Regi Siriwardena

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Four Studies

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Preface

I first became curious about second-person pronouns owing to two coincidental but entirely unrelated sets of circumstances in the mid-1970s. I had been teaching myself to read Russian, and once I felt confident enough to cope with Tolstoy and Chekhov, I found that these masters of prose fiction enlisted, in conveying nuances of human relationships, the two Russian pronouns of address, *ty* and *vy*, in ways that no English translation could capture. I still remember the excitement with which, in reading Chekhov's short story 'The Lady with a Little Dog' — a story I had known and admired for half a lifetime in English translation —, I discovered how the evolving relationship between Gurov and Anna Sergeevna is subtly delineated through the pronouns by which they address each other. It was like seeing for the first time the true colours in the original of a painting that one had known earlier only in a postcard reproduction.

But at some stage of my reading of Russian I remembered that Shakespearean English had also two second-person pronouns — *you* and *thou*. Four years of education in a university English department and many subsequent years of frequentation of Shakespeare criticism had taught me nothing about the rationale for the choice of one pronoun or the other. I went back to the plays and discovered many situations in which the pattern of distinctions between Russian *ty* and *vy*, or of French *tu* and *vous*, could be used to illuminate *you* and *thou*, but also others that baffled interpretation on that basis. This was the beginning of a quest that led me to consult the scanty scholarly literature on Shakespeare's pronoun usages — sometimes helpful, but sometimes raising many unanswered questions that it took me some years to resolve for myself.

But, in the mid-70s, there was another kind of stimulus that prompted me to think about second-person pronouns.

At that time I worked in an establishment in which the great majority of employees were Sinhala-speaking, Listening to their conversation among themselves, I would often hear the form of address *oya*. It wasn't a pronoun I had ever used, and one I didn't venture to use because it seemed to me at that time impolite, but I was beginning to encounter it more and more often in my daily social life. One day I was out walking when I was overtaken by a sudden shower of rain, and dashed for shelter into a wayside office garage. The watcher commiserated with me on my bedraggled state, addressing me as *oya*. As the rain continued, he asked who I was and what I did, whereupon at some point in the conversation he shifted to *mahattaya*. (Such experiences tell one more about the sociolinguistics of pronouns than any theoretical study.) But there were people who made no bones about addressing me or others in trousers as *oya* — some bus conductors, for instance —, and it was evident that what I was observing was part of an on-going process of social change.

In the course of my thinking about second-person pronouns I read the paper by Brown and Gilman that I had seen referred to as an authoritative work on the subject. It was certainly informative, but being based on usages in five European languages, the theoretical model it presented of a structure built on a contrast between pairs of 'pronouns of power and solidarity' (structuralists love binary oppositions) didn't help with Sinhala pronouns. Ultimately, I tried out the still amorphous conclusions I had reached in an article in the *Lanka Guardian* in June 1979, titled 'The Missing Second-Person Pronoun'. It seems to me now an impressionistic and superficial article, but it did arouse some interest and comment. Continuing to explore the subject further over the years, I read a paper at ICES under the title 'Power, Personal Relations and Second-Person Pronouns' that was subsequently published in *The Thatched Patio*, March/April 1991. That paper was the beginning of the comparative three-language

study of second-person pronouns, published as a monograph, *Addressing the Other*, by ICES in 1992.

When I prepared that monograph for publication I was half-apprehensive that the subject might be regarded as of such specialised interest that the book would find few readers. However, rather to my surprise, the (admittedly small) edition has sold slowly but steadily over the years, and was exhausted some time ago. There has been a request for a reprint, but I have taken advantage of this opportunity to revise the study. At every stage of my research, I have tested my ideas against further reading and reflection, and the present book includes a rewriting of the monograph, in respect of its ideas and analysis as well as of its presentation. I have, therefore, retitled it. The most substantial changes are in the chapter on Russian pronouns, but there are in every chapter changes of detail. I have also rearranged the order of the exposition. There are now two introductory chapters; Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are devoted to English, 6 to Russian, 7 to Sinhala, and 8 to comparative observations.

Over the twenty years during which I have pursued this study intermittently in the midst of other commitments, I have conducted it with my own resources, unaided except for some useful information from four scholars whom I mention in the next paragraph. For the study of English and Russian, which is entirely textual, I made use of the books in my own possession and those I acquired specially for this purpose as well as a few that I could consult in libraries in Sri Lanka. Sometimes in the course of this research I felt I was in the position of Robinson Crusoe, and wished that I had access to a well-stocked library in a Western university: I don't think my essential conclusions would have been different, but I would then have had a greater wealth of material to fill out my analysis. The study of contemporary pronominal usage in Sinhala, on the other hand, could have been fleshed out further by field studies, which neither my limited resources nor my advancing years permitted me to conduct. I hope that, as far

as Sinhala as well as Tamil (the latter I lacked the knowledge to touch) are concerned, some scholar of sociolinguistics will be interested in developing the lines of inquiry begun in this study.

I should like to repeat the acknowledgment I made in *Addressing the Other* to Ranjini Obeyesekere and H.L. Seneviratne who helped me with comments and suggestions regarding the Sinhala pronouns, and to Eric Meyer and Nira Wickramasinghe for information on new trends in French usage.

I have in this book added to the revised version of the study on second-person pronouns three other essays that have in common a focus on language, though in different aspects. 'Shakespeare's Language of Sexuality' is an expanded version of a lecture delivered under the auspices of the English Association of Sri Lanka on Shakespeare Day, 1997. When the lecture was to be announced, I was apprehensive that some parents might bring their children and later accuse me, like Socrates of old, of corrupting youth; so I requested that the announcement should say that the lecture was intended 'only for those who were mature enough to take it'. However, before I spoke, I explained that I hadn't intended to impose an age limit, since some people were mature enough in this respect at 15, and others might not be at 65. My remark turned out to be prescient. There were in the hall some young people who followed me with what appeared to be keen interest and laughed in the right places, while some older people sat glumly and discontentedly through the lecture; and a foreign diplomat said later he had wanted to ask a question but refrained since he didn't approve of 'all this pornography'. I was happy to share the charge of pornography with Shakespeare, since I was only commenting on what he wrote.

'Pushkin and Poetic Language' was first written for *Nēthrā* for the 1999 bicentenary of Pushkin's birth, and has been both enlarged and otherwise revised for this book. My main purpose in publishing it is to raise in the minds of Sri Lankan readers, who, like others elsewhere in the former territory of the British empire, have been brought up in the faith that Shakespeare is the supreme and universal peak of poetic expression, some questions regarding that proposition. It may be frustrating to some readers that I should describe Pushkin as one of the very greatest of poets but not offer a single translation to substantiate that claim. But Pushkin is untranslatable, at least into English, though, like some others, I have been imprudent enough in the past to violate that principle. He is untranslatable not because he is difficult but because of his *neprostaya prostota*, or 'unsimple simplicity' (to borrow a phrase from the critic Kornei Chukovsky writing of Akhmatova), which in translation too often degenerates into banality. For me the essay offered an opportunity to take further the exploration of the 'bare style' in poetry begun in *The Pure Water of Poetry.*

'Standing up for the Signifier, Or, Who's Afraid of Noam Chomsky?' is a much-reshaped new version of a paper that originally appeared under another title in *The Thatched Patio*, May/June 1994. It's a critique of the *dominant* tradition of academic linguistics running from Ferdinand de Saussure to Noam Chomsky and his followers. (I stress *dominant* because there are dissident conceptions to be found within academic linguistics itself.) To this undertaking I don't bring a specialised training in linguistics. When I read for a degree in English in the forties at the University of Ceylon, the course included something called 'language', but in that colonial syllabus, the term meant the history of the *English* language: we learnt about the Great Vowel Shift of the fifteenth century but never heard the name of Saussure, who has come to be regarded as the founder of modern linguistic science. Since then, however, I have explored the literature of linguistics

without academic guidance, and with the results set out in the essay. I must confess that reading Chomsky has not been a pleasure for me: there are, no doubt, people whose heart leaps up when they learn that 'John is easy to please' has a different grammatical structure from 'John is eager to please', but I am not one of them. But more is involved here than a matter of personal taste. In spite of Chomsky's distinguished record as a critic of the American political establishment and American foreign policy, his linguistics seems to me to have social implications that buttress the very ideologies from which he dissents. It's all the more necessary to say this at a time when there is a danger of genetic determinism taking over large areas of both learned and popular thinking, owing to the prestige acquired by the experimenters with DNA. Chomsky's conception of an innate universal grammar and his exclusion of sociolinguistics from the proper domain of linguistic science close off all those aspects of linguistics that are concerned with the investigation of language and social power. Others may look forward hopefully to the day when the key to a universal grammar will be found in the left hemisphere of the brain. Being deeply sceptical of this quest of the Holy Grail, I find it more profitable to observe as well as to celebrate the inexhaustibly diverse and endlessly protean life of language as a manifestation of social change and individual creativity.

References in footnotes are by author and page numbers only; the relevant book-title, publisher's name and publication date are given in the list of references at the end of the book. Translations from the Russian are my own, except where otherwise acknowledged.

List of Tables

LOVE, POWER AND PRONOUNS

1

I should like to begin with a poem of mine, 'Colonial Cameo', which is based on an actual experience of my early childhood:

> In the evenings my father used to make me read
> aloud from Macaulay or Abbot's *Napoleon*; he was short,
> and Napoleon his hero; I, his hope for the future.
> My mother, born in a village, had never been taught
>
> that superior tongue. When I was six, we were moving
> house; she called at school to take me away.
> She spoke to the teacher in Sinhala. I sensed the shock
> of the class, hearing the servants' language; in dismay
>
> followed her out as she said, *Gihing ennang.*
> I was glad it was my last day there. But then the bell
> pealed; a gang of boys came out, sniggering,
> and shouted in chorus, *Gihing vareng!* as my farewell.
>
> My mother pretended not to hear the insult.
> The snobbish little bastards! But how can I blame
> them? That day I was deeply ashamed of my mother.
> Now, whenever I remember, I am ashamed of my shame.

That scene in a suburban school in the late 1920s was one of considerable socio-linguistic significance. What outraged my

[1] *Gihing ennang* (literally, 'I'll go and come') is a common polite salutation in Sinhala on leaving. *Gihing vareng* (literally, 'Go and come') has the impolite imperative used in giving orders to social inferiors.

classmates and found expression in their taunt was that somebody they had regarded as one of themselves had been unmasked as an impostor, with a mother ignorant of English. One could proceed from this incident to question whether divisions of class are as simple as the conceptualisation of them by those Marxists who see them only in terms of relations of production; whether cultural stratifications aren't as important a constituent of class distinctions. Remember that it was sufficient for my schoolmates to hear my mother speak to the teacher in Sinhala for them to assign her to a class category — as one of those people to whom one could, and indeed should, say *vareng*; they didn't need to ask whether she owned any property or what her income was.

But that isn't my main concern here, though it does have a bearing on the importance I want to give to linguistic usages. My subject is second-person pronouns — the pronouns used in addressing people. There was no pronoun actually articulated in the two rude words that my classmates shouted after my mother and me; but there was one implied by the form of the verb *vareng* — the non-polite imperative used in giving orders to social inferiors. The pronoun implied was, of course, *umbe*, also used in such situations. In the colonial context my middle-class schoolmates would have been accustomed to speak Sinhala only to servants and other menials; and the non-polite pronoun and the corresponding verb would have been the natural form for them to use in addressing a Sinhala-speaking person. But in that world of the twenties, still largely static and hierarchical, *umbe* was also the second-person pronoun my mother, though herself Sinhala-speaking, used in speaking to anyone among the succession of female domestics who passed through our house. Most of them, I remember, were named (or renamed) either Jane or Alice, as were women servants in many other middle-class households at the time. That expropriation of personal identity through renaming was perhaps a practice sustaining the relations of power maintained by the personal pronouns and forms of verbs.

Today, however, in the household in which I now live, I hear my sister speaking to her domestic help in terms such as these: *Nanda, oyate kaeme rath karanne puluvandhe?* (Nanda, can you warm the food?) The instruction phrased not as a command but as a question, and the adoption of the egalitarian pronoun *oya*, when compared with my mother's usages, are part of a process of social change that has taken place over the intervening decades.

You will notice that in that last sentence I said that these linguistic changes were *part of* a process of social change, not that they 'reflected' or 'were the product of' it. The latter, to my mind, would have been an incorrect formulation. It would have implied that social relations were one thing and language was another, and that change in the former stood to change in the latter as cause and effect. But language is within society, not outside it, and linguistic practices are part of a network of many different social practices interacting with each other in ways that are too complex to be reduced to the simple formulation I rejected.[2]

Linguistic practices are, in fact, one of the elements that are constitutive of class relations, gender relations, familial relations, and even — in some societies — ethnic relations. It is on this basis that I wish to examine the functions of second-person pronouns. When, as in many languages, there is more than one such pronoun, the choice of the particular pronoun or pronouns two speakers use in addressing each other characterises the relationship between them. The total utterance in which a second-person pronoun occurs may carry

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[2] Cf. Foucault, pp. 52-53: 'As history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggle or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle.' Also cf. Fowler *et al.*, p. 2: 'Language use is not merely an effect or reflex of social organisation and processes, it is a part of social process. It constitutes social meanings and thus social practices.'

a propositional or emotional content, but the use of the pronoun itself is a linguistic element whose function is to situate the speaker in relation to the person addressed. To be sure, it doesn't stand alone in serving this function. The grammatical form of an utterance (as in my sister's instruction to her maid), or the intonation with which it is spoken, or the facial expression (say, the smile or frown) that accompanies it — all these and several other linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic features may help to place the speaker in a particular relationship with the person addressed. But second-person pronouns are the central structural element of language that has been developed for this purpose.

I hope those preliminary remarks will have indicated the kind of sociolinguistic phenomena I shall be dealing with. I wish to set out now the order of the exposition in what follows and its methods of analysis. It is based principally on case-studies of second-person pronouns in three languages at particular stages of their development — English in the age of Shakespeare (late 16th-early 17th centuries), 19th century Russian, and contemporary Sinhala. I use the term 'Shakespearean English' throughout the study to denote the language not only of his writings but also that of his speech community in respect of the use of second-person pronouns (the justification for so doing will be advanced later in this chapter). In the second chapter I describe the structure of second-person pronouns common to many European languages — one based, in address to a single person, on a distinction between two pronouns. I call such structures of second-person pronouns *dyadic*[3] structures. In the third chapter I analyse the modified dyadic structure of second-person pronouns in Shakespearean English, and in chapter 4 I illustrate this in detail through the dialogue of one of Shakespeare's plays. The

[3] I replace the term *binary*, used in the earlier version, with *dyadic* in order to parallel *monadic*, which is introduced here for the first time.

fifth chapter is devoted to a discussion of the sociolinguistic shift that transformed the second-person pronoun structure of English into a *monadic* structure — that is, one based on the single pronoun *you* —, and to the developments in second-person pronouns in other Western European languages after the French Revolution. In Chapter 6 I examine the significantly different history and character of second-person pronouns in 19th century Russian, with examples drawn from dialogue in 19th century Russian fiction, and offer a brief account also of the changes in second-person pronominal usage after the 1917 revolutions. In the seventh chapter I take Sinhala as a language that, like many other South Asian languages, possesses a *multiple* structure of second-person pronouns — in other words, a plurality of pronouns, as contrasted with the dyadic structures typical of European languages. I then discuss the changes that are taking place today in Sinhala second-person pronominal usage — changes that are of great sociolinguistic interest. I conclude in chapter 8 with some comparative observations.

In using the literary material from English drama and Russian fiction I have two purposes in mind. In the first place, the focus of my study is on spoken utterances in face-to-face encounters between people, and theatrical and fictional dialogue represents an important part of the sources on which we can draw in identifying and analysing pronominal usages in spoken language in the past. It must be remembered that the technological means of recording real-life conversation didn't exist before the twentieth century, and the spoken word was rarely even transcribed outside the courtroom and the legislative chamber. It may be asked whether I am entitled to equate the pronominal usages in the literary texts I am using with those of the spoken languages of their times, particularly in the case of Shakespearean drama which is for the most part in the heightened language of poetry. I am under no illusion that any fictional or theatrical dialogue, even in realist novels or plays, can be presumed to be a faithful representation of

real-life conversation. It is only after the taping of actual speech during the twentieth century that linguists as well as other people have become fully aware of how far spoken utterances diverge from grammatically well-formed sentences.[4] In real speech, people often don't complete their sentences, or they interrupt each other, or they say things that can be understood only by the hearer in the immediate context; but dialogue in plays or novels is usually more deliberately organised and coherently shaped by the writer. But here I am not dealing with the whole range of linguistic elements in the texts concerned, but only with the second-person pronouns – that is, with one of the basic structures of language crucial in the definition and regulation of social and personal relationships.

It is reasonable to suppose that in plays written for performance in the popular theatre in Elizabethan England, these pronominal usages would have had to correspond to those familiar to the audience in their daily linguistic transactions to be intelligible. The speech community represented by this audience was that of the metropolis, London. Theatre companies sometimes went on tour to provincial towns, but it is the London audience that the plays were written for. 16th and 17th century English undoubtedly had a variety of regional dialects, but these are not represented in the plays, except occasionally, and even then usually in forms conventionalised in the theatre.[5] As for differences between class dialects within the London speech community,

[4] Pinker (p. 224) says that when the Watergate tapes – transcripts of conversations between President Nixon and his aides – were published, different people were surprised by them for different reasons, but 'one thing that surprised everyone was what ordinary conversation looks like when it is written down verbatim'.

[5] e.g. Edgar's assumption of a stage-rustic idiom in his conversation with Oswald in *King Lear*, 4.6.

I shall presume, since the Elizabethan theatre audience was multi-class, that pronominal usages of lower-class characters in the plays corresponded to those that would have been heard in the London streets and marketplaces.

The 19th century masters of Russian prose fiction whose work I am using wrote mainly in the tradition of formal realism; several of them created characters from a wide social spectrum, ranging from the aristocracy and gentry at one end of the social scale to the peasantry at the other, and their regional locales had also a comparable spread; hence, the dialogue in their fiction is a valuable source of information about 19th century second-person pronominal usage. It is evident from a reading of their work that Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Chekhov had an attentive and discerning ear for speech, and — what makes them useful for this study — that they were alive to the significance of pronouns of address as markers of social and personal relationships and of shifts and changes in them.

