<th>Ye</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Generation I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William I</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Generation I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clement</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Generation II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Generation II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John I</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>Generation II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>1,029</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William II</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmond II</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John II</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John III</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margery</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William III</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William IV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Generation III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2,413</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2,445</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E: Address pronouns in the Paston Letters

First, this demonstrates very clearly that thou was indeed part of the late Middle English pronoun system, and that there was a distinction between a plural / V-pronoun on the one hand (vou = ye), and a singular / T-pronoun on the other (tu = thou), albeit perhaps only on a meta-linguistic, technical level. The second instance of thou in the Paston Letters is in a letter by Margaret Paston in 1463. She quotes a conversation:
Furthermore they told him that ye had hold a corte ther syn pat they entered there. That Jenney answerd ageyn, 'Be-cau-see he held a corte here we mad hym hold corte at London, and so shall we make the to hold a corte at Ipswe-ches wyth-out thoue wolt pay vs be rent and ferme' (Margaret Paston, no. 174, 1463, p. 286/4-8).

William Jenney, Knight, was socially superior to the person he spoke to, Rysyng, a tenant of the Pastons and later of Jenney's. This may explain the use of both thou and thee (one of the two occurrences in the whole corpus) in this rendering, i.e. in a direct quotation of oral text. It must be kept in mind that this is in fact a quotation from an oral register: thou, strictly speaking, does not appear in written language in this case. The same phenomenon can be seen in a letter by John III:

All loke we do is ille doon, and all that Syr Jamys and Pekok dothe is well doon. Syl Jamys and I be twyn. We fyll ought be-for for my lord wyth 'Thow provd pyre' and 'Thow provd squire', my modyr takyn gys part, so I have almeest bote be bote as for my modyrs house. (John Paston III, no. 553, 1472, p. 5760/48-51).

The third case where thou is used is in letter no. 333, written by John III in 1469. John quotes the King:

[...] and he gave me thys answer, that whedyr he had spokyn to the Kyng or noth pat the mater shold do well j-now. Thomas Wy[n]sfield told me and swore on to me that when hys maters ayesen yow, that the Kyng and seyd on to hym a-yn, 'Brandon, thou shoul be begyll the Dwk of Norffolk, and bryng hym abow[t] the thombe as thow lyst, I let the wet thow shalt not do me so, for I vnderstand thy fals delyng well j-now' (John Paston III, no. 333, 1469, p. 544/21-28).

Again, we find the representation of spoken language from a person of higher (indeed highest!) social status to somebody considerably inferior. Also, the attitude of the speaker towards the hearer does not seem to be exactly positive, on the contrary: in both cases the speakers seem very reproachful. This makes it very difficult to decide whether thou is socially or pragmatically motivated. The memorandum on French grammar suggests the former, Davis's comment the latter "[w]here the singular occurs in the Paston Letters it always implies anger, contempt, or hostility" (Davis 1954:131, cited in Finkenstaedt 1963:92). Unfortunately, from the data at hand, this problem cannot be solved.

Thou/thee clearly are in the language system as such, but have not yet entered into the realm of 'real' (i.e. non-literary) written language (or have they just left?). The Pastons did write letters to inferiors where they could have employed (even in a reproachful way) thou or thee. They did write very intimate letters, even one or two love letters (pace Lass, who sees the early letters as 'largely utilitarian', 1999:150). The fact that they did not employ use of the plural pronoun you as a respectful marker of address was a change led by the most powerful social groups. [...] At first, you, as a marker of special esteem, was rare, an emblem of courtly custom: but gradually, relationships such as parent/child, lord/servant, husband/wife were power-coded, in that the former in each pair demanded you, and returned thou. By about 1500 it seems that this practice had been copied by the middle class, and thou was becoming the 'marked' form. It could be used for special effects; moreover, it was the reciprocal pronoun of the lower classes. (Leith 1997: 106).

seems quite an adequate description of what is going on in the Paston Corpus (with the addition that there obviously was no need for 'special effects' in the letters, which ultimately may be due to the fact that this is written language and not spoken interaction). It seems that the Pastons as members of the upper class demonstrate the gradual spread of you as a polite form and that thou has either completely disappeared from their system or has not set in yet.

