

Grammar, or What Hath God Wrought?

Let us explore that arcane realm commonly known as Grammar. (Grandpa we'll leave alone.) The Elizabethans, like the Spanish, Germans and other folk what talk funny, use two forms of the pronoun "you," that is, a formal and an informal one except when reciting prayers or writing smarmy poetry. We speak of the word "thou." You already know that the informal "you" is to be used only between consenting adults, I mean towards intimates and those of lower station. The trick is to use the correct verb form with it. Ponder the following table:

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I talk straunge | We talk straunge |
| thou talkest straunge | ye talk straunge |
| you talk straunge | you all talk straunge |
| s/he talketh straunge | they talk straunge |

Notice that "thou" and "s/he" are the only people with verbs that differ from today's usage. Observe that "ye" is the plural "thou" as in "hear ye, hear ye," or "Ye know not what ye do." Bear witness to the fact that "he" and "she" and "it" have their own ending, different from "thou:" to wit, "th" as opposed to "st." Revel in the knowledge that these endings can be applied to all verbs. Let us enumerate:

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| I begin | thou begin'st | s/he beginneth |
| I conjugate | thou conjugatest | s/he conjugateth |
| I do | thou dost | s/he doth |
| I have | thou hast | s/he hath |
| I grow tired | thou grow'st tired | s/he groweth tired |

Sometimes there is an "e" before the ending and sometimes there isn't. Try it both ways and use whichever is easier to say. These verbs tend to start out with "e's" and lose them over the course of time. (Just like modern contractions, "I'd," "can't," "should've," these changes happen because people say things quickly and slur them.) If it feels good, do it.

The "th" ending was busily dropping out in this period. It was used in very common words like "doth" and "hath" by rural folk. Always use it for "thou." (I'll sneak in the exceptions here: thou art, shalt, wilt ...) After all, if you spoke Pig Latin, you can manage this.

You were probably wondering all this time where "thee" fit in the scheme of things. You mean you weren't? "Thou" is the subject of a sentence and "thee" is the object. Crystal clear now, huh? Observe:

Thou lovest me. I love thee.
I'll give thee candy if thou wilt climb into my car.

Who art thou? Why doth he bind thee with leather, chains and all manner of strange instruments?

Rule of finger: Any time you'd use "me" instead of "I" in a sentence, use "thee" instead of "thou."

Did you know that with verbs referring to "thou," it's possible to leave out the "thou" altogether? Yes, indeedy-do! It was common to say:

Art out of thy mind? Dost wish me to punch thee out?
Hast heard the latest punk rock group?

Lastly, before we venture out to brave new worlds, let us discuss "thy" and "thine." "Thine" is used with words beginning with vowels or at the end of a sentence. "Thy" is used with all the others. ("My" and "mine" work the same way. Consider:

thy lips

my tongue

Is't thine?

thine ears

mine own

Yea, 'tis mine.

Congratulations! You have now mastered the complete course of Elizabethan Grammar 1A. Interested students are encouraged to read the Faire's B.F.A. booklet for more juicy stuff like what this is.

Love and kisses,

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