I have, however, a further purpose in my use of this literary material: I wish to demonstrate that pronominal usage can be a most valuable tool of interpretation in respect of characters and the social and personal relationships between them. Literary scholars and critics have rarely been concerned with Shakespeare's pronouns, which have been relegated to the grammarians, the historians of language and the lexicographers.[6] The French and Russians take their pronouns more seriously. Even French school editions of Racine draw attention to such effects as the change of pronoun by the heroine of *Phèdre* at the crucial moment of the declaration of her guilty love for her stepson Hippolyte:

Ah! cruel, tu m'as trop entendue.

[6] See Abbott, Brook, Barber, Onions. That some of the commentary by linguistic scholars on Shakespeare's pronouns is unsatisfactory will come out later in this study.

One would suppose that readers of Shakespeare, for whom *thou* is an archaic word, would need more help in this respect than French students, who are familiar with the distinction between *tu* and *vous* from living usage in their language.

However, annotated editions of Shakespeare's plays, such as the New Penguin, the New Arden and the New Cambridge, do not in general explicate the significances of the second-person pronouns, even when these, as I shall try to establish, are vital to the dramatic situation in which they occur. It is rare for an editor of a Shakespeare play to include even half a paragraph on the second-person pronouns, as H.J. Oliver does in his introduction to *As You Like It*, but even he, in doing so, depreciates the subject by describing it as 'a minor point of usage'.[7] I must say that I too had failed to understand the wealth of dramatic meanings encoded in Shakespeare's second-person pronouns (because nothing in my academic training or my reading of Shakespeare criticism had given me that understanding) until I returned to Shakespeare from a reading of Russian.

The question may be asked how important an examination of Shakespeare's pronominal usages is for an understanding of his plays as theatre or as literature, and whether this isn't a trivial or pedantic pursuit. I hope the discussion of specific examples later in this study will answer that question, but meanwhile I may perhaps indicate my view by a comparison with another tool of Shakespeare criticism that was at one time much in vogue. I refer to the analyses of iterative imagery and image clusters in the plays, concerning which there was a great deal of interest in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s as a result of the work of Caroline Spurgeon, Wilson Knight, Wolfgang Clemen, L.C. Knights, D.A. Traversi and others. I don't doubt that the patterns of imagery these critics discerned were there, but one may ask how far these would have been apparent to an audience in the

[7] Oliver, p. 33.

theatre (other than subliminally, perhaps), as distinct from the reader or scholar in the study.[8] But pronouns of address are, as I have already indicated, a central feature of language in interactions between people, which are, of course, the very stuff of drama. When (to take an example I shall discuss fully later) Emilia in the last scene of *Othello* shifts within two lines from *you* to *thou* in addressing Othello, is it likely that the dramatic significance of this would have escaped any member of the Elizabethan audience? A spectator may have missed the 'animal imagery' in the play, but could s/he fail to see the significance of the pronoun shift, knowing how to interpret a similar linguistic phenomenon in daily life?

If Shakespeare's original audience understood such meanings without need of commentary, the contemporary playgoer, reader, critic, director or actor may also attain understanding in the same way that s/he acquires comprehension of other features of Shakespearean language. How, for instance, does one learn the range of meanings of the adjective *rank* in Shakespeare's drama and poetry? Superficially, one may get some understanding from looking it up in a glossary, but the word doesn't really acquire its full resonances until one has come across it in different contexts and responded to its multiple and shifting significances. This is true also of the complex and variable dramatic meanings embodied in Shakespeare's second-person pronouns, and the discussion of them in subsequent chapters is meant to provide only a skeleton that the reader of this study may fill out in the course of his or her personal engagement with Shakespeare. Unfortunately, I can't recommend a similar course for the reader of classic Russian prose fiction unless s/he already knows the language. Many readers will be familiar with Robert

[8] Actually, the concentration on imagery was part of a certain trend in Shakespeare criticism of the period to divorce his plays from the theatre – very apparent in the *Scrutiny* critics' description of them as 'dramatic poems'.

Frost's remark, 'Poetry is what gets lost in translation.' This seems to carry an implication that the translation of prose involves no comparable loss. But my discussion of passages from some 19th century Russian fiction-writers may suggest that there can be inevitable losses in translating from a language that has a dyadic structure of second-person pronouns as an important component of the articulation of social and personal relationships to one that is monadic in this respect. Hopefully, my discussion may encourage some reader to learn enough Russian to read Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov in the original.

2

The following passage is quoted from a translation of a book published in the Soviet Union in 1929 under the title *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and the authorial name V.N. Voloshinov:

> Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act.* It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.* Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other"[9]

Most scholars are convinced today that the remarkable Russian thinker of that time, Mikhail Bakhtin, was the real author, or at least co-author, of the book; moreover, that the reference to Marxism in the title and the use of Marxist concepts at certain points in the book were protective devices on the part of Bakhtin in view of the political climate of the time in the Soviet Union.[10] However that may be, my interest in Voloshinov-Bakhtin's[11] observations in the quoted passage is as a starting point for my exploration of second-person pronouns as a component of language. Voloshinov-Bakhtin was not specifically concerned in the passage with pronouns of address: the fact that 'a word is territory shared by both

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9 Voloshinov, p. 86: italics in original.

10 cf. Clark and Holquist, pp. 146-170. Clark and Holquist say categorically, 'The authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is clearly Bakhtin's.' (p. 166)

11 In view of the uncertainty regarding the author's identity, I use this form of reference to him.

addresser and addressee'[12] was for him a fundamental reality of language. But that reality manifests itself more clearly in second-person pronouns than in most other aspects of language, precisely because these pronouns are the main device that language has evolved by which the speaker situates himself in relation to the person addressed.

However, the 'dialogic' character (to use a favourite term of Bakhtin) of second-person pronouns is not exhausted by the fact that they are used to address other people. I present below a table of the two second-person pronouns used in Shakespearean English to address single persons, together with the possessive and reflexive pronouns related to each of them.

Table 1

Second-Person Pronouns in Shakespearean English

	T	Y
Subject	*thou*	*you*
Object	*thee*	*you*
Possessive	*thy*	*your*
Possessive (predicative)	*thine*	*yours*
Reflexive	*thyself*	*yourself*

Thee in Table 1 is the form *thou* takes when it is the object of a verb (e.g. 'I love thee'), or after a preposition. but *you* is unchanged in such a case. In the possessive forms *thine*, usually, and *yours*, always, are predicative (that is, they are dependent on some form of the verb *to be*). I shall denote *thou*

12 Ibid.

and the other forms in the first column of the table by T, and *you* and the other forms in the second column by Y.[13]

Let us now consider two short passages of dialogue from two plays of Shakespeare. Here is the first: I have suppressed the names of the speakers in order to concentrate attention on what the pronouns say, apart from any knowledge of the dramatic context:

A: I have forgot why I did call thee back.
B: Let me stand here till thou remember it.

Speaker A uses a T-form, and B answers with another. What this reciprocal exchange of T tells us, in the pronominal usage of Shakespearean English, is that the characters are on a footing of informality and equality with each other. If we restore the lines to their original context — *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.1. 215-216[14] — we shall find that the two speakers are a pair of lovers. The pronouns alone cannot tell us that, but the relationship of the speakers is compatible with the way in which it is delimited by the pronouns. But what is important to note is that the dialogic exchange of pronouns is necessary to define this significance. The first T cannot be understood as an intimate address from its syntactical relation to the rest of the sentence, or even from the knowledge that in Shakespearean English T and Y stand in dyadic opposition to each other. It can be understood only when this meaning is confirmed and completed by the second T, which responds to

13 The idea of using symbols is derived from the paper by Brown and Gilman which will be discussed later, but I differ from these scholars in not adopting for English *you* the V symbol which they apply to the polite pronouns of other European languages. The reason for this difference will become apparent in Chapter 3.

14 All act, scene and line references to Shakespeare plays are keyed to the edition I have used, Wells and Taylor.

it. In saying this, we are taking the standpoint of a spectator/auditor in the theatre or a reader of the play who interprets the relationship from the dialogue: the equivalent, in the case of a real-life conservation, would be a third person who listens in, or one who reads a transcript of the conversation. But even from the standpoint of a participant in the dialogue, A, when she says T, invites and expects an answering T.[15] This dialogic character of the pronouns will be clarified further by my second example:

A1: Kind Tyrrell, am I happy in thy news?
B1: If to have done the thing you gave in charge
Beget your happiness, be happy then,
For it is done.

In this passage A1 addresses B1 with a T-form, and B1 answers with Y. In this case, however, unlike in the first, there is more than one possible relationship between the two speakers with which the T-Y exchange in Elizabethan speech is compatible. It can be that the first speaker is in a position of superior power or higher status; but it is also possible, on the evidence of these lines alone, that he is more outgoing, effusive, heartier, while the second is more reserved. If we restore the lines to their original context — *King Richard III*, 4.3. 24-27 — , we find that A1 is Richard III and B1 the murderer he has hired to kill the Princes in the Tower, so the first conjecture is the right one. But once again, the answering second-person pronoun is necessary to define the relationship. If B1 had answered with T, it would have placed the two speakers on a footing of equality and informality. The second-person pronouns, therefore, by their dialogic character call in question the approach of traditional linguistics, which — before the development of what is now called *discourse*

[15] It can happen, of course, that in certain situations this expectation can be unfulfilled. See p. 32.

analysis — took the sentence as the highest unit of linguistic analysis. As we have seen, it is impossible to interpret the pronouns in the examples we have considered without going beyond the sentence to the dialogue. This property of second-person pronouns has been obscured from the view of the generality of speakers of English because modern English has only one second-person pronoun, which is neutral and devoid of meaning except in showing that another person is being addressed. However, in the dyadic structures of second-person pronouns in older English or of other European languages, we have to place the pronouns in larger units of discourse than the single sentence in order to render them fully intelligible. This is also true of the multiple second-person pronoun systems in Sinhala and other South Asian languages. As we shall see in Chapter 7, reciprocal *umbe*, *thamusé* and *oya* can be used between equals or intimates in Sinhala speech; but non-reciprocally, these pronouns would be an expression of superiority, so that an isolated utterance often does not enable us to distinguish whether it belongs to the first or the second category. The literary examples from Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 6 show that it is sometimes necessary even to go beyond the single dialogue or scene to a sequence of scenes or episodes between two characters in a play or novel to comprehend fully the dynamics of a changing relationship, as revealed by the second-person pronouns.

The first attempt at a cross-language study of dyadic structures of second-person pronouns was made by two American scholars, Brown and Gilman, in a paper first published in 1960.[16] Although forty years old, it is still often cited in sociolinguistic literature as an authoritative work in this field.

[16] See 'References' under Brown and Gilman.

Brown and Gilman based their study on five Western European languages —English, French, German, Italian and Spanish: they didn't deal with Russian at all, and although they cited two examples from Shakespeare, they made no detailed examination of usage in Shakespearean English. As will be clear later, Brown and Gilman's model is useful only in analysing pronominal structures in European languages or others with comparable dyadic structures: it is inapplicable to Sinhala and other South Asian languages. Without detracting from the importance of Brown and Gilman's pioneering work, I shall make some departures from their analysis and terminology, as follows:

(a) Brown and Gilman take 'power' and 'solidarity' to be the two aspects of relationships defined by the dyadic second-person pronouns. I don't use the term 'solidarity', with its original Durkheimian associations as well as those it has acquired in political speech. The two dimensions I shall distinguish are those of 'power' and 'strangeness', taking the opposite of the latter as 'familiarity'.

(b) I follow Brown and Gilman in using the symbols T and V to represent dyadic pairs of pronouns in European continental languages (see Table 2 below), but in later chapters I add to them numerical indexes in order to make further distinctions.

(c) As will be evident in Chapter 3, I differ from Brown and Gilman in not assimilating the dyadic structure of second-person pronouns in Shakespearean English to those of other European languages: hence I don't use their V symbol in the case of English, but replace it by Y.

The purpose of the numerical indexes referred to under (b) is to categorise the different uses of T and V (or Y) in various kinds of situations, whether social or interpersonal. The

meaning of each index will be explained as it is introduced, but here it is necessary to reassure those readers who may react against both the letter symbols and the numerical indexes as too intimidatingly mathematical, or too abstract, or too mechanical. On the first possible objection, I must say that neither the symbols nor the indexes have anything to do with mathematics; as William Empson said of his own symbols in *The Structure of Complex Words*, they are no more mathematical than road-signs. Regarding the other two potential criticisms, I don't pretend that my categories are anything more than an analytical convenience, nor do I deny that there are, within the category denoted by a particular symbol, distinctions differentiating one kind of relationship from another but not distinguishable by the pronouns alone. For instance, as we shall see, in all the dyadic structures of second-person pronouns referred to in this study, my symbol T_2 can cover anything from easy informality or casual intimacy between acquaintances to intensely passionate relationships between lovers. The categories defined by the symbols are intended only as a scaffolding by means of which the reader may come closer to the life of the text; and later in the study they are, I hope, given fuller and more concrete meaning by the total verbal and dramatic contexts to which the symbols are related.

I now set out in Table 2 the nominative forms of the dyadic pairs of T and V pronouns in four European languages; but it must be noted that the T and V symbols are meant to represent not only the nominative cases but also others. For instance, the T or V pronoun may change its form, depending on whether it is the subject or object of the sentence or stands in some other grammatical relation to it. Further, the T and V symbols are used also to cover those instances where the pronoun is not expressed but is left implied by the form of the verb (cf. Sinhala *Gihing vareng* on p. 1).

Table 2
Dyadic Second-Person Pronouns in Four European Languages

	T	V
French	*tu*	*vous*
Italian	*tu*	*Lei*
Spanish	*tú*	*usted*
Russian	*ty*	*vy*

It is beyond the scope of this study as well as of my capacities to offer any detailed account of the historical development of the dyadic structures of second-person pronouns in all these languages. Such a history would in any case be rendered problematic by the fact that the records and documents on the basis of which one may try to reconstruct the pronominal structures and usages in the pre-modern period privilege the language of the élite against that of the common people, and the written language against the spoken. However, when in Chapters 3-6 I present the case-studies of English and Russian, I shall discuss some of the relevant historical processes.

In the languages listed in Table 2, the forms of address to a group of people were not originally differentiated from those used in addressing a single person politely. In fact, the V forms in French and Russian are grammatically plural and take a plural verb (cf. English *you*).[17] What happened in these

[17] As Chapter 6 will indicate, the use of the plural pronoun in Russian as a polite form of addressing a single person was a relatively late development, modelled on French.

languages was that the plural form was adopted as the polite form in addressing a single person, on the basis that speaking to one person as if s/he were many was a way of showing respect.[18] This was also true of the polite pronouns used in addressing single persons in Italian and Spanish, which were originally the plural forms *voi* and *vos* respectively. Subsequently they were replaced by Italian *Lei* and Spanish *usted*: the first was a contraction of *la vostra Signoria* (Your Lordship) and the second of *vuestra Merced* (Your Grace), and they take a third-person verb. In these two languages, then, honorifics used earlier to address aristocrats became, in abbreviated form, the pronouns for speaking formally and politely to anybody.[19]

As a result of the process of historical evolution of the second-person pronouns, with plural forms being used as polite ways of addressing an indfividual, the semantic distinctions made by T and V, whether in respect of power or of personal relationships, have operated only in the singular in French and Russian. In address to a group of people these languages do not make distinctions through the pronouns of superior / inferior or formality/informality. This was originally true also of Italian and Spanish, but in later historical times these languages developed parallel plural forms, *Loro* and *ustedes*, to go with the polite singular forms referred to in the last paragraph.

In three of the four languages listed in Table 2 (that is, in French, Italian and Spanish) a person of superior status would say T to an inferior, while the latter would address him/her as V. Between equals who were familiar with each other the norm would be T, regardless of class or status. However, between equals who were strangers, the usage might be more variable: people of the upper classes would use V as a polite

[18] There was a 19th-century usage in Russian that will help to illuminate this fact. When asked where the master was, a servant might answer *Oni doma* (literally, 'They are at home').

[19] V*oi* still exists side by side with *Lei* in Italian.

form, while speakers of lower classes might say T to a person of equal status even if he was a stranger. This last difference would mark a distinction between class dialects. Russian usage demands separate treatment, which will be presented in Chapter 6.

It is necessary to clarify the fact that 'power', as used here, does not cover only differences of class or social status: it might include gender differences in a patriarchal family, or generational differences, as between parents and children, or, more generally, between old and young.

I go on to the case-studies from Chapter 3 onwards. The choice of English and Russian for this purpose was determined in the first instance by my areas of knowledge. However, second-person pronominal usage in these two languages at the two ends of Europe should be of general interest. In the case of English, there was in the early modern period a divergence from the general dyadic structure of Western European languages, and this has given English-speakers the single pronoun of address, *you* (see Chapters 3 and 5). Russian had by the beginning of the 19th century moved towards the usages set out in Table 8. But the origin and social context of the emergence of these forms in Russian were different from those of Western Europe, as was their subsequent history: these will be the subject of discussion in Chapter 6.

Since one of the purposes of this study has been to demonstrate that the examination of second-person pronouns can be a useful tool of literary criticism, the choice for the case-studies of Shakespearean English and 19th century Russian was also influenced by the fact that both these were periods of great literary creativity. In the case of Shakespearean English I have drawn mainly on the plays of Shakespeare himself, but used a few examples from some of his contemporaries to clarify particular points. In the chapter on 19th century Russian I have used several texts from the major fiction-writers as well as from the poetry of Pushkin.

3

The major problem with regard to second-person pronouns in Shakespearean English is that of the character and function of *you*. There is a natural inclination on the part of scholars who examine the structure of Shakespearean second-person pronouns to view it through the dyadic structures of the Western European languages discussed in chapter 2.

There is no doubt that the Middle English (medieval English) pair T-Y was parallel to the T-V of the Western European languages discussed in Chapter 2, and the strong influence of Norman-French and of continental usage generally makes this easy to comprehend. But was this still true of Shakespearean English? Brown and Gilman assumed that it was, assimilating (as I have already stated) Shakespearean *thou-you* to the European T-V dyad. I must say that I fell into the same error in the early stages of my study, but by the time I wrote *Addressing the Other*, I had corrected it.[20] Before setting out my present conclusions on this subject, it is first necessary to show why the alternative analyses offered by scholars are unacceptable.