3.5. A comparison

Table (f) summarises and compares the results for the four letter collections. What we can witness is a strong preference for nominal ye and the gradual introduction of you into that function, particularly in the later generations. This corresponds, more or less, to Mustanja's claims that you can be found since the 14th century, but that "[u]ntil the middle of the 16th century, [...] ye remains the prevailing form in the nominative" (1960:125).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ye</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Thou</th>
<th>Thee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stonor</td>
<td>1290-1483</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>41 (5.5%)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cely</td>
<td>1472-1488</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>53 (6.7%)</td>
<td>32 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumpton</td>
<td>1433-1551</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>81 (12.9%)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paston</td>
<td>1421-1503</td>
<td>2,413</td>
<td>17 (0.7%)</td>
<td>15 (0.61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,374</strong></td>
<td><strong>192</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F: Pronoun usage in the Plumpton, Stonor, Cely, and Paston Letters - a comparison

On the basis of the Corpus of Early English Correspondence, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2000:322f, Nevalainen 2000:352f) demonstrate convincingly that the 'real breakthrough' of you (in opposition to ye) only took place between 1520 and 1600 and that London and the Court were the spearhead of this change. In London we find an increase from 6.6% to 45.6% between 1519 and 1559, the Court, on average, moved from 15.4%
to 40.7% (Nevalainen 2000:360). The observed geographical and temporal differential might also account for the radically different frequencies of you in table (1), ranging from only 0.7% in the Paston Letters to 12.9% in the Plumpton Letters. Within the coordinates established by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, the Plumpton Correspondence strikes on two counts: the family came from the north of England and the letters were written fairly late (until 1551). Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg point out that the north was in close contact with London and that the northern authors in their corpus catch up just as quickly with the Londoners as those from neighbouring counties, e.g. East Anglia. East Anglia, in turn, is quite slow in comparison to the north, and considering its geographical proximity to London. Thus, “[t]he linguistic behaviour of East Anglia therefore at least to some extent reflects the self-sufficiency that social historians have attributed to this area” (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2000:324). The Pastons were a family of the landed Norfolk gentry (albeit with London contacts), so that their linguistic behaviour also becomes more transparent from this point of view. The Celys were London wool merchants. The fact that they did not use you as extensively as the Plumptons, but still quite a lot compared to the Pastons, must be credited to the fact that their letters were written much earlier, before the landscape change in the sixteenth century took place. The Stonors came from Oxfordshire and wrote fairly early, which places them in the middle range. So the introduction of you as it can be observed in the letters ties in with the geographical and temporal distribution as it was established by large-scale corpus studies.

But still, the thou-pronouns, thou and thee, do not show up to any significant degree in the letters. Had they disappeared by that time? Why do they show up (again) in Shakespeare’s language? Do the letters represent atypical language use of some kind? Or is there something wrong with our earlier sources?

4. EARLY LETTERS AS A SPECIAL TEXT TYPE?

We know from extensive studies on Chaucer's and Shakespeare's usage that thou and thee must have been principally available (or at least comprehensible in their socio-pragmatic force and potential) to speaker-hearers in the late fourteenth and the late sixteenth century. The few occurrences of thou in the Paston and thee in the Cely Letters also confirm this point of view. But why don't we find more of these forms in the letters? There is certainly more than one situation in which thou or thee would have been appropriate either from a macro-pragmatic or from a micro-pragmatic point of view.