First, the contention that Y was the mode of address of upper-class speakers among themselves, and T of lower-class speakers to each other. Thus, G.L. Brook writes:

> *You* is the usual pronoun used by upper-class speakers to one another... *Thou* is used in various special situations. It is used by lower-class characters in speaking to members of the same social class.[21]

The suggestion here is that there is a class distinction in the use of *you* or *thou* in the case of members of the same social

[20] Siriwardena (2), pp. 22-34.

[21] Brook, p. 73.

class speaking to each other, the former being the regular upper-class usage and the latter the lower-class. (Inter-class modes of address are not at issue at this point.) Charles Barber takes a similar view:

> Among the polite classes, *You* was the normal, neutral[22] form by Shakespeare's time. The artisan classes, however, normally used *Thou* to one another, even if not intimates.[23]

The qualifying words — *usual, normal, neutral* — in these two comments are meant to take care of the fact that an upper-class speaker, addressing an equal, may say T in order to express intimacy or anger (the uses that are categorised as T_2 and T_4 respectively later in this chapter). That is not a matter for dispute; what is questionable is the statement that the normal mode of address among lower-class speakers was *thou*. It is possible to produce many counter-examples from Elizabethan literature to refute this view. First, here is a passage from Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury* (1597), which is a novel written in a realist mode and obviously designed to appeal to its middle-class readers' attachment to the bourgeois work-ethic. In this novel Jack is initially a broadcloth weaver's apprentice: in the course of the story he wins the favour of the master's widow by his hard work, and ultimately marries her and becomes a master-weaver himself. In the following passage from Chapter 1, Jack is still an employee, and some of his friends of the same class scoff at his devotion to duty:

[22] Barber's use of the term *neutral* here must be distinguished from the sense in which I shall use it later in this chapter (p. 28). Barber means only that in the speech of the upper classes among themselves, when not inflected by any affective element, the pronoun was neutral.

[23] Barber, p. 237.

> 'Doubtless,' quoth one, 'I doubt some female spirit hath enchanted Jack to her trestles, and conjured him within the compass of his loom that he can stir no further.' 'You say truth,' quoth Jack, 'and if you have the leisure to stay till the charm be done, the space of six days and five nights, you shall find me ready to put on my birthday apparel, and on Sunday morning for your pains I will give you a pot of ale over against the maypole.'
>
> 'Nay,' quoth another, 'I'll lay my life that as the salamander cannot live without the fire, so Jack cannot live without the smell of his dame's smoke.' 'And I marvel,' quoth Jack, 'that you, being of the nature of the herring (which so soon as he is taken out of the sea dies), can live so long with your nose out of the pot.' 'Nay, Jack, leave thy jesting,' quoth another and go along with us. Thou shalt not stay a jot.' 'And because I will not stay, nor make you a liar,' quoth Jack, 'I'll keep me here still, and so farewell.'

It will be observed that throughout this passage Jack addresses his friends as *you* (although the third of his friends says *thou*) — and this, even though they are all talking familiarly and jestingly, so that *thou* would be quite in place. One can find many parallels in Shakespeare's plays to prove that there was nothing abnormal in lower-class characters saying *you* to each other. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.2. Bottom and his fellow-weavers, assembled to discuss the performance of their play, say Y throughout the scene (there are 21 instances, not counting the plural forms). Again, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, Dogberry throughout says Y to his fellow-watchmen. Bottom and his friends and Dogberry are surely lower-class enough for Brook's and Barber's analyses to be invalidated.

To turn now to the situation of a person of superior status or power addressing somebody in an inferior position: those

scholars who seek to assimilate Elizabethan English Y to Continental V have a problem when they find a character in such a situation saying Y to the other instead of the T they expect. Brown and Gilman's paper provides one example of this problem. They quote[24] a passage of dialogue from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine (Part One)*, in which Tamburlaine is tormenting the captive Emperor of the Turks, Bajazeth:

TAMB: Here, Turk, wilt thou have a clean trencher?
BAJ: Ay, tyrant, and more meat.
TAMB: Soft, sir, you must be dieted: too much eating will make you surfeit.

The first line of Tamburlaine, with *thou*, raises no problems for Brown and Gilman; but his second speech with its *you* runs contrary to their theory. They comment: '"Thou" is to be expected from captor to captive and *the norm is upset when Tamburlaine says "you". He cannot intend to express admiration or respect* since he keeps the Turk captive and starves him. His intention is to mock the captive king with respectful address, implying a power that the king has lost.' (My emphasis.) As far as this particular passage is concerned, Brown and Gilman may be right in suggesting that Tamburlaine is indulging in mock-politeness because he not only says *you* but also addresses Bajazeth as *sir*, and pretends to be concerned for his health in starving him. But the implications in the words I have italicised that a captor (a person in a position of superior power) can never say *you* to a captive without 'upsetting the norm', and that *you* must carry with it admiration or respect, cannot be sustained: it is falsified by this very play. Earlier in the strange sadistic orgy that is *Tamburlaine*, we have Bajazeth's queen, Zabina, who is also a captive, upbraiding Tamburlaine for using her husband as his footstool. Tamburlaine asks his own queen, Zenocrate, to

[24] Brown and Gilman, p. 279.

control Zabina better, and Zenocrate replies that the latter is the slave of her maid, Anippe, and that Anippe will bridle her tongue. Anippe then says to Zabina:

> Let these be warnings for you then, my slave,
> How you abuse the person of the king,
> Or else I swear to have you whipped stark naked.

There is no question of irony or mock-respect in this characteristic piece of Marlovian brutality ('these' are probably slaps or blows). One may say that Anippe doesn't need to say *thou* in order to assert her power over Zabina because the rest of her speech and behaviour conveys this explicitly enough. It is true that T would have been the more normal pronoun in a threatening speech to a slave. I suggest that the explanation for the shift to Y here is that *these...thee...then*, followed by *thou abus'st*, would have been awkward for the actor — the kind of point that linguistic theorists tend to forget in dealing with dramatic texts (I shall point out some parallel instances in Shakespeare in the next chapter). If we wish, we can conjecture that Marlowe may have originally written *thee* and the boy actor protested: 'Can I not say *you*, Master Kit?' But what it is most important to note is that the pronominal structures of Elizabethan English permit this kind of variation (as I shall go on to establish), though it would have been impossible for a 17th century French dramatist or a 19th century Russian, for whom T would have been obligatory in such a situation.

A similar question arises with regard to pronoun exchange between a master or mistress and a servant. Scholars who approach Shakespearean pronominal usage through the T-V model naturally expect that the former should say T and the latter Y, but in the literary texts it isn't unusual to find a master/mistress saying Y. In some of these instances the effect may be one of ironic or playful politeness, but this is far from being always applicable. Accordingly, the scholars mentioned

have had to cast about for other explanations. Thus, Brook says: '*Thou* is used to express good-humoured superiority to servants. When a master is finding fault with a servant, he calls him *you*.'[25] Barber, noting that the use of *thou* to a servant was not compulsory, goes on: '...in many scenes in the drama, a master addressing a servant fluctuates between *You* and *Thou*, sometimes being more condescending, sometimes more peremptory.'[26] This equation of Y with being condescending and T with being peremptory, it will be noted, runs directly contrary to Brook's interpretation. In Onions' *Shakespeare Glossary*, the entry for *thou* lists among its uses: 'by masters or superiors when speaking good-humouredly or confidentially to servants or inferiors.'[27] Onions thus seems to be in line with Brook.

Once again, it is possible to refute both sets of interpretations by offering counter-examples. Let us consider the dialogue between Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors*, 1.2. S. Antipholus and E. Dromio aren't actually master and servant, but this is irrelevant because master and servant are what they rake themselves to be owing to the mistaken identities of the two pairs of twins. In the course of the scene S. Antipholus asks E. Dromio where he left the gold he entrusted to his charge, grows increasingly angrier as Dromio denies knowledge of it, and ends by beating him. While in this passage of dialogue E. Dromio consistently addresses his master as Y, S. Antipholus shifts between Y and T in ways that cannot be reconciled with any of the interpretations offered by the scholars I have cited. Thus, at 72-73:

> Come on, sir knave, have done your foolishness,
> And tell me how thou hast disposed thy charge.

25 Brook, p. 74.

26 Barber, p. 237.

27 Onions, p. 284.

And again, at 91-92:

> What, wilt thou flout me thus unto my face,
> Being forbid? There, take you that, sir knave.
> (*He beats Dromio*)

One can't say here that the thou's are more 'good-humoured' or more 'peremptory' or the you's are more 'condescending'. The same point can be made from *The Taming of the Shrew*, 4.1., where Petruccio treats his servants roughly in order to intimidate Katherine. At 116-117 he says to Grumio:

> You peasant swain, you whoreson, malthorse drudge,
> Did I not bid thee meet me in the park
> And bring along these rascal knaves with thee?

It is hardly possible to discriminate in tone or attitude between the Y of the first line and the T of the second and third. In both scenes that I have quoted (and there are many others I could have used) what is striking is the ease with which the characters shift between T and Y with no apparent motivation; and this raises serious doubts concerning the scholarly attempts to make strict distinctions between them.

The variability in usage of Shakespearean Y that has caused so much confusion among scholars cannot properly be conceptualised unless we place it in the context of its historical evolution (*pace* those linguists who maintain that synchronic and diachronic aspects of language must be kept firmly apart). We know that in Middle English the pronouns of address *you* and *thou* contrasted with each other, on the pattern of Table 2. We also know that modern English in the 'standard' language has a single second-person pronoun — *you*— which does not vary with number, gender, status of the person addressed or attitude of the speaker. Thus we can say:

You scoundrel!
I love you.
I wish to acknowledge your letter of the 4th May.

Here the expressions of anger, love and impersonal politeness respectively in the three sentences are carried not by the pronoun *you* but by other elements (including intonation, when the sentences are spoken). Modern *you* is neutral, unmarked for gender, number, or relationship with or attitude to the person addressed, in itself devoid of tonal or emotional shades of meaning, and has in fact no meaning other than to indicate that another person is being addressed. It can be used in any situation or relationship and is compatible with any kind of emotion or attitude precisely because it is devoid of affective content.

Shakespearean English already has such an unmarked *you*. When, for instance, masters and mistresses say *you* to their servants, *you* in such a usage is usually neutral,[28] comparable to modern English *you*. The existence of such a neutral second-person pronoun by Shakespearean times marks a divergence from general pronominal usage in European languages. It represents an erosion of the dyadic structure of second-person pronouns that had been inherited from the past history of the language. That dyadic structure in Middle English may be schematically represented in Table 3, substituting English Y for the Romance languages' V.[29]

[28] I make the qualification *usually* in order to cover the occasional instances where the pronoun carries a tone of mock-courtesy.

[29] I have preferred to use a separate symbol for the English pronoun because of its distinctive later history.

Table 3
Model of Dyadic Structure of Second-Person Pronouns in Middle English

Position of Speaker in relation to Addressee

Strangeness ⇩ *Power* ⇔

	Superior	Equal	Inferior
Strange	T	T/Y[30]	Y
Familiar	T	T	Y

With the emergence of an unmarked Y in Shakespearean English, the structure now becomes modified in ways that are represented in Table 4:

Table 4
Modified Dyadic Structure of Second-Person Pronouns in Shakespearean English

Position of Speaker in Relation to Addressee

Strangeness ⇩ *Power* ⇔

	Superior	Equal	Inferior
Strange	Open	Open	Y
Familiar	Open	T	Y

Open means that either T or Y is possible.

[30] The explanation on pp. 19-20 why either T or V Is possible between equal strangers, depending on their class, is applicable here too.

The erosion in Shakespearean English of the original dyadic structure of second-person pronouns prepares the way for the later evolution of English towards a monadic structure in this respect. That development will be discussed in Chapter 5. But already the destabilisation of the dyadic structure with the emergence of an unmarked Y and the existence of two options for pronominal address in several types of situations (see Table 4) means that second-person pronoun usage is more flexible, variable and often more indeterminate in meaning, in Shakespearean English than in Continental languages of the same period. I attribute these differences to the fact that by Shakespeare's time England, or urban England, was a society with emergent bourgeois relations in which fixed aristocratic hierarchies of birth and status had begin to lose something of their force. (Chapter 5 may provide some confirmation of this interpretation.)

I now present in two tables (5 and 6) the different uses of T and Y in Shakespearean English. In these I introduce the numerical indexes appended to T and Y that have already been mentioned, in order to categorise the varying uses of the pronouns.

Table 5

The Four Uses of T in Shakespearean English

Category	*Marker of*
T_1	social superiority / power
T_2	intimacy / affection / desire
T_3	reverence (religious / secular)
T_4	anger / hatred / moral contempt

Table 6

The Three Uses of Y in Shakespearean English

Category	*Marker of*
Y_1	deference to a superior (Y_1-T_1)
Y_2	politeness to a non-intimate equal (Y_2-Y_2)
Y_0	unmarked, compatible with any relationship or attitude

It should be evident that the categorisation of the pronoun uses into four types for T and three for Y does not relate to any changes in the grammatical form of the pronoun: the differences are entirely semantic. It is the total utterance of which the pronoun is part, and the context of situation in which it occurs, that enables us to place the pronoun in one category or another. The dialogic exchanges that have been set out in parentheses against each category of use of T and Y are those normally to be expected: however, the meaning of a particular use of T or Y may stand even if these dialogic expectations are left uncompleted or are frustrated (examples will be found in the following discussion).

T_1 is the more normal usage in address to a person of lower social status or lesser power, though, as we have seen, Y_0 can be an alternative in Shakespearean English. The standard response to T_1 is Y_1. While it is open to a superior not to use the pronoun of power in addressing an inferior, it is much rarer for an inferior to depart from the pronoun of deference: when this occurs, it has to be explained by special circumstances. Between Shakespeare's Juliet and her Nurse, the pronominal norms are generally observed, but when the

Nurse is feeling particularly tender to Juliet, she says T_2.[31] This is possible because the Nurse is much older than Juliet and intimate with her, and can therefore take this liberty. Shakespeare's Fools have, in this as in other respects, the license given to clowns and jesters in courts and noble households. Feste in *Twelfth Night* usually addresses Olivia as Y_1, but when he interrogates her on her unreasonable mourning for her dead brother, he says: 'Good Madonna, why mournest thou?' (1.5.62.) He is assuming a momentary position of power (T_1) as a judge questioning a person on trial. The Fool in *King Lear* habitually says T_2 to Lear, and this assertion of equality, coupled with the often outrageous content of his speeches, underlines his role as the searching critic of Lear's folly.

Reciprocal T_2 is the characteristic mode of pronoun exchange between equals speaking familiarly, intimately or affectionately, and is often exemplified in the dialogue of lovers. The pronominal shift that accompanies the process of falling in love can be exemplified from *Romeo and Juliet*, which uses the idea of love at first sight. When Romeo approaches Juliet at the ball and takes her by the hand while asking her for a kiss, he addresses her playfully as a pilgrim imploring a saint.

> O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:
> They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair. (1.5.102-3)

There is an ambiguity in this *thou*: it is T_2 disguised as T_3 (see below). Juliet, in her shyness or her reluctance to commit herself openly so soon, stays with *you* throughout this dialogue, even after the second kiss: 'You kiss by th' book.' (1.5.109.) But when she appears on the balcony in the next

[31] Here and elsewhere I use statements of the type 'A says T_x (or Y_x)' to mean: 'A says T (or Y) with the communicative intention or effect categorised as T_x (or Y_x).'

scene, almost the first words Romeo overhears from her are: 'O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' (2.1.75.) She has made the transition from Y_2 to T_2 in her own mind in the interval of silence, and thereafter both lovers exchange T_2.

The general norm of address between parent and son/daughter (T_1-Y_1) is seen in this brief exchange between Gertrude and Hamlet:

> GERT: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
> HAM: Mother, you have my father much offended.

Hamlet here is conforming to the norm of address between mother and son though the content of what he says is rebellious. Gertrude's next line is 'Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.' Her move from T_1 to Y_0 is an offended distancing of herself. Such alternations are to be found also between Volumnia and Coriolanus, and similar variations can be noted between husbands and wives. In this last relationship there are several possibilities in Shakespearean English: T_1-Y_1, with the husband using the pronoun of power and the wife that of deference; T_2-T_2, and Y_0-Y_0. (The one possibility that is excluded is that of T_1-Y_1, with the wife using the former pronoun.) Of the three that are commonly found, the first would indicate a traditionally patriarchal relationship, the second a more equal and probably affectionate or passionate relationship, and the third a more formal one. The fact that between Coriolanus and his wife there is throughout T_1-Y_1 is in keeping with the quite obvious male dominance in the marriage. That Antony says only Y_0 to his legal wife Octavia, while frequently exchanging T_2 with Cleopatra, brings out the formality of the first relationship and the passionate nature of the second.

T_3 in Table 5 is a special use: in its religious aspect it is a pronoun of address to God, Christ or a saint (cf. Romeo's playful use of it in his first dialogue with Juliet, already discussed on p. 32); it is common in the English Bible, in

prayers, devotional literature and religious poetry. The source of this use is that God is treated as the beloved, an object of affection, though in practice the attitude of the believer to God may not coincide with that relation but include awe, fear, submission. T still survives in that use although it has otherwise passed out of contemporary English. Probably deriving from that religious usage, there was also a secular use of T_3 in solemn or ceremonial address to kings and other persons of high rank. It often occurs in Shakespeare's historical plays: e.g. Mowbray to the King in *Richard II*, 1.1.165-6:

> Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at thy feet.
> My life thou shalt command, but not my shame.

T_4 in Table 5 relates to the practice of a person addressing another as T even though s/he might be neither a social inferior nor an intimate but the object of anger, scorn or moral contempt. It is this use of T that Sir Toby Belch urges Sir Andrew Aguecheek to adopt in the letter of challenge to Viola/ Cesario: 'If thou "thou'st" him some thrice, it shall not be amiss.' (*Twelfth Night*, 3.2.42-3) The first *thou* in the sentence is T_2, the second is T_4. In T_4 the linguistic means of asserting social superiority are carried over into a different context in claiming moral superiority. This use of T is particularly striking when it runs counter to the relative positions of speaker and addressee in the social hierarchy — when, in other words, T is directed at a person who would normally expect from the other the Y of deference. (See p. 42 in the next chapter for a notable example.)

It may seem confusing that the same pronoun can carry such widely different meanings. But the context, situational and verbal, usually makes clear which meaning is present. This doesn't mean that there can't be ambiguities, or that the ambiguities can't be deliberately or creatively used when necessary. Shakespeare, for instance, employs the difference

between T_1 and T_2 to create a comic misunderstanding in *Twelfth Night*. When Malvolio, taken in by the forged love letter, appears before Olivia in crossgarters and yellow stockings, she, believing that something is wrong with him, says: 'Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?' *Thou* here is the addrtess of mistress to steward (T_1). But Malvolio misunderstands both the mention of bed and the pronoun, taking this to be T_2 (a lover's address), and answers: 'To bed? Ay, sweetheart, and I'll come to thee.' (3.4.27-9).[32]

For the purposes of analytical clarity I have treated the four uses of T as mutually exclusive in the discussion above, but this is not necessarily true of actual pronoun use. In the case of close relationships such as those of parent and child or husband and wife, there is often a mixture of power-submission and affection. In *Addressing the Other* I used a mixed symbol, $T_{1/2}$, to mark such a relationship, but I have decided to discard it here as an unnecessary complication for the reader and to make the point instead in commentary. (The discussion in the next chapter of the pronouns exchanged between Othello and Desdemona should help to clarify this further.)

So far the second-person pronouns in Shakespearean English have been discussed (for the most part) as if, between a single pair of speakers, the same pronouns were invariably exchanged. However, the linguistically most interesting cases, as well as those most dramatically significant in a literary text, involve a shift by a speaker from one pronoun to another in addressing the same person. Such a shift may mark a change in the relationship, a change of feeling or attitude on the part of the speaker to the person addressed. I present in Table 7 the shifts that occur most frequently in the literary and dramatic texts.

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32 Malvolio quotes the line, 'Ay, sweetheart...' from a popular song of the time, believing it to be appropriate to his situation.

Table 7

Dynamics of Second-Person Pronoun Shifts in Shakespearean English

From	*To*	*Marker of*
Y_2	T_2	movement to intimacy
Y_1	T_2	abandonment of deference, assertion of equality
Y_1	T_4	rejection, defiance of social / moral authority
T_1	Y	mock-courtesy to inferior / casual variation?
T_2	Y_0	withdrawal of feeling from intimate person

As will be seen from Table 7, in Shakespearean English shifts from T to Y are not always meaningful, though shifts from Y to T always are because of the specific character of T. A speaker moving from Y_2 to T_2 would be moving from formal politeness to intimacy or affection: the state of falling in love, as we have seen, is often marked by such a shift. On the other hand, a change from Y_1 to T_2 would mean an abandonment of deference, an assertion of equality by a speaker who had earlier accepted inferiority vis-à-vis the other. A more extreme form of such a shift, distinguishable from the other by the situational and verbal context, may take the form of a defiance of or rebellion against the other who had been regarded until that time as superior: hence I characterise this as a movement to T_4. Examples of these two types of shifts will be discussed in the next chapter: on the part of Iago in relation to Roderigo (from Y_1 to T_2) and on Emilia's part in relation to Othello (from Y_1 to T_4).

However, in the case of a shift in the opposite direction — from T to Y — the interpretation may be more uncertain.

For instance, when a master or mistress who customarily says T_1 uses Y, the effect may in a small number of cases be one of ironic politeness (in which case we should categorise it as a mocking Y_2), but more often than not it is a casual variation (Y_0) that has no dramatic significance. (As stated on pp. 25-28, I cannot agree with Brook, Barber or Onions on this point.) But in the case of more intimate relationships a shift from T to Y may mark a definite withdrawal of feeling, as noted in Table 7. This is particularly true in the case of lovers, where both real-life usage and poetic convention had so strongly established reciprocal T_2 as the norm that a move from it to Y cannot but be sensed as coldness, alienation or rejection. I should like to exemplify this in the first instance from an Elizabethan sonnet — Michael Drayton's 'Since there's no help...' Outside Donne's poetry, there is probably no other Elizabethan short lyric that gives so strongly the feeling of being taken into the middle of a dramatic situation, of watching action and gesture, and of that immediacy being intensified through the accents of living speech:

> Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part —
> Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
> And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,
> That thus so cleanly I myself can free.
> Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
> And when we meet at any time again,
> Be it not seen in either of our brows
> That we one jot of former love retain.
>
> Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
> When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
> When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
> And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
> — Now if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
> From death to life thou might'st him yet recover.

It's already clear from the first line that the couple in the poem — the man who speaks and the woman he addresses — are lovers in the act of parting: what he intends to be the farewell kiss comes at the end of the first line, and the effect of the second is to suggest that with the kiss she clings to him and he pushes her away. But for my purpose it's the pronouns I wish to focus on. Although there is actually no preceding T in the poem, the Y of the second line must come as a departure from the T_2 the couple must have said to each other in other times. Although the man is firm in reiterating throughout the octet his insistence on breaking, there is with the beginning of the sestet a reflux of feeling, marked by *now* in line 9, and *now* in line 13; and, acquiring emphasis by rhyming with them, there come the two *thou*'s of lines 13 and 14 that signal his move towards reconciliation: at the end we can almost see him holding out his arms to her.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, as already noted, the lovers normally exchange T_2, but when Antony is disillusioned with and recoils from Cleopatra — and such moments are not rare in this relationship where there is much passion but little tenderness — his alienation is marked by a switch to Y_0. One such occasion is when he discovers her allowing Thidias, Octavius's messenger, to kiss her hand: after ordering Thidias to be whipped, he turns on Cleopatra with: 'You were half blasted ere I knew you. Ha!' (3.13.105) In his continuing tirade against her within the space of over fifty lines, he reiterates Y: it is only towards the end of the scene, after she has protested her continuing love, and he has declared himself 'satisfied', that he reverts to T_2. But later, after the battle of Actium, when Antony believes Cleopatra has betrayed him to Octavius, his outrage and anger against her can find expression only in the extremity of T_4: 'Vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving', sustained in the brutal imagining of:

> And let
> Patient Octavia plough thy visage up
> With her prepared nails. (4.10.34-9)

The next chapter is devoted to a more detailed examination of the second-person pronouns in a single play of Shakespeare, *Othello*. I have chosen it for this purpose because the play involves relationships of race, class and gender, and can, therefore, throw considerable illumination on the use of pronouns of address in characterising these different relationships

4

A word of caution is necessary before going on to the examination of pronouns of address in *Othello*. I have already pointed out, in relation to Anippe's lines in *Tamburlaine*, that considerations related to facility of speaking or elimination of unwanted phonic effects may affect the choice of a pronoun in a play meant for performance.[33] There are two kinds of verbal situations to which these considerations are relevant. Shakespeare's ear seems to have been offended by an unintended jingle of *me* and *thee* in a line, particularly if worsened by the occurrence of another rhyming word such as *see*. In such cases he often substituted *you* for *thee*, taking advantage of the fact that the unmarked Y_0 of Shakespearean English permitted him to do this. It also happened sometimes that the consonantal heaviness of a verbal form that *thou* grammatically required (e.g. *striv'st* instead of *strive*) would have created a difficulty for the actor, making it impossible for him to 'speak the speech trippingly on the tongue', as Hamlet advised the players to do. In such cases, too, Shakespeare substituted *you* for *thou*. Some examples of such substitutions will be noted in the analysis of second-person pronouns in *Othello* in this chapter.

I begin with the pronouns marking relations of social hierarchy in the play. Between Othello and Cassio there is nearly always reciprocal Y_0; between Othello and Iago T_1-Y_1. This difference between Othello's modes of address to his two subordinates marks his observance of the difference between them in rank. The only exceptions to the forms of address just described are dramatically significant. In the scene where Othello dismisses Cassio after the drunken brawl, he announces his decision with:

Page 25.

Cassio, I love thee
But never more be officer of mine.

At this point Desdemona, woken by the noise, enters, and Othello continues:

> Look if my gentle love be not raised up.
> I'll make thee an example. (2.3.241-4)

In his first T Othello is trying to soften the blow to Cassio by indicating that it isn't personal animosity but duty that makes him act, but the next moment Desdemona's entrance moves him to anger against Cassio and he speaks more harshly. Both T's are compatible with the address of superior to inferior, but the first is tinged with T_2 and the second with T_4.

In dialogue between Othello and Iago there is never a departure from the non-reciprocal pronouns (T_1-Y_1) that are proper between general and minor officer, except when at 1.3.121 Othello says, 'Ensign, conduct them. You best know the place.' Here, I think, Shakespeare wishes to avoid the awkwardness of sound that 'thou best know'st' would have produced. There is one and only one place in the play where Iago says T to Othello — and that when the latter is approaching but can't hear him:

> Look where he comes. Not poppy nor mandragora
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou owedst yesterday. (3.3.334-7)

The two T_1s here, so contrary to Iago's position as subordinate, are a triumphant assertion of power; it is mixed perhaps with that racial aversion for Othello and contempt for him as an 'ass' who can be led by the nose that have been evident since the beginning of the play, so that the utterance approaches T_4.

Between Desdemona and Emilia, as might be expected, T_1-Y_1 normally prevail. There is only one place where

Desdemona says Y_0 to Emilia: 'and bade me to dismiss you' (4.3.13.), which I take to be due to Shakespeare's wish to avoid the echoing vowels of *me* and *thee*. However, there is a dramatically expressive and touching departure from the norm by Emilia, after Desdemona's death, when she addresses the dead body on the verge of her own death:

> What did thy song bode, lady?
> Hark, canst thou hear me? (5.2.253-4)

Here she is speaking to her dead mistress as a person loved (T_2). One may say that she has earned the right to do so, having paid for her affection with her life.

Between Othello and Emilia there is until the last scene only Y_0-Y_0. That Othello (unlike Desdemona) should use Y_0 to Emilia is in keeping with a certain formality of address on his part to a woman with whom his relations are distant. It takes his need to assert his authority over her after the murder to make him shift to T_1. But there is again a more dramatic change of pronoun by Emilia in this scene. On her first learning that Othello has killed Desdemona she still addresses him as Y_0, but reviling him as 'devil'. However, on Othello using the word *whore* of Desdemona, she is so outraged that she shifts from *you* to *thou*:

> OTH: She's like a liar gone to burning hell.
> 'Twas I that killed her.
> EMI: O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil! (Y_0)
> OTH: She turned to folly, and she was a whore.
> EMI: Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil. (T_4)
> (5.2.138-142)

Emilia continues to hurl T_4 at Othello for the rest of the scene. When she learns of the handkerchief, she exclaims in anger

and contempt: 'O thou dull Moor...' (5.2.232) There is righteous indignation in Emilia's pronoun here, but there is also racial prejudice, confirmed by the fact that she reiterates *Moor* three times in the scene. Perhaps Emilia had thought the match unsuitable just as much as her husband did, and had been restrained only by loyalty to her mistress from articulating her attitude earlier.

Between Desdemona and Cassio we have in the main Y_0-Y_0, but on Desdemona's arrival in Cyprus, Cassio greets her with a ceremonial T_3: 'Hail to thee, lady...' (2.1.86) Desdemona departs from her normal Y_0 to Cassio when she wants to assure him of her goodwill and concern for him after he has been dismissed:

> Be thou assured, good Cassio, I will do
> All my abilities in thy behalf. (3.3.1-2)

There are other instances in the same scene. If we compare this speech with that of Othello quoted above, 'I'll make thee an example,' we may see how important it is to consider the dynamics of pronominal use in dramatic dialogue. Both Othello and Desdemona normally address Cassio as Y, both of them in these particular situations shift to T, but Othello in so doing moves towards T_4 and Desdemona towards T_2.

That Cassio and Iago should exchange reciprocal Y_2 is to be expected since the difference in rank between them is not so great as to justify the use of a pronoun of power by Cassio. But when Iago speaks of Cassio in 2.1., seeing him as a possible victim, he uses T_1 in his aside: 'Ay, smile upon her, do. I will gyve thee in thine own courtship.' (2.1.72-3)

The situation between Iago and Roderigo is more complex. Throughout 1.1. there is non-reciprocal usage between them (T_1-Y_1), and this, coupled with the fact that Iago addresses Roderigo as 'sir', points to Roderigo's superior social position (he has been a suitor to Desdemona, although

unsuccessfully).[34] But after Roderigo has been drawn into the plot against Othello, Iago has sufficiently established himself as Roderigo's confidant and seeming ally to assume the stance of a sympathetic and intimate equal. In the latter half of 1.3., when Roderigo despairingly calls, 'Iago', the latter for the first time answers with T_2: 'What sayst thou, noble heart?' (1.3.302) He maintains T_2 till near the end of the scene, but is confident enough, having established his equality, to revert to Y (but now a neutral Y_0) with 'Do you hear, Roderigo?" Beneath the Y_0, the tone is authoritative. In the Quarto text, which was in some places cut in the playhouse version on which the First Folio text is probably based, Roderigo responds to that Y_0 with an answering Y_0: 'What say you?', thus no longer addressing Iago as T_1. By now Roderigo has been sufficiently tamed, so that reciprocity is maintained in the rest

[34] I have been asked whether I believe Shakespeare chose his second-person pronouns deliberately. As with any feature of a writer's language, it makes little difference whether he did or not; and since Shakespeare's pronominal usages were derived from those of his speech community, we must suppose that they would usually have needed no conscious artifice. However, the opening lines of *Othello* seem to offer an interesting possibility of a conscious alteration by Shakespeare of a second-person pronoun in his text. The Quarto text (here modernised in spelling and punctuation) of these lines, spoken by Roderigo to Iago, reads:

> Tush, never tell me, I take it much unkindly
> That you, Iago, who has had my purse
> As if the strings were thine, should know of this.

The Folio text, which probably represents a later revision incorporating alterations made in the theatre, has *thou...hast* instead of *you...has*. Since in the rest of the scene Roderigo says only T to Iago, it is possible that during revision Shakespeare altered the pronoun for greater consistency.

of the play: they never return to the unequal position of the first scene. Indeed, some of Iago's later uses of T (e.g., 'Nay, get thee gone' in 2.3.372) approaches the tone of T_1 — a superior giving a subordinate orders, and thus a reversal of the positions from which they started. The way the relationship unfolds is a demonstration of Iago's skilful management of power relations: this would already have been apparent to any intelligent reader of the play, but to take note of the pronouns is to sharpen one's perception of this fact.

Brabantio, woken up in the middle of the night in 1.1. by Iago and Roderigo, addresses Roderigo with T (1.1.197) as soon as the latter identifies jimself. This T, as well as the angry question to Iago a few lines later, 'What profane wretch art thou?', in answer to his obscene and provocative speech, should be taken as T_4. However, by the time Brabantio discovers that Desdemona is in fact missing, he wishes to ingratiate himself with Roderigo, and therefore shifts to Y_0. His last line in the scene is: 'On, good Roderigo, I'll deserve your pains.' Although I said in the last chapter that a shift from T to Y isn't always meaningful, here the shift is in fact dramatically significant by contrast with Brabantio's earlier incensed T_4.

In the encounter with Othello in 1.2. Brabantio uses the angry and contemptuous T_4: 'O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter? (1.2.62) — and so for the rest of the scene as well as 1.3. Brabantio's T_4 here articulates not only parental outrage but also racial aversion, confirmed by his several references to Othello's skin-colour and racial identity. When we learn that Othello had been at one time a welcome guest in Brabantio's house, we see where the colour-lines are drawn in Venice: Othello is acceptable as a guest, as a distinguished servant of the state, but as a son-in-law he is impossible.

I have left to the last the pattern of pronoun exchange between Othello and Desdemona. It is striking that although

reciprocal T_2 is the language of lovers, Desdemona never once says it to Othello. Her maintenance of Y_1 throughout is in keeping with the deference with which she regards him as an older man and with her idealisation of him as a warrior and as a glamorous figure from the larger world beyond her sheltered life. Neither in 2.1., where husband and wife are joyfully reunited in Cyprus, nor in 3.3., where Desdemona is cajoling Othello to restore Cassio to his place and speaking with teasing affection — situations where we would expect T_2 — does Desdemona depart from the deferential pronoun. It's true that by 3.3. she has assumed a stance of pert independence that tends to run counter to the role of the submissive wife that is implied by the pronoun. It's all of a piece that at the end of this conversation, having wrung from Othello a promise that Cassio may come to plead his cause, she reassumes verbally the role of the dutiful wife: 'Be as your fancies teach you,/ Whate'er you be, I am obedient.' (3.3.89-90) We seem to catch a glimpse in this scene of a Desdemona who might in time stand on her own feet and even learn, like Kitty in *Anna Karenina* (see p. 65), to say T_2. However, Iago's plot and Othello's jealous suspicions foreclose these possibilities, and the more violent Othello becomes in his jealous rages, the more Desdemona withdraws into submission. It has been suggested, I think rightly, by some critics that the circumstances in which Othello and Desdemona fall in love do not offer a basis for a stable marriage, and Desdemona's Y_1 can offer confirmation of this. They are not when they are married on a footing of real intimacy, and they have no time to grow into one before the relationship is destroyed.

Othello for his part uses T_1 to Desdemona in the first half of the play (that is, before his jealousy is aroused). It isn't possible to describe the pronoun as T_2 because it isn't reciprocated, but while there is undoubtedly male dominance in it, there is, of course, also affection — though sometimes a

patronising affection.[35] There are some occasional variations that need to be clarified. In 2.1., where he rapturously embraces Desdemona on landing in Cyprus, his first words to her are:

> It gives me wonder great as my content
> To see you here before me. (2.1.184-5)

One would have expected T, but the substitution of Y_0 here seems to be due to Shakespeare's wish to avoid the jingle of *see*, *thee*, *me*, which would otherwise have occurred. In 3.3., when Desdemona begins entreating Othello about Cassio's place, Othello in replying uses Y_0 which, by the absence of the expected T_1, shows a slight standoffishness because he isn't exactly pleased that she should try to interfere in official matters; but by the end of the conversation with her he slips back into T_1, 'I will deny thee nothing' (3.3.77), because by then he has softened and wishes to treat her gently like a child he is humouring.