One possible explanation would be simple (socio-)linguistic inflation: The writers as members of the upper middle and upper classes had already entered into the sociolinguistic spheres where ye and you were the only acceptable forms of address among each other - and even to socially inferiors. This would correspond to Leith's description. Hanham's comments on the Cely letters, and the findings of the Helsinki research group (Nevalainen 1996). However, there is enough evidence from Shakespeare to show that even the upper classes might have had thou and thee at their hands, at least for micro-pragmatic purposes, in order to express anger and contempt (Leith's 'special effects' quoted above; 'thou was emotionally charged form' Barber 1993:186f; cp. Bruti 2000:39). Moreover, the literary and reported uses of the time show very clearly that thou was a salient, objectivized, and cognitively accessible variant, so that it was available for subtle and purposeful metalinguistic uses as in (1) and (2):

1. Belch: Taunt him with the license of ink. If thou dost him some thrice, it shall not be amiss. 
W. Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, III, ii, 160 (1601/02)

2. All that he did was at thy instigation, thou viper; for I thou thee, thou traitor.
Sir Edward Coke's attack on Raleigh at the latter's trial in 1603

This accessibility and objectivization are also marked by a shift in grammatical status: thou is no longer a simple personal pronoun, but it has been converted into a transitive verb (like Modern German: da > daugen). This use seems to stem only from the 15th century. It might be noted in passing that, interestingly, German has also developed the verb sien aus of its V-pronoun Sie, whereas English has never, at least to my knowledge, seen either you or ye as verbs (but compare French iutoyer 'to address informally with the T-pronoun tu' and voiroyer 'to use the V-form vous'; Swedish duar 'to address informally with the T-pronoun du'. English also appears to be the first (the only?) Germanic language that has lost the distinction between T and V pronouns in favour of the V-form).

Jonathan Hope in his study of the Durham Ecclesiastical Court Records from the middle of the sixteenth century has shown that in his corpus, in which both you and thou occur frequently, thou is clearly a 'marked form', and that you is 'the default, or neutral form, and thou, when it is used, is almost always motivated in some obvious way' (1994:148). Hope concludes that "Shakespeare's dramatic usage, if it bears any relation to 'real' Early Modern usage at all, preserved modes of usage which have long disappeared from everyday speech." (1994:148, emphasis added). Thou and you must have behaved differently in speaking and writing, in 'real language use' and in literature.

Hope also suggests that dramatic usage and letters may be lumped together and opposed to the oral registers preserved in the court records. I believe that the present data do in principle support Hope's claims that we must be very careful not to confuse spoken and written, literary and everyday usage. From what we can see here, however, letters seem have had a system that was different from both the literary language on the one hand, embodied in Shakespeare, and spoken language on the other, embodied, perhaps, in the Court records. Shakespeare used both you and thou quite freely and present-day linguists have some difficulty in establishing the factors involved in the use of one or the other form in particular cases. The Court Records, on the other hand, also contain you and thou, but here thou can be described as the clearly marked form, motivated by obvious micro-pragmatic functions, such as expressing contempt. The letters analyzed in this study do not contain as many you, thou, or thee forms as could have been expected. In fact, if they represent real language use, a later re-introduction of thou and thee would have to be stipulated, which seems rather unlikely. Judging on the basis of quantity and quality of the occurrences in the different letter collections, it must be assumed that thou and its related forms must have led a secret life in the spoken language which has not been recorded in the letters, but which showed up (again) in the court records. The use in drama may have been of a completely different, perhaps archaic sort. Thou and its related forms were not part of the 'real' written
language of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. There seems to be anecdotal qualitative evidence in the early letters which suggests that thou was used more frequently, and more naturally in spoken language, perhaps without a specific micro-pragmatic, but with a strong macro-pragmatic function: if it occurs at all, it shows up as a quotation of the King’s speech. Later developments have to involve a shift from macro (semantic) to micro-pragmatic factors, as has already been pointed out by Leith. From this point of view, the history of you and thou might have to be reconsidered. And in any case, in doing so, we should be careful not to confuse the literary and the real, the written and the spoken, the common and the special word.

**PRIMARY SOURCES**


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