In the second half of the play Othello's address to Desdemona shifts between the T_4 of anger and hatred and Y_0 when he is being coldly or mockingly polite. In 4.2., for instance, after a string of T_4s, in accusing her of being a whore, he uses Y_0 when he pretends to apologise:

> I cry you mercy then,
> I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
> That married with Othello.

The murder scene offers some expressive fluctuations. He begins over her sleeping body with T_1, contemplating it as an

[35] In *Addressing the Other* I marked it $T_{1/2}$, but although I have dropped this notation here, the reader should remember that Othello's address to Desdemona carries these double shades of meaning.

object of desire ('thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature', at 5.2.11). When she awakes, he speaks to her at first formally and coldly with Y_0, but as his anger and hate mount he shifts to T_4 and sustains it until he kills her. In his act of smothering her there is a broken exclamation, 'Nay, an you strive...' (5.2.88), in which the Y_0 is explained by the need for rapid and unimpeded utterance that *thou striv'st* wouldn't have made possible. (This is not only a matter of the actor's convenience: it would be true to actual speech in such a situation.) Once Othello discovers his tragic error and is stricken with remorse, his need to reassert his love over her dead body is articulated in a return to T_1.

5

A quarter-century after Shakespeare's death, second-person pronouns became a matter of public ideological controversy. It was characteristic of the period that social issues should be fought out in religious terms. Radical Puritan sects such as the Quakers and the Diggers wanted to root out the use of the pronoun *you* in the singular and universalise *thou*. Since *you* was a more formal manner of address and was obligatory for social inferiors when they addressed superiors, the radical sects wanted to eliminate it. These sects believed in the imminent dawn of a social millennium of equality and brotherhood. Gerrard Winstanley, the remarkable leader of the Diggers, reinterpreted the traditional Christian doctrine of the Fall. According to him, the Fall took place when the earth, that God had intended people should cultivate in common, was appropriated by some as their private property, It was in keeping with the levelling of class distinctions to which the Diggers and other radical sects looked forward (there was in fact a group who called themselves Levellers) that they should have tried to level down pronominal usage, making of *thou* a weapon against hierarchy. George Fox, a Quaker, wrote in his *Journal*:

> ..moreover, when the Lord sent me forth into the world, he forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low, and I was required to 'thee' and 'thou' all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small.[36]

Fox even wrote a grammar book in which he tried to establish from several languages that *thou* to one person and *you* to many was the 'natural' form of address.

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[36] Quoted from Alexander, p. 229.

The struggle over pronoun use became part of the social and ideological conflicts of the Civil War and its aftermath. But just as the radical Puritans were defeated in the contest for political power, so were they marginalised ideologically. The Quakers (or Society of Friends, as they called themselves) continued to use *thou* and *thee* among themselves, but their linguistic usage had no effect on the larger society. The English bourgeoisie, who emerged triumphant from the Civil War and the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, would have shunned *thou* in its radical version as a dangerous manifestation of 'levelling'. Thomas Fuller, a 17th century Anglican conservative, said:

> In a word it is suspicious, such as now introduce thou and thee will, if they can, expel mine and thine, dissolving all propriety into confusion.[37]

The OED gives as one meaning of *propriety* current in this period 'a piece of land owned, a landed estate'. So the radical *thou* was seen as a threat to property. If the radicals had their way in universalising *thou*, they would end by confounding *mine* and *thine*, undermining the sacred right of property.

While the resistance on the part of the classes wielding power to the generalisation of *thou* was due to a fear of its potential radical consequences, there was another reaction among these same classes to the old dyadic structure of second-person pronouns. That structure derived from an aristocratic society in which a person's class was determined largely by birth and inherited rank. The new competitive bourgeois society, for whose growth the political changes of the 17th century opened the way, made possible social mobility, and therefore it required forms of address that corresponded to the absence of fixed hierarchies. The new democratic discourse was that of equality of rights, equality of persons

[37] Quoted from Alexander, p. 232.

before the law, and representative government, and the monadic pronoun, the unmarked and universal *you*, in which all distinctions of class and power relations seemed to be obliterated, became part of that discourse. However, the democratic discourse masked the realities of unequal distribution of property, differential access to political power, and male dominance. The pronoun *you* served the same function in seeming to negate differences in power between one person and another.[38]

The linguistic process by which this ideological transformation was achieved may be described as follows. It will be recognised that in the old dyadic structure of second-person pronouns in English the uses Y_1 and Y_2 depended on the existence of a contrasting pronoun, T. Y_1 was the appropriate response to T_1, and reciprocal Y_2 marked strangeness as against the familiarity of reciprocal T_2. Hence, the more the currency of T was eroded, the more Y_1 and Y_2 also fell into obsolescence, leaving the unmarked Y_0 as the norm of use.

What pronominal address in the post-Civil War era began to institutionalise, therefore, was *you* as the universal second-

[38] It's interesting to compare this with the fact that in the Vedda language of Sri Lanka, which M.W. Sugathapala de Silva defines in its dominant form as a Sinhala-creole-Vedda, there is only one second-person pronoun, *topan* (de Silva, p. 35). The monadic pronoun of address of the Vedda language is the expression of a society with 'a minimum social stratification' (ibid., p.16). Modern English *you*, on the other hand, belongs to an advanced bourgeois society that finds it useful to conceal the realities of power relations behind democratic forms. The monadic second-person pronoun of the Vedda language belongs to a society where the linguistic representation of social relations is largely transparent, the monadic English *you* to one where they are opaque. Cf. also what is said on p. 56 on the original monadic second-person pronoun in Russian at a time when class formation was still unsolidified.

person pronoun; in the course of the eighteenth century *thou* disappeared, except in certain provincial dialects and lower-class dialects and as a special usage in religious and elevated poetic contexts (in the latter form corresponding to T_3).[39] *Thou* in religious use still survives in the English Bible and in devotional literature. Since the educated classes no longer said T in real-life conversation, the use of *thou* in love poetry, in perpetuation of the old T_2, became merely an empty literary convention, but its death was slow. Tennyson still used it in love poems (e.g. 'So fold thyself, my dearest, thou'), but not Browning with his greater colloquialism. Later in the 19th century Robert Bridges kept it up, but not Yeats, even in his early poetry, nor Housman. Some of the Georgians reverted to it (Walter de la Mare, for instance, began a poem with 'Thou angle face'); but it was finally killed off by the modernist poetic revolution of the 1920s with its drive towards bringing the language of poetry closer to living speech.

The increasing dissemination of *you* was part of the process of construction of a 'standard' language, based on the institutionalisation of the language of the upper classes as the proper language of the nation.[40] Such dialectal forms as *thou*, *tha* and *thee* survived in the speech of provincial and country people, but were despised by the élite, and the spread of education, books and newspapers reinforced the elevation of the 'standard' language to the position of an unquestioned norm. Radio and television in the 20th century further

[39] In 1775 Dr. Johnson exposed as a fraud James Macpherson's claim to have discovered manuscripts of ancient Erse poetry and translated them: Macpherson wrote him a letter threatening him with personal violence. Johnson's reply, beginning, 'I received your foolish and impudent letter,' uses Y throughout. If this had happened in the previous century, Johnson would have followed Sir Toby Belch's advice and 'thou'd' him.

[40] Crowley (see Ref.) gives a good account of this process.

accentuated this development. D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), based on his childhood and youth in a Midland mining village in the last years of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, illuminates these changes in linguistic practice. The father, a coalminer, uses the dialect *tha* and *thee* habitually; the mother, middle class by upbringing, says *you*; and the son, Paul, acquires the standard usages both from her and from his education. But he slips into the dialect when he makes love to Clara (though not to Miriam, with whom he is more inhibited):

> 'But tha shouldna worrit!' he said softly, pleading.
> 'No, I don't worry!' she laughed tenderly and resigned.
> 'Yea, tha does! Dunna thee worrit,' he implored, caressing. (Ch. 12)

It is evident that Lawrence wants us to see Paul's dialect as marking a casting off of the constraints of everyday social life: the love-making takes place in a declivity behind a cliff, and when afterwards they climb back to the path, he says, 'Now we're back at the ordinary level.' But when I re-read this episode today, it raises troubling questions in my mind. Is Paul's use of the dialect meant to be taken as spontaneous or willed? The former is hardly likely, since he doesn't use it in his everyday speech. Then is Lawrence himself using the dialect as a literary contrivance to create a sense of a deeper, more passionate life? The same questions recur even more sharply when Mellors, the improbable intellectual/gamekeeper of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, reverts to dialect in his love-making with Connie.

In the era after the French Revolution Western European languages other than English found another path to democratisation in the use of second-person pronouns. Over

the last two centuries in these languages the currency of non-reciprocal T and non-reciprocal V has greatly lessened, and more and more reciprocal T and reciprocal V have become the standard forms of address to intimates and non-intimates respectively. In a different way from the English, these pronominal usages also serve the ideological needs of a bourgeois society by doing away with, or minimising, the incidence of the older, overtly unequal forms. However inequality is still inherent, though less openly manifested, in the contemporary uses of T and V forms. The correspondence between reciprocal T and intimacy on the one hand and reciprocal V and strangeness on the other doesn't alter the fact that between superiors and subordinates intimacy cannot normally be carried so far as to make possible reciprocal T. Thus class relations and relations of power are still maintained in pronoun usage. In this context, it is of great interest that in contemporary France, as both Dr. Eric Meyer and Dr. Nira Wickramasinghe tell me, there is a trend among some speakers, particularly the young, to generalise *tu* and use it in addressing even non-intimates.[41] This I would take to be an anti-bourgeois and egalitarian trend.

Contemporary English, with its monadic second-person pronoun, presents a different case, where relations of inequality of power have to be marked not by the pronoun but by other forms of address. Thus, in an office or factory, hierarchy is denoted by the distinctions between people to whom an ordinary employee says 'sir' or 'madam', those whom s/he addresses as Mr. X or Mrs. Y, and those s/he calls by their first names. In societies such as the southern states of America or the former South Africa, where rigid racial hierarchies have existed, there have been such linguistic innovations as the practice of whites addressing even older black males as 'boy'.

41 Dr. Eric Meyer also tells me that in the radical euphoria of the May 1968 days in Paris even strangers began to say *tu* to each other.

6

The emergence of a dyadic structure of second-person pronouns in Russian must be placed in its social and historical context. It is evident that this was a relatively late development in the history of the Russian language. A.P. Sumarokov, an 18th century playwright and poet, thought that the use of the plural form, *vy*, of the second-person pronoun as a polite way of speaking to a single person was no older than the 18th century; and he believed it was an innovation modelled on French usage. Modern Russian scholars have, however, been able to trace its use back to diplomatic correspondence in the 16th century.[42] But Sumarokov's opinion can't be lightly set aside. The reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that the V form was first adopted by the state, and that too in foreign communication in an effort to catch up with Western European practice, but that it hadn't begun to penetrate general social life until the 18th century.

Moreover, the 16th century was itself a period long past the heyday of the dyadic structures of second-person pronouns in Western European languages during the flourishing era of Western feudalism. In Russian, therefore, the late adoption of these linguistic practices, originally under state sponsorship, seems related to the belated development of Russian feudalism itself — 'the formlessness of class relations' that Trotsky noted at the very beginning of his *History of the Russian Revolution*[43] as characteristic of Russia's pre-modern history.[44] Even when feudalism emerged in Russia, it was a weak social formation, wholly dependent on tsarist autocracy, unlike Western European feudalism, which was based on a parcelling of authority between monarchy and nobility.

42 Comrie and Stone, p. 173.

43 Trotsky (1), p. 4

44 By 'pre=modern' here I mean: before the consolidation of the state by Peter the Great at the beginning of the 18th century.

It must be presumed, therefore, that Russian originally had a monadic structure of second-person pronouns — a single, all-purpose *ty* for address to one person, and a plural form, *vy*, for address to many, and that these pronouns were used by and between speakers of all classes. However, in the 18th century the borrowing of the French model gradually transformed the linguistic practice of the upper classes, a process that would have been consummated by the codified bureaucratisation of Russian feudalism by Peter the Great. Peter organised the servants of the state into a hierarchy of fourteen ranks, each of which had its special titles, uniforms and appropriate forms of address, which those lower in the hierarchy had to use in communicating with their superiors, whether orally or in writing. The table of ranks is not reproduced here, but can be found in several books in the English language[45]. In consulting these or in reading English translations of 19th century Russian literature, it is necessary to be on guard against interpreting the renderings of both titles and forms of address in terms of British or British colonial usage. 'Privy Councillor', for instance, was only a designation of a particular rank of official, just as 'His Excellency' was a prescribed form of reference to one of many officials in a particular grade. Each civilian rank corresponded to a parallel military one (so that one is again in danger of being misled by the abundance of 'Generals' in the bureaucracy). However, the proper use of the T and V pronouns, in address between certain grades of superiors and inferiors, was rigidly observed among officials, and in the armed forces it was actually laid down by regulations prescribing which ranks should be addressed as T and which as V by those above them: inferiors, of course, always said V to their superiors. These regulations were in force until the February 1917 Revolution.

It must be remembered that the Russian bureaucracy included many whose counterparts in Western Europe would

[45] Perhaps the most easily accessible is Hingley, pp. 130-131.

not have been reckoned part of the civil service, such as many lawyers and doctors as well as university professors and high-school teachers, while the landowning gentry had law-and-order functions in relation to their peasants. Through the bureaucratisation of Russian life the polite V pronoun was well established by the 19th century among the upper and middle classes, and 19th century literature brings out abundantly the punctiliousness with which functionaries maintained the correct modes of address, including the pronouns. The young Chekhov even made a comic sketch out of the subject in an early story titled '*Ty* and *Vy*'. A minor official at a railway station runs into another functionary, an old schoolfriend whom he hasn't seen for many years. The first official greets the second with T, and begins a conversation with him in a hail-fellow-well-met manner, until he is surprised to learn that his old friend has climbed several steps higher than him in the official ladder. He then hastily switches to V, and adopts a sickening tone of deference even though the other protests that this is unnecessary.

But the establishment of V as the 'correct' form by which inferiors should address superiors was still uneven outside the ranks of the bureaucracy, upper and lower. This was due to the fact that peasants, especially where they did not come into regular contact with the gentry, were unacquainted with the pronoun and, therefore, said T to everybody. There is a Russian verb, *tykat'*, which means 'to address somebody as *ty* (cf. French *tutoyer*); and in the sub-entry for *tykat'* under the main entry for *ty* in Dal's dictionary (1882)[46] the first illustrative quotation reads: *Muzhik vsyakomy tykaet* (The peasant says *ty* to everybody). It is not possible to determine in the absence of a context, which Dal' doesn't supply, whether the sentence is a statement about peasants in general or about an individual peasant; but I think the former more likely. This same linguistic phenomenon —

[46] Dal', Vol. IV, p. 447.

that peasants often said *ty* to everybody —is readily observable in reading 19th century Russian literature.

However, not all cases where a peasant says T to his betters may be due to ignorance. If we compare (though unfortunately not in English translation) the first two stories in Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* (1847-51), a collection which depicts peasant life through the eyes of a huntsman who is a member of the gentry, we shall have an impression of the ways in which the second-person pronouns can reveal subtleties of both class differences and individual character. In the first story, 'Khor and Kalinych', the peasant Khor' says T to the narrator at their first meeting in spite of the gulf between their social positions. It's unlikely that Khor' is ignorant of the 'correct' pronoun because he is no backwoodsman: he is prosperous, and does a profitable trade in butter and in tar. It's more likely that the form of address is an expression of his hearty outgoing character: as the narrator says, Khor' speaks to him 'affectionately', in spite of their short acquaintance. Possibly also, Khor's mode of speech is an expression of his sturdy independence: although he is a serf, he doesn't work on his master's land but has opted to pay him quitrent.

In the second story, 'Ermolay and the Miller's Wife', the narrator guesses at first sight that Arina is neither the wife of a peasant nor of a petty bourgeois but is a serf-woman. She is, in fact, a former serf-girl, had been taken over as a maid by the landowner Zverkov's wife and had worked for her in Petersburg, and would therefore have been exposed to the manners of an upper-class household. In the story, the narrator says T both to Ermolay (who is employed as a huntsman by a neighbouring landowner) and to Arina; Ermolay says V to the narrator and T to Arina; and she says V to both the narrator and Ermolay. Their relative social positions are thus nicely defined. However, in the story there is a contrast between Arina's meekness of outward demeanour and submissive norms of speech on the one hand and her inner character on

the other: she had borne a child out of wedlock when her master and mistress had selfishly refused her permission to marry.

In general, it is observable from the characters in 19th century Russian fiction and drama that servants and serfs who work or have worked in the houses of the gentry observe the standard rules regarding the T and V pronouns more consistently, while peasant usage is more variable. The gentry must have regarded peasant deviations from this norm as a sign of their lack of refinement and culture. Even in the case of house-serfs or servants, however, the hierarchical patterns of speech could be overridden by other considerations. In Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin* Tatyana and her nurse exchange reciprocal T_2 with each other. This is possible because Filipyevna is so much older than Tatyana, and assumes the position of an affectionate intimate with her young charge. (The relations between them are almost exactly parallel to those of Shakespeare's Juliet and her nurse, who sometimes says T to Juliet, except that Filipyevna has nothing of the bawdiness of Shakespeare's creation.)

Table 8

Model of Dyadic Structure of Second-Person Pronouns in 19TH Century Russian

Position of Speaker in relation to Addressee

Strangeness ⇩ *Power* ⇔

	Superior	Equal	Inferior
Strange	T	V	V
Familiar	T	T	V

Table 9

The Four Uses of T in 19TH Century Russian

Category	*Marker of*
T_1	social superiority / power
T_2	intimacy / affection / desire
T_3	reverence (religious)
T_4	anger / hatred / moral contempt

Table10

The Two Usesof V in 19TH Century Russian

Category	*Marker of*
V_1	deference to a superior (T_1-V_1)
V_2	politeness to a non-intimate equal (V_2-V_2)

In the light of what has been said on pp. 56-57, it is necessary to remember that while upper-class usage, and that of speakers who were influenced by their example, conformed to the model of Table 8, it wasn't followed by the whole of peasant society.

Comrie and Stone refer to the occurrence in Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter* of such forms as *Dumal li ty, vashe blagorodie, chto...* (Did you think, your honour, that...), where the pronoun *ty* conflicts with the honorific *vashe blagorodie*, confirming what was said earlier about some peasants' ignorance of 'proper' pronominal usage; they add that such forms are found in the novel 'only in the speech of uneducated characters'.[47] However, without going through the *Collected Works* line by line, I have found three examples in Pushkin that are not open to this explanation. In Pushkin's poetic play *Boris Godunov*, both crowd and courtier say T to the Tsar. But this can be explained on the basis that since the play is historical (its action runs from 1598 to 1605), Pushkin was representing an archaic usage of a period before the establishment of the V-form. The same interpretation can be offered in the case of one of Pushkin's most striking short narrative poems, *Zhenikh* (The Bridegroom), where Natasha says T to the robber-bridegroom (a kind of Bluebeard), although she speaks to him with pretended respect, addressing him as *sudar'* (sir): *Postoy, sudar', ne konchen on* (Wait, sir, it isn't finished). Natasha is a merchant's daughter and not a peasant, and her speech hardly seems illiterate; so it must be that Pushkin meant to place the story in a timeless past, appropriate to the ballad.

But the third set of instances I have to cite is more problematic. In Pushkin's retelling as a narrative poem, *Andzhelo*, of the story of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Izabela says T both to Andzhelo and, at the end of the story, to the Duke. This can't be explained as an intended archaism, because, on the other hand, Pushkin's Lutsio addresses Izabela

[47] Comrie and Stone, p. 173.

as V. The only possible answer I can suggest is that Pushkin is here introducing a usage parallel to the English *thou* used as a ceremonious form in Shakespearean English, well attested in Shakespeare (see p. 34) and found in *Measure for Measure* itself. (Pushkin had contemplated translating this play, with the help of a French version, before opting for a narrative form.) This is a use that I have marked T_3 in Shakespearean English (p. 34), but there is no parallel use in 19th century Russian, where T_3 is used exclusively in religious contexts (see Table 9). It is the normal mode of address to God, Christ, the Virgin and the saints in the Russian Bible, in prayers and in religious poetry.

However, there is one remarkable example in Russian literature of the use of T in such a context that deserves attention as a creative utilisation of an ambiguity arising from the multiple significances of T. In Dostoevsky's story 'The Grand Inquisitor'[48], Christ, on his return to earth in the 16th century, is arrested by the Inquisition. In the dead of night the Grand Inquisitor comes to Christ in his cell, and makes a long indictment of his fatal error in conferring freedom on men — the error that the Church had corrected. He addresses Christ throughout as *ty*, and from habit we may take this at first to be the T_3 of reverence — the normal mode of address to Christ. Yet almost his first words are: 'Why hast thou come back to hinder us?' —a prosecutor's interrogation of an accused; and his concluding words are: 'For if there was anyone who most of all deserved our fire, it was thou. Tomorrow I will burn thee. I have spoken' — the words of a judge passing a death sentence. We have then to ask ourselves whether the

[48] The story of the Grand Inquisitor is told by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Book 5 Chapter 3).

Inquisitor's pronoun was T_3 or the T_1 of power — the address of authority to a condemned prisoner.[49]

19th century Russian practices regarding pronominal usages in gender relations were variable. The pronouns exchanged between husbands and wives varied with class and education. Reciprocal T_2 could occur at both ends of the social scale — among the educated sections of the aristocracy and gentry and the intelligentsia in general, as an aspect of modernisation and sophistication; and among peasant families where they used no pronoun other than T. Outside these groups T_1-V_1 could prevail as a patriarchal usage (with the husband, of course, using the pronoun of power). However, as 19th century Russian fiction shows, this aspect was complicated as far as the educated classes were concerned by the fact that they often spoke French, sometimes even in preference to Russian.[50] It is unnecessary for me to discuss in detail the way in which this affected pronominal usage since the question has been very fully treated by John Lyons in an essay on 'the stylistics of bilingualism', where he takes *Anna Karenina* as his text.[51] For my purpose in this section the most relevant fact is that the Russian *vy* was even more formal than the French *vous*.[52] Lyons says that in the same period as *Anna Karenina* some French husbands and wives, both of the aristocracy and of the bourgeoisie, did say *vous* to each other; but it would have been impossible for a husband and wife to adopt a comparable usage in Russian — reciprocal *vy* —

[49] The effect would have been all the more powerful for contemporary Russian readers because in Tsarist prisons it was obligatory for jailors to address prisoners as T. Later in the same novel Dmitri Karamazov experiences this as an arrested suspect.

[50] See, in the essay on Pushkin in this book, pp. 111-112.

[51] Lyons, pp. 235-249.

[52] As was to be expected, considering the fact that it was a relatively late adoption, and not one used by the whole people

without giving an impression of deadly coldness. *Ty-vy* would have been socially acceptable as a patriarchal usage, *ty-ty* as belonging to a more equal or more sophisticated relationship between the sexes; but *vy-vy* would have seemed impossibly stiff. This fact helps to illuminate the scene in *Anna Karenina* (Part 2, Ch. 29) where Vronsky falls at the steeplechase while Anna and her husband are watching. Anna openly shows her distress by crying out, and this upsets the public appearance of decorum that Karenin has been trying to enjoin on his wife after her love affair began. There is now a crisis, and it is manifested in the pronoun he uses in speaking to Anna. Up to this point he had addressed her as *ty* (T_2), but this is now out of the question for him in the face of her public disregard of the proprieties. On the other hand, he can't bring himself to use the Russian *vy*, which would be, in the circumstances, almost a declaration of war, so he compromises by speaking French and saying *vous*. Of course, this and other such nuances are lost in English translation.

Second-person pronoun shifts, when they occur in 19th century Russian, are always unequivocal: there are no casual variations between T and V as in Shakespearean English with its unmarked Y_0, so that any shift is motivated. I list in Table 11 the types of shifts that are to be noted most often in the literature:

Table 11
Dynamics of Second-Person Pronoun Shifts in 19TH Century Russian

From	*To*	*Marker of*
V_2	T_2	movement to intimacy
V_1	T_4	rejection, defiance of social / moral authority
T_2	V_2	withdrawal of feeling from an intimate person

In languages with dyadic structures of second-person pronouns the move from V_2 to T_2 is a crucial 'rite of passage' (as John Lyons calls it) in a love relationship, since reciprocal T_2, as compared with the formality of reciprocal V_2, is a marker of the growth into intimacy. In *Anna Karenina*, Kitty, after she has fallen in love with Levin, struggles with her embarrassment in saying T_2 to him. When he bursts into the bedroom where she is on the day of her wedding before the rite has been performed (Part 5, Ch. 2):

> 'Ah!' she cried out, seeing him and all beaming with joy. 'How is it that you (*ty*) — how is it that you (*vy*) — are here?' Down to that last day she said now *ty*, now *vy* to him.

English translators naturally find this passage an insuperable stumbling-block. But it isn't often noted that there is an opposite but equally critical 'rite of passage' that marks the death of a love relationship — the shift to the V_2 form by a person who has hitherto used T_2 in his or her address to the other. Anna reaches this point, at the end of her growing estrangement from Vronsky, on the last day of her life (Part 7, Ch. 26):

> 'Yes, by the way,' he said, when she was already at the door, 'we are definitely leaving tomorrow, aren't we?'
> 'You (*vy*), not I,' she said, looking back at him.
> 'Anna, it's impossible to live like this.'
> 'You, not I,' she repeated.
> 'This is becoming intolerable!'
> 'You...you will regret this,' she said, and went out.

What is 'impossible' and 'intolerable' to Vronsky is not only her refusal to go with him but also the fact that she has said *vy*, and has underlined it in the last line of dialogue by pausing and repeating the pronoun with emphasis. It's like a glass of

cold water thrown in his face. Even Anna senses that she has gone too far, and the next moment, after he has left, she scrawls a desperate note to him: 'I am to blame. Come back home, we must talk things over. For God's sake come, I am frightened.' (Part 7, Ch. 27) In this note she returns to T_2. But it's too late.

One of the subtlest, most unobtrusive and yet expressive uses of second-person pronoun shifts is in Chekhov's story 'The Lady with a Little Dog'. The story is justly celebrated, but the reader who knows it only in English misses one whole dimension of Chekhov's artistry, which lies in the nuances of the second-person pronouns, and these are untranslatable into English. In the story Gurov, a married man holidaying alone at the seaside resort of Yalta, meets Anna Sergeevna, who is married too, and has an affair with her. In the first part of the story, after he has made love to her in the hotel bedroom, he addresses her as T_2. He is an experienced roué; this for him is going to be one of his casual adventures, and he slips easily into the intimate form. It's all of a piece that immediately after the lovemaking, he sits down to eat a slice of melon. She, on the other hand, is deeply troubled by guilt for her infidelity, and she speaks to him, as she had done before, as V_2:

> 'It's not good,' she said. 'You'll (*vy*) be the first to stop respecting me now.'

Gurov's response comes after half an hour of silence, during which he has eaten the melon:

> 'Why should I stop respecting you (*ty*)?' he asked. 'You don't know yourself what you're saying.'

They leave — he to Moscow, and she to the provincial town where she lives. In Moscow Gurov finds to his surprise that he can't get her out of his mind as he could other women he has seduced. Ultimately, he goes to the town where she lives in the hope of meeting her, and manages to confront her in a

theatre during the interval. In this hurried conversation they both say V. On Gurov's part this is a move back from T_2 to V_2. It appears to be a distancing of himself, but, as compared with the easy intimacy he assumed during their earlier meeting, it means that he is no longer so complacent as to take everything for granted. Finally, in the last part of the story, we meet them again after several years during one of the clandestine meetings in Moscow that have punctuated their relationship. Here, for the first time in the text, we find them *both* saying T_2 (the pronouns aren't actually articulated in the brief snatches of conversation we have, but they are implied by the verbs). Though the relationship remains distorted by the need for deceit and concealment, the emotional barriers between them have fallen. The story is one of Chekhov's most masterly achievements in using the simplest, most minimal means — here in the ordinary pronominal exchanges of Russian speech — for dramatic depth and expressive force.

In pronominal usage the regular order is highlighted most sharply at moments when it is deliberately ruptured. Such a case occurs in Nikolai Leskov's story 'The Hairdresser Artist'.[53] Arkady is a house-serf belonging to the tyrannical and sadistic Count Kamensky, and is a highly skilled hairdresser. One evening he is called upon to shave the Count's brother (equally vicious), who normally refrains from shaving his face because there are bumps on it, but he has to that evening because the Tsar is visiting the area. Arkady is summoned to the Count's brother's presence, and finds him in a room with ten gold pieces and two loaded pistols on the table: he tells Arkady that if he shaves him without injury the gold pieces are his, but any cut will mean that he will be shot instantly. Arkady is already in a state of tension because he

[53] N. S. Leskov (1831-1895) is not widely known among readers of English, but he was an original, and in some ways, unique writer among 19th century Russian masters of fiction, and his work has an affinity to the tradition of the popular tale.

knows that the serf-girl he loves has been asked to present herself that night in the Count's bedroom. Nevertheless, he completes the shave successfully, picks up the gold pieces and says 'Goodbye' (V_1). The other stops him because he is curious to know why Arkady accepted the commission at the risk of death: does he have a protective charm? Arkady answers:

> I have no charm on me; but in me there's a thought from God: if you (T) had lifted your hand with the pistol to shoot me, I would have cut your (T) throat before that with the razor.

The two Ts are a conscious and deliberate breach by Arkady of master-servant relations: in my categorisation, they belong to T_4. This case of a shift from V_1 to T_4, though striking, is relatively simple in its effect; for a more complex example of a V to T shift (in this case, from V_2 to T_4) we can go to a great scene in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (Part 4 Chapter 8), where the two women between whom Prince Myshkin is emotionally divided — Aglaya and Nastasya Filippovna — confront each other.

Aglaya is a general's daughter; Nastasya Filippovna isn't inferior by birth, but she had been left an orphan by the death of her father, an army officer and landowner of ruined fortune. When still barely more than a child, she had been seduced by her guardian, Totsky, who converted her from ward to mistress. It would take me too far afield from my present subject to discuss adequately the way in which, in presenting the figures of the two women, Dostoevsky both enlists and subverts the traditional opposition between virgin and harlot. Aglaya is very conscious not just of her social position but of her virtue, and she despises Nastasya Fillipovna for her past life; but the latter commands not only our sympathy as a suffering Mary Magdalene but our respect as the passionate, proud and rebellious woman she is.

Throughout the scene Aglaya is icily polite to the other, addressing her as *vy*, but her moral contempt is barely concealed beneath that mask, and peeps out in the comments on Nastasya Filippovna's sexual past that she permits herself: 'a woman...of such a character', 'much too educated for your...situation', where the pauses, seemingly of embarrassment, only sharpen the thrust of the censorious phrases that follow. The insinuations culminate in the deadly remark, 'If you wanted to be honest, you should have become a laundress' (which, in popular slang, meant a prostitute). Nastasya Filippovna, on her side, says very little for the greater part of the scene; she speaks guardedly, though sometimes cuttingly, in her brief interventions, and herself observing the external polite proprieties by staying with *vy*. Until, that is, the end of the dialogue, where, when the emotional tension and temperature have reached their height, she challenges Aglaya:

> And if you wish, this moment...I'll command him, do you hear, I'll only need to command him, and he'll throw you up at once and stay with me for ever, and marry me, and you'll have to run home alone! Is that what you want, is it?'

Here, where the hitherto repressed fury of her passions is exploded, Nastasya Filippovna for the first time in the scene throws *ty* after *ty* at her rival, like a series of bombs, blowing up Aglaya's claims to moral superiority.

In Act Two of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) the radical student[54] Trofimov says in the course of his critique

[54] Trofimov isn't portrayed explicitly as politically radical, but that's because Chekhov wouldn't have been able to get the play past the censorship if he had been.

of the gentry: 'They call themselves intellectuals, but they say *ty* to their servants.'[55] There is other evidence too to show that by the turn of the century liberal-minded people were reacting against some of the hierarchical forms of address. Perhaps even more significantly, in the same period some workers had demanded that their managements address them with the polite pronoun.[56] But the decisive changes had to wait for 1917. It required the February Revolution of that year and the overthrow of the Tsarist regime to remove by decrees and regulations these forms of address in the official sphere.

I have referred earlier to the attempts made by the radical sects in the English Revolution to universalise the use of *thou*; and the Jacobins in the French Revolution attempted similarly to establish *tu* as the general mode of address — both conceived as moves against hierarchy.[57] In the Russian Revolution, however, what the revolutionaries sought to do was to eliminate the use of *ty* by social superiors to inferiors, and to establish in the public sphere the general use of *vy* — thus, to level up second-person pronoun usage, not to level it down as their predecessors in the English and French Revolutions had aimed at doing. But in this, as in other aspects of social relations, neither February nor October could completely eradicate the social and ideological roots of long-established practices. Moreover, as a new bureaucracy replaced the old, the inequalities of power remained. As far as forms of address were concerned, there were two processes at work. On the one hand, there were both officials and subordinates, accustomed to non-reciprocal *ty* and *vy*, who

55 English translators render the second half of this sentence by some such paraphrase as 'they talk rudely to their servants', but it could be rendered exactly into Sinhala, though not if the translator is wholly dependent on an English version.

56 Comrie and Stone, p. 174.

57 See also the reference to the May 1968 days in Paris on p. 54.

stuck to the forms familiar to them; on the other hand, there were new elements who had risen into the post-revolutionary bureaucracy who came from those social classes where *ty* was the general pronoun of address. On account of both these factors, Red Army officers used *ty* often to address their subordinates, and so did factory managers, and even officials higher in the political scale.

At the Eleventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party, Lenin, disturbed by the growing bureaucratisation of the regime, drew an analogy with what may happen when one nation conquers another: 'If the conquering nation has a higher level of culture than the vanquished one, the former imposes its culture upon the latter; but if the opposite is the case, the vanquished nation imposes its culture upon its conqueror. Has not something like this happened in the capital of the RSFSR?'[58] The survival of the pre-revolutionary usages of second-person pronouns — markers of the bureaucratic feudal practices of the past — allows us to see the process that Lenin was talking about in microcosm.

Writing an article titled 'The Struggle for Cultured Speech' in *Pravda* in May 1923, Trotsky condemned 'abusive language and swearing', and went on to say: 'There is no denying that the old pre-revolutionary forms of language are still in use at the present time, six years after October, and are quite the fashion at the top.'[59] Later, in his critique of the Soviet regime in *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in exile in 1937, Trotsky cited from *Pravda* a conversation between a factory director and a mechanic. 'The mechanic,' commented Trotsky, 'addresses the director with extreme respect, using the second person plural, while the director answers him in the second person singular. And this disgraceful dialogue, impossible in any cultured capitalist country, is related by the

58 Quoted from Deutscher, p. 237.

59 Repr. In Trotsky (2), pp. 53-54.

director himself in the pages of *Pravda* as something entirely normal.'[60] These practices, in fact, outlived Trotsky's lifetime. The excellent study by Comrie and Stone, *The Russian Language since the Revolution*, shows that as late as the 1960s complaints about the use of non-reciprocal *ty* by individuals in positions of authority were being aired in the Soviet press, and that in some factories workers had to persuade the management to institutionalise *vy*.[61]

The Soviet Union developed its own socialist rhetoric which, like the Western democratic discourse, concealed the realities of unequal power and unequal privilege. However, there was one area of Soviet life in which repressive power manifested itself openly not only in other forms but also in linguistic practices, and that was in the prisons and forced labour camps. In the Tsarist period, it was compulsory that prisoners should be addressed as T, even if they came from the privileged classes, Dostoevsky himself in his Siberian prison camp as well as his fictional character Dmitri Karamazov underwent this humiliation. But the same form of address, apart from other ways of violating human dignity, remained in force in Soviet prisons. This is evident from the flood of prison literature through which Soviet readers in the era of perestroika learnt the truth about the recent past.

One of the most powerful of these narratives was the memoir of her twenty years in the prison camps by Anna Larina, the wife of Nikolai Bukharin, titled *Nezabyvaemoe* (The Unforgettable). From her story it is evident that she, an educated and cultured woman, was consistently addressed as T by her warders and summoned degradingly by her surname 'Bukharina', apart from being insulted as 'bitch' and made to perform such menial tasks as shovelling shit. However,

60 Trotsky (3), p. 103. The references to the 'second person plural' and 'second person singular' are to *vy* and *ty* respectively.

61 Comrie and Stone, p. 175.

when she was once conveyed to Moscow because she had been summoned by Beria, the head of the secret police, the latter received her courteously, and among other shows of politeness, addressed her as *vy* and by her first name and patronymic in correct fashion. It turned out that he had a purpose: he wanted to win her over as a collaborator — an attempt she resisted.[62]

In Dostoevsky's prison narrative *Notes from the House of the Dead*, we learn of the shock the prisoner got on his first day when he found dead cockroaches floating in the cabbage soup served to the prisoners. Ninety years later Mme. Bukharin went through the same nauseating experience in a Soviet prison. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*[63] Just as the Revolution didn't improve prison sanitation, so it failed to sweep away the filth of the past in the linguistic and non-linguistic assertions of naked power against the victims of the state.

62 Larina, pp. 171-192. I have used this episode in my play about Bukharin and his wife, *The Long Day's Task*, repr. in Regi Siriwardena, *Octet: Collected Plays* (ICES, 1995).

63 'The more things change, the more they are the same.' (Alphonse Karr)

7

In an earlier chapter of this study I referred to the fact that in studying historically usages of second-person pronouns in any language, we are faced with the difficulty of obtaining reliable evidence regarding the spoken language of earlier times. In the case of Sinhala we are fortunate that we have a record of second-person pronouns in 17th century Kandyan speech by Robert Knox who, as a British captive in the kingdom for nineteen years, knew colloquial and not literary Sinhala. In the chapter of his *Historical Relation of Ceylon* (1681) devoted to 'laws and language', he says: 'They have seven or eight words for Thou, or You, which they apply to persons according to their quality, or according as they would honour them.'[64] He then lists the eight words I have set out in Table 12.

Table 12

Second-Person Pronouns in 17th Century Kandyan Speech as given by Robert Knox

Knox's forms	Actual Sinhala forms
To, Topi	*tho, thopi*
Umba, Umbela	*umbe, umbela*
Tomnai	*thamunnehé*[65]
Tomsi, Tomsela	*thamusé, thamusela*
Tomanxi	*thamunnnansé*

64 Knox, Vol. 2, p. 292.

65 I am grateful to Tissa Abeysekera who identified this pronoun for me when I was baffled by the form Knox gives.

Knox doesn't tabulate the words in the left-hand column, but places them in serial order, and adds: 'All these words are gradually one higher than the other.' This last statement is rather loosely expressed, since it is apparent that after the singular form of three of the pronouns Knox places the plural form. I have, therefore, in tabulating the pronouns set the plural form, where it was given by Knox, on the same line as the singular, but otherwise preserved Knox's order. Knox's transliterations of these Sinhala pronouns are somewhat distorted by the foreign accent with which he must have spoken them, but that doesn't make it impossible to restore the originals. *Tho* and *thopi* are appropriately placed at the beginning as the pronouns that situate the persons addressed in the lowest order of subordination. Concerning the other pronouns it is noteworthy that *thamusé* and *thamusela*, from the position in which Knox places them, were only less honorific than *thamunnansé*. *Thamusé*, however, has descended considerably in the social scale since Knox wrote.

What Sinhala possessed, then, in the 17th century, was a multiple structure of second-person pronouns, all of which continued to be in use down to the 20th century. This multiplicity can be paralleled in other South Asian languages. Knox uses the word *quality* to define the basis of differentiation by which people were addressed by one or the other of these pronouns: 'according to their quality, or according as they would honour them'. *Quality*, in this context, would in 17th century English mean 'social rank'. What, then, was the basis of distinctions of 'quality' which determined the choice of pronouns of address in Kandyan society of Knox's time, and why did it need a multiple structure of such pronouns? European languages, even in the strongly hierarchical society of medieval times, could manage with the dyadic structures of second-person pronouns that we have looked at earlier.

I suggest that why Sinhala, and other South Asian languages, developed a multiple structure of second-person

pronouns was because the societies in which they were used had a gradation of castes, which were the fundamental basis of the distinctions of 'quality' that Knox speaks of. It's well known that down to near-contemporary times *tho* and *thopi* were used to address the castes lowest in the hierarchy. Knox himself mentions that the Rodi (who were accorded the lowest place of all) were obliged to use the most ceremonious terms in addressing even ordinary people of other castes.[66] What has been taking place in the 20th century is that there has been a striving to develop Sinhala pronominal usages that are more appropriate to a modern democratic society. The process is still going on but, as I shall bring out, is incomplete.

Let us look at the contemporary situation regarding some of the pronouns that Knox lists. *Tho* and *thopi* have virtually disappeared today, except when a speaker uses them deliberately in anger as an insult (to anybody, regardless of status) or when parents or other elders, especially in the Kandyan speech community, use them playfully or affectionately to children.[67] However, when I say this, I mustn't omit the case of Yasmine Gooneratne's Uncle Frederick — at least, because it's an entertaining story. This was Frederick Obeyesekere, the son of Donald Obeyesekere, and a Cambridge graduate and lawyer, who in 1960 decided to contest the Dompe seat in Parliament. He was a kinsman of the Bandaranaikes, so the SLFP would have been glad to give him nomination, but he spurned this option because he despised mass parties, and stood as an independent against his own nephew, Felix Dias Bandaranaike. According to Yasmine Gooneratne in her family memoir, *Relative Merits*, Uncle Frederick stood up at his election meeting in the Dompe Town Hall, and 'in his most polished Cambridge tones' delivered a speech in which he addressed the audience as *thopi*:

66 Knox, Vol. 2, p. 212.

67 I am indebted to Dr. Ranjini Obeyesekere and Prof. H.L. Seneviratne for bringing this latter usage to my notice.

> 'And so,' finished Uncle Frederick, beaming kindly from the rostrum on the vulgar multitude below him, whose growing irritation he mistook for murmurs of approval, 'let me not attempt to influence *thopi* in these important deliberations. That is not for me to do. But if any here have a desire to bestow their valuable votes on me, then I will offer them this encouragement: *thopi* have my gracious permission to do so.'[68]

Umbe has had a much longer life than *tho* and *thopi*. Within recent historical times, *umbe* has had a dual character: one, as a pronoun of intimate address (reciprocal), and the other, as a marker of relations of power or superiority in address to social inferiors. (non-reciprocal).[69] In the former use it was probably part of a non-élite class dialect. In the latter use, as I said early in this study, it was in the days of my childhood the normal form of address of upper-class and middle-class people to anybody who was barefooted and who wore sarong or cloth and jacket, and, in the households of those classes it was the standard form of address to servants.

When I made a first attempt more than twenty years ago to treat the subject of second-person pronouns in an article in the *Lanka Guardian*,[70] a Christian priest, the Rev. D.J. Kanagaratnam, wrote a letter to a subsequent issue of the journal[71] offering some interesting information about the second-person pronoun usages of missionaries. He reported that in the first Sinhala translation of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1820) God was referred to as *Unvahansé*, the clergyman as *Unnansé*, and the people as *tho* and *thopi*:

68 Gooneratne, p. 84.

69 Cf. the uses of T that I have indexed as T_1 and T_2 in Russian.

70 Siriwardena (1).

71 *Lanka Guardian,* 1 August 1979.

> Even in the 20th century till the '50s these forms were retained along with 'obavahanse' for God and 'umba' and 'umbela' used individually and collectively when people are referred to. Some translations even have 'Thope hith osavapalla' (lift up your hearts) and 'kapalla' and 'beepalla' (eat and drink).[72]

However, Sinhala nationalists in the early part of the 20th century were not ahead of Christian missionaries in their use of pronouns of address. Anagarika Dharmapala followed the upper-class and middle-class norms of his time when addressing working-class audiences, speaking to them as *umbela*.[73] The man who transformed public political discourse in this respect was the labour leader and pioneer of militant trade unionism, A.E. Goonesinha.

When I was a young student in the 40s working for the LSSP, I used to know Henry Peiris, then editor of the illegal *Samasamajaya*; he later became an M.P. in the first Parliament. Henry Peiris had begun his political life with A.E. Goonesinha. He told me that Goonesinha made a great impact on the working class by addressing them for the first time as *mahatvaruni* (gentlemen). This, coupled with his virulent attacks on the colonial police, Peiris said, raised the self-respect of the workers and broke their fear of authority.

While *umbela* disappeared from political life as a result of Goonesinha's innovations, both singular and plural forms of this pronoun continued to be used in everyday life in address to people of subordinate classes for a much longer time. Even today, there are, no doubt, people who (adapting Trofimov's

72 Ibid. *Thopé* is the possessive adjective from *thopi*, and the verbal forms *osavapalla...kapalla...beepalla* are all forms used in addressing social inferiors.

73 This is evident from the speeches quoted in Gunadasa Amarasekera's book *Anagarika Dharmapala Marxvadhiyekdhe?*

words) call themselves intellectuals but say *umbe* to their servants, but their number is dwindling all the time.

However, the movement in the direction of more democratic pronominal usage was for a long time impeded by the fact that though the old hierarchical pronouns had become an embarrassment, there was no second-person pronoun readily and generally available for use in ordinary conversation in order to place the hearer on a footing of equality with oneself. *Obe* is too stiff and stilted; it is used in writing or in formal speeches, and it has been adopted on radio and television in interviews and discussion programmes,[74] but it is impossibly bookish for everyday speech. *Thamusé*, which has come down in the world since Knox, is too patronising. I know a middle-class person who lost his temper when a policeman addressed him as *thamusé*, and I recall an occasion when a film director was most upset and apologetic because one of his assistants, to whom I was a stranger, had said *thamusé* to me: 'Thamusé! My heavens!' he exclaimed. Peasants and urban workers use reciprocal *umbe* to each other in intimate conversation, and this usage has been adopted by some middle-class males (less widely by females), but it is obviously unusable by non-intimates, I have been told that *ohé* has existed for a long time in the southern dialect of Sinhala, but in my experience (almost entirely urban) of the language its currency appears to be declining. *Thama* was apparently widely used by older generations in Kandyan speech,[75] and I knew a lady from an aristocratic family who frequently employed this form, but it used to send the girls with worked with her in Colombo into fits of giggles because it was strange to them. It still exists as a formal and impersonal

74 Except when the discussant or interviewee is a person of some distinction, when the interlocutor generally shifts to the honorific *obethuma*.

75 I am again indebted to Dr. Ranjini Obeyesekere for information on this point.

mode of address, perhaps somewhat patronising in character, and therefore open to adoption by such persons as state officials talking to ordinary citizens,[76] but again its stiffness severely limits its range of use. Prof. J.B. Disanayake has drawn my attention to another formal pronoun, *yushmetha*, that is used in the courtroom.

When I look back on my own practice in the sixties and seventies, I recall that most often in Sinhala conversation, I would avoid using a pronoun by addressing the other person by name: *Rani hete gedere yanavadhe?* Or, if I was speaking to someone with whom I was less familiar, *Mister Silva mokakdhe hithanné?* I believe that this was a strategy that many others besides myself adopted, and this pointed to a hiatus in pronominal forms consequent on the growing obsolescence of the old hierarchical pronouns.[77] However, the form that has emerged in the last three decades or so to partially fill this vacuum is *oya*.

The form itself isn't new, but it was at one time thought by élite speakers to be indecorous or rude: what is new is the increasing and more widespread use of it as a form of address in conservation with equals, or those with whom the speaker claims equality. It was almost certainly first adopted in urban speech, where the need for a non-hierarchical pronoun would have been felt most strongly, though there are no field studies on which to base this conjecture. When I first wrote on the subject of second-person pronouns twenty-two years ago, I

[76] I have heard it used in two teledramas, on both occasions by characters representing police officers addressing middle-class people they were interrogating.

[77] Dr. Ranjini Obeyesekere questions my view that there was such a hiatus, on the ground that in Sinhala it is always possible to use the verb alone without the pronoun e.g. *Enevadhe?* (Are you coming?) It seems to me, however, that this form of address is possible only with intimates, and that if used to strangers or to persons of higher status, it would seem curt or brusque.

said that I still had an inhibition against using *oya* to strangers because it seemed to me brash. Since then, however, I have overcome that inhibition through my own habituation to that usage and through hearing the pronoun every day around me. What is particularly significant is that such persons as bus conductors or office peons now say *oya* to people in trousers or saree whom at one time they would have addressed only as *mahattaya* (sir) or *nona* (madam). This is a striking assertion of equality, as is also the habit of younger bus conductors and other young persons of similar social position of addressing older middle-class males as *Uncle*. Of course, it's true that the former practice of calling anybody in trousers *mahattaya* couldn't have been sustained because trousers are no longer a badge of class: the bus conductor or office peon is often in trousers himself.

While I believe I am right in saying that *oya* first gained wide currency in urban speech, it is no longer confined to it. Though my own contact with rural Sinhala is minimal, I have been assured by knowledgeable observers that it is rapidly taking root in the village, especially among younger generations: in this, as in other respects, the distinction between urban and rural cultures in contemporary Sri Lanka seems to be dwindling. I think very plausible a suggestion Dr. J. Uyangoda has made to me: that university students and others working in the city carried back the use of *oya* to their villages, and that it is also spread by the media — films, teledramas, radio plays and popular novels.

But the transformation of pronominal usage that the extended use of *oya* has effected is still partial and limited. *Oya* can be and is used between equals, whether intimate or non-intimate, but it can't cross institutionalised boundaries of power or status. Thus, in certain contexts *oya* is non-reciprocal: I say *oya* to the domestic help, but she would think it inconceivable to say *oya* to me. Nor, on the other hand, would an ordinary citizen dream of addressing a Minister or a high official as *oya*: the regular pronoun in that case would

be *obethuma*, or even *thamunnansé*. What this means is that the old feudal and caste hierarchies have declined, but they have been replaced by a new political and bureaucratic hierarchy, and some of the old pronominal usages have been transferred to the new relations of power. In short, our linguistic practices and the ideologies they incarnate still carry with them a living legacy of the feudal past that runs counter to the democratic or socialist discourses we have come to profess in the course of our political development. That's why our linguistic usages, our thinking and our social relations are so often shot through with contradictions.[78]

[78] In the 18th century the republicanism of the American and French Revolutions involved a rejection of the titles and forms of address of old feudal Europe, and the presidents of these countries are consequently addressed as 'Mr. President' and 'Monsieur le Président'. In Sri Lanka, however, neither the first nor the second Republican Constitution was followed by any attempt to democratise the forms of address to the head of state, and the President of Sri Lanka, like the former Governor-General as the monarch's representative, continues to be addressed as 'Your Excellency' (in Sinhala, *Uthumaneni*). How we Sri Lankans love the tinsel of titles and honorifics! A left leader with a revolutionary past even wrote in the eighties a letter to President J.R. Jayewardene asking for the reinstatement of the 1980 strikers, beginning as salutation with 'May it please Your Excellency', to which the President, in rejecting the request, responded with 'My dear Bernard'.

I conclude the three case-studies with a summary and some comparative observations.

The structures of second-person pronouns in Shakespearean English, when viewed diachronically, have to be seen as transitional. This character of the pronouns is revealed especially in the unmarked *you*, standing outside the traditional hierarchical relationships and the structure of pronouns of address associated with them. It foreshadows the universal *you* that later became institutionalised in English as the appropriate form of address in a bourgeois society. In Shakespearean English this process was incomplete because non-reciprocal *thou* and *you* continued to be in use side by side with unmarked *you*, but when change was consummated in the 18th century, what it meant was that pronominal usage had been democratised by levelling it upwards. The attempts of the radical sects, who represented subaltern groups, during and after the Civil War to universalise *thou* failed, and instead, the pronoun that had been originally the polite form of address of the upper classes among themselves and the proper form of address of the lower classes towards their superiors was universalised. This, as we have seen, was part of a general refinement of linguistic usage, an emphasis on gentility and correctness of speech, which was in effect the imposition of the speech habits of the élite on the rest of the nation.

In post-revolutionary Russian, as in other modern Continental languages, change in pronominal usage took a different form because the dyadic structure of second-person pronouns was preserved, but the lines of distinction between the T and V forms were redrawn so as to mark the difference not between social superiority and inferiority but between familiarity and strangeness. Nevertheless, this was also an example of levelling up pronominal usage — an extension to the whole society of the speech habits of the educated former ruling classes, without its hierarchical elements. There is no

doubt that this change corresponded to popular desires during the revolutionary era, but it was institutionalised by decree and promoted by a revolutionary élite. However, as this élite hardened into a bureaucratic caste, contradictions between the officially sanctioned ideology and linguistic practice developed, owing partly to the survival of old pre-revolutionary habits and partly to the growth of new unequal relations of power. But over the seven decades of existence of the Soviet state, general pronominal usage evolved towards the norms prevailing in Western Europe, except in the prisons and forced labour camps where the repressive character of the state manifested itself also in linguistic usage. But if the bourgeois democratic transformation of Russia that is now on the order of the day is carried through, these linguistic practices will appear as part of the amalgam of a Communist dictatorial order with the traditions of a feudal past, and in this as in other respects Russia will probably be anxious to catch up with Western Europe.

The current changes in use of pronouns of address in Sinhala are, however, of a different character in some respects from those represented by the other cases that have been studied. The increasing obsolescence of the traditional hierarchical pronouns and the growing currency of *oya* are linguistic changes that are moving away from the heritage of old social relations, though, as with other social changes in the same direction, they are incomplete. Reciprocal *oya* exists side by side with non-reciprocal pronouns, just as in Shakespearean English unmarked and reciprocal *you* existed side by side with non-reciprocal *you* and *thou*. However, what is most significant in the spread of *oya* is that it isn't parallel to the way in which *you* was generalised in English because it doesn't spring from a universalisation by the upper classes of their usage. It isn't a case of pronominal change being levelled upwards but of a change from below.

The point will be clear if we recognise that in the English case what was involved was an abandonment of the T form by

superiors addressing inferiors, whereas the lower classes continued to say Y to their betters as they had always done. Of course, in the dialogic exchange Y now took on a different — an unmarked — character, but at the level of speech habits the decisive shift was on the part of the upper classes and could be carried out only by them. But where a speaker of the subordinate classes had used reciprocal *thou* to intimates, s/he was now being urged by precept and example to say *you* as the correct and elegant form of address. English pronominal change, therefore, was clearly from the top downwards; in contemporary Sinhala, on the other hand, the initiation of the new function of *oya* hasn't come from the upper classes.

I would distinguish here between two different aspects of linguistic change in contemporary Sinhala involving class relations. By the 1940s or 1950s (my dating here is based entirely on personal memory) a younger generation of middle class or upper middle class people (most of them English-educated) were ashamed of the linguistic habits of their elders in addressing servants or other people of a lower social class — that is, the use of *umbe* and the non-polite verb forms. They were influenced perhaps by democratic ideals and partly by the model offered by the English *you*. These local counterparts of Trofimov began to use the polite forms of verbs, regardless of the class of persons they were addressing, but in the absence of a generally acceptable non-hierarchical pronoun, most of them would at that stage avoid using one at all. This, therefore, was a linguistic change initiated from above, as in the case of the European developments I have been discussing. But the anti-hierarchical use of *oya* is not only more recent, but also came not from a liberal élite but from Sinhala-speaking people of lower social status than these. Indeed, originally, I remember, many members of the more privileged classes felt affronted when addressed as *oya* by people from whom they expected deferential forms of address, and perhaps some of them still feel that unease. It's one thing to be civilised in addressing your social inferiors and abandon overtly

humiliating forms; it's another to accommodate yourself to their assertion of equality with you.

If, therefore, the adoption of *oya*, particularly in relation to people normally assumed to be of superior social status than the speaker is seen as a linguistic change from below, one needs to identify the social groups who originated it. Nothing definite can be said about this in the absence of field studies of use of second-person pronouns in Sinhala. But I would guess that the innovation was created not by those at the bottom of the social pyramid but by intermediate groups such as students and lower middle class employees (I have referred to the cases of bus conductors and office peons) — those predominantly urban groups who come regularly into contact with people traditionally regarded as higher in the social scale but no longer feel obliged to treat them with verbal deference. I wouldn't hazard putting a date on the beginnings of this phenomenon, but it isn't older, I believe, than three decades. It's post-1956, of course; but it's a significant example of a spontaneous linguistic change from below, not stopping at the platform rhetoric of equality but translating it into the language of everyday social intercourse.

However, the future development of *oya* will be determined by the evolving character of our social relations. What will probably happen in the presently foreseeable future is that *oya* will be the normal form of address to equals or those whom the speaker perceives as equals, while more deferential forms will be sustained in address towards superiors, particularly those in positions of authority over the speaker. And some of these forms in their obsequiousness may still carry the stamp of our feudal past.

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE OF SEXUALITY

This is an expanded version of a lecture delivered to the English Association of Sri Lanka on Shakespeare Day, 1997.

The most challenging statement about Shakespeare's language of sexuality was made by a cockroach. His name was Archy, and he figured in Don Marquis's *Archy and Mehitabel,* which, several decades after it was published, I still consider the finest book of American light verse ever written. But since I am probably the last survivor of the generation of Sri Lankan readers who grew up with Archy, I had better explain about him. This is the story Don Marquis tells. In his apartment, he used to find poems written on his typewriter by an unknown person. So he kept watch, and found that a cockroach visited the apartment every night and laboriously typed out the poems by jumping up and down on the keys. The cockroach turned out to be the reincarnated soul of a poet. Since he couldn't operate the shift key while jumping up and down on the letter keys, there were no capital letters in his poems; and whenever Archy wanted a question mark or a mark of exclamation, he had to spell them out. Here then is Archy's poem, 'archy confesses', about Shakespeare and sexual language:

coarse
jocosity
catches the crowd
shakespeare
and i
are often low browed

the fish wife s
curse

and the laugh
of the horse
shakespeare
and i
are frequently
coarse

aesthetic
excuses
in bill s behalf
are adduced to refine
big bill s
coarse laugh

but bill
he would chuckle
to hear such guff
he pulled
rough stuff
and he liked
rough stuff

hoping you
are the same
archy[1]

Was Archy right about Shakespeare and sexual language? The modern enlightened liberal attitude assumes that when artistic necessity justifies sex-talk of the kind that's considered improper in polite society, then it's permissible; otherwise it's obscene. That, for instance, is the principle underlying such landmark documents in the sexual liberation of literature as Judge Woolsey's judgment on *Ulysses* in the United States, or the British court's decision in the *Lady Chatterley* trial in

[1] Marquis, pp. 100-101..

the sixties. But what Archy is saying is that these 'aesthetic excuses' are so much guff when it comes to Shakespeare: he was a popular entertainer who pulled rough stuff because he liked rough stuff. Was Archy right? That's the first question I want to try to answer. For this purpose, I shall use two passages from two plays of Shakespeare as test-cases.

The first passage is from the lesson scene in Act 4 Scene I of *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson, examines the small boy William on his Latin grammar in the presence of his mother and Mistress Quickly. Part of the humour of the scene comes from the parson's Welsh accent and verbal mannerisms. Making fun of the linguistic habits of minority speakers is a familiar source of popular comedy: the English stage has for a long time been laughing at Scottish, Irish or Welsh speakers, just as Tamils and Muslims speaking Sinhala are often laughed at in Sinhala theatre and cinema. But the main source of comedy in this scene is in the bawdy jokes made possible by a combination of Sir Hugh's Welsh accent and the illiterate Mistress Quickly's misunderstandings of what is being said. After some preliminary questions, the parson puts William through the declension of the Latin pronoun *hic, haec, hoc.* 'What is the focative case, William?' he asks. William is stumped by this question, and stammers, 'O — vocative, O', which serves as another unintended sexual pun (unintended, that is, by the character) since O was in Elizabethan slang one of the ways of referring to the female genitals. Sir Hugh says, 'Remember, William, focative is *caret,* ' which is the Latin for 'it's missing' — that is, there is no vocative. But in the context of 'focative' the word *caret* calls up in the minds of the audience the carrot as an image of the penis. Mistress Quickly, in her verbal confusion, underlines that by saying, 'And that's a good root.'

Now what are we to say about this scene in testing Archy's claim? The scene has no bearing at all on the rest of the plot. In fact, in the Quarto text of the play, it's omitted entirely, and that's because that text was probably an abridged

one made for a provincial performance. We can't find any 'aesthetic excuse' for the scene on the basis of plot or theme or character. It's just a piece of extraneous funny business, and the comedy, apart from the ethnic humour, comes from the bawdy puns. So here, in Archy's terms, is Shakespeare pulling 'rough stuff' either because he likes it or because he knows the audience will like it.

Before I pass on from this scene I want to recall something that throws light on Sri Lankan norms of linguistic propriety. In 1940 Lyn Ludowyk produced *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with the University Dramsoe. He played the Welsh parson himself, and he brought the house down with the line about the 'focative case'. But later in the scene Sir Hugh asks William for the genitive cases of the pronoun. William answers, 'Genitive – *horum, harum, horum',* and Mistress Quickly bursts out, 'Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie on her! Never name her, child, if she be a whore.' But in the Dramsoc production, the actress didn't speak the word *whore,* she replaced it with a wave of the hand. So I want to offer this footnote to Sri Lankan social history — that on the Colombo stage in 1940 a male actor, and the university Professor of English at that, could play on the word *fuck,* but a well-brought up upper-middle class young lady couldn't be required to say *whore.*

Now let's look at the other passage from Shakespeare I want to use as a test for Archy's claim. This is from *Hamlet,* Act 3 Scene 2, the scene where Hamlet stages the play within the play in order to determine Claudius's guilt. In this part of the scene Hamlet goes up to Ophelia, who is seated among the assembled court audience, and settling himself at her feet, says: 'Lady, shall I lie in your lap?' In the Elizabethan language of sex, this could mean only: 'Shall I sleep with you?' Ophelia, no doubt embarrassed and blushing, says, 'No, my lord,' whereupon Hamlet pretends to correct himself: 'I mean, my head upon your lap?' Ophelia replies, 'Ay, my lord.' Hamlet then asks her, 'Do you think I meant country matters?'

Country matters would mean 'something coarse, vulgar, obscene', but it contains a hidden pun, in the first syllable of *country,* which the actor might stress in speaking: '*coun*try matters'. Ophelia, probably outraged again, says, 'I think nothing, my lord,' to which Hamlet responds: 'That's a fair thought – to lie between maids' legs.' Ophelia, perhaps uncertain what he means, asks: 'What is, my lord?' and Hamlet says, 'Nothing.' This seems to be a dismissive answer, as if saying, 'Never mind,' but it actually carries on the sexual allusions of the previous lines. To understand this we have to know the sexual meanings of *thing* and *nothing* in Elizabethan speech. There were actually two sets of usages, both of which can be found in Shakespeare. In one usage *thing* is used undifferentially of both the male and the female sexual organ. In the other usage, *thing,* as representing the penis,[2] is contrasted with *nothing,* which Elizabethans pronounced as 'no thing'.[3] In this second

[2] Knowing this usage illuminates many passages in Shakespeare; for instance, the first stanza of Feste's last song in *Twelfth Night:*

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> With hey-ho, the wind and the rain,
> A foolish thing was but a toy,
> For the rain it raineth every day.

The 'foolish thing' as a 'toy' belongs to childhood masturbation, as contrasted with the adult sexualilty of stanza 3: 'But when I came, alas, to wive.'

Hence it is that Shakespeare is able to rhyme 'doting' with 'nothing' in Sonnet 20. The sonnet is of particular interest in relation to what is said later in this essay about the sexual ambivalence of the poet's feelings for the young man to whom it is addressed:

> And for a woman wert thou first created,
> Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
> And by addition me of thee defeated,
> By adding one thing to my purpose nothing,
> But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
> Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

usage *nothing* represents the female genitals; this implies a markedly patriarchal conception of femaleness, as defined by the absence of a penis. It is this latter usage that explains the line from *Hamlet*. What Hamlet is saying is, 'If you think nothing, that is the proper thing between a woman's legs.' Incidentally, knowing the sexual meaning of *nothing* gives us an understanding of one point of the title of another Shakespeare play, *Much Ado about Nothing*. Part of that play turns on the suspicion that Hero has lost her virginity before marriage, and this false accusation against her almost leads to tragedy. But through the pun in the title Shakespeare in mocking his own plot: his first audience would have understood him as covertly saying: 'All this fuss about a vagina.'

But to return to the *Hamlet* scene. Hamlet had been in love with Ophelia, but by this scene his bitterness against his mother's adultery has blackened the whole of womankind in his eyes. He vents his misogyny and his revulsion against women, and against sexuality itself, by a sadistic verbal assault on Ophelia, tormenting her with coarse sex-talk. The scene is painful, but I think we have to say that unlike the passage from *The Merry Wives* we looked at earlier, it isn't just indulgence in bawdy language for its own sake. The dialogue has undoubtedly a dramatic point and purpose, within the scene and within the play as a whole, in articulating Hamlet's disgust with sexuality, with womanhood, with life itself, that is part of his malaise. But it can be suggested that the sexual puns have a further significance in relation to the play's theme. The world of *Hamlet* is one of deceptive appearances. Behind the pomp and splendour of the Danish court is the ugly reality of murder and adultery. So, to Hamlet there is falsity in language itself: seemingly innocent words conceal obscene meanings.

So, as far as the passage from *Hamlet* is concerned, I don't think Archy's description applies. It's conceivable that there were spectators who were titillated by it, but it isn't

funny: if we admit an element of humour in it, we have to say that the humour is bitter, horrific or black. But elsewhere in the plays one may find sexual language that is different in tone from the *Hamlet* passage but equally organic to the drama – as with the bawdy humour of Mercutio and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, the obscenities of Iago in *Othello*, or the sexual allusions of the Fool in *King Lear*. Or that wonderful description by the Hostess in *Henry V* of Falstaff's death, which brings together sexual frankness, folk piety and folk practicality, tenderness and pathos: I need to quote the whole passage:

> 'A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child; 'a parted e'en just between twelve and one, e'en at the turning o'th tide; for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John'? quoth I, 'be o'good cheer!' So 'a cried out, 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him, 'a should not think of God — I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet; I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so up'ard and up'and, and all was as cold as any stone.

The Hostess putting her hand on Falstaff's genitals and feeling them 'as cold as any stone' has to be the final mark of death: if that vital centre of Falstaff is cold, he must be dead indeed. But this intimacy with his body also comes naturally to her, so that what might elsewhere have been bawdy humour is transformed into a maternal tenderness and loving sadness that are very moving.

In making a contrast between the passage from *The Merry Wives* on the one hand and those from *Hamlet* and *Henry V* on the other, I run the risk of leaving you with a wrong impression. You may suppose that in the lesser plays there are sexual jokes thrown in for their own sake, but not in the greater ones. But that wouldn't be true. Let me offer a passage from one of the tragedies that's purely exploitation of bawdy language with no 'aesthetic excuses', as Archy calls them. In *Othello* the Clown is talking to the musicians who have come to serenade Othello and Desdemona after their nuptial night:

> CLOWN Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?
> FIRST MUSICIAN Ay marry are they, sir.
> CLOWN O, thereby hangs a tale.
> FIRST MUSICIAN Whereby hangs a tale, sir?
> CLOWN Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know.

This is a joke created by a rather laboured and not very funny play on words, and it doesn't add anything essential to the scene. *Tail (tale)* in Elizabethan slang was an expression for the penis, and it hangs by, or close to, a wind-instrument, that is, the anus. So Shakespeare, as a popular writer for the theatre, could, even in one of the great tragedies, strain to make a dramatically extraneous sexual joke for the delectation of the audience.

By comparing the abundance of sexual language in Shakespeare's plays with its paucity in the theatre of the eighteenth, or nineteenth, or the first half of the twentieth century, some people may be led to suppose that Shakespeare had total freedom in this respect. But that wouldn't be true, although censorship in his time didn't concern itself with sexual morality as much as with politics and religion (and religion, as regarded by the state, was a dimension of politics). Outside the censorship of individual plays to keep out political and religious subversion, the only state regulation of the

language of the theatre that we know of was an Act of Parliament in 1606. Under this Act profanity in the theatre — that is, the taking of God's name in oaths – was prohibited. We know that this regulation affected those plays of Shakespeare that were produced or revised after that date. But consider the fact that neither the word *fuck* nor the word *cunt* appear, in those naked forms, in the passages we have looked at, nor do they in any other play of Shakespeare or in any Elizabethan play I know. They appear in disguise, as it were, in the form of a pun. But the pun implies that there is a taboo on speaking the words openly — perhaps not so much as a rule of censorship but as a consensus on what could be said and couldn't be said on the public stage. The function of the pun is to enable the taboo to be circumvented, so that the forbidden word can be said without fully speaking it out. But the resultant effect of defeating the taboo in this way varies with the situation. In the passage from *The Merry Wives,* if we are amused by it, we can admire the writer's ingenuity in manipulating the language so as to make a sexual allusion by covert means. But since there is no further dramatic point to the passage, we don't find that the puns have illuminated character or situation. The effect of the *Hamlet* passage is much more complex. When we listen to it, what we are immediately aware of is Hamlet's sardonic wit; we see the lines as Hamlet's releasing of his bitterness by disguising it through the puns; it's only secondarily that we think of Shakespeare securing this effect through his control of language.

But it's not only with tabooed words that these possibilities arise, but also with seemingly chaste ones, underneath which a pun may conceal a hidden sexual meaning. There's a good example at the very end of *The Merchant of Venice* — the last two lines, in fact. In the last scene of the play the two women, Portia and Nerissa, have teased their husbands: first, by accusing them of giving away their betrothal rings to women; later, by producing the rings and

claiming that they had them from the lawyer and his clerk with whom they themselves went to bed. After the truth has finally been sorted out, Gratiano speaks the last couplet of the play:

> Well, while I live I'll fear no other thing
> So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring.

On the surface these lines seem to say that he'll take good care not to lose her betrothal ring, but *ring*, like *circle* and O, was used in Elizabethan slang to mean a woman's sexual organ. After all the teasing about Portia's and Nerissa's fictional infidelity, Gratiano is hinting that he will see that his wife doesn't really cheat him sexually, so that he rings down the play with a burst of guffaws from the audience. Especially, I suppose from the men, because it's a male joke about the sexual unreliability of wives.

I haven't counted, but it's likely that the majority of Shakespeare's puns have to do with sexual language, and without doubt most of his comic puns do. In the witty exchanges between a pair of characters that are so common in the comedies, we often have a string of puns turning on sexual allusions, or one that is climaxed by a bawdy joke. These passages have mostly lost their saltiness today, partly because punning as a form of humour is no longer in fashion, but also because the sexual puns have become linguistically obscure, and most people need to consult glossaries or annotated editions is order to unravel them. It's well known that the great Dr. Johnson disliked Shakespeare's fondness for puns, and described a quibble — that is, a pun — as 'the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it'. It's normally supposed that Johnson's hostility to puns was due to his neo-classic opposition to ambiguity of language. To me it seems likely that the stern moralist in him was also offended by the sexual content of many of the puns; or that

correctness of language for him went hand in hand with correctness of morals.

The Elizabethan theatres were situated on the periphery of London, so as to be out of the reach of the city authorities who, dominated by Puritan views, were hostile to the theatre. The theatre therefore belonged to the less regulated fringe of city life, and it shared this territory with the brothel quarter. Not only did the brothels jostle with the theatres for building space, but the prostitutes and pimps contacted customers at the entrances and exits to the theatres and even within the auditorium itself. In 1597 the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London presented a petition asking that the theatres be pulled down because they corrupted youth with 'unchaste matters and ungodly practices', they were places of resort for vagrants, whoremongers and criminals, they distracted working people from their occupations and from the practice of religion, and they spread disease. In other words, the theatre was said to be a source of social, moral and physical infection. Nothing happened then because the theatre had the protection of the monarchy and powerful aristocrats, but in 1642, with the outbreak of the Civil War, the Puritans had their revenge. The theatres were closed, and remained so till the restoration of the monarchy eighteen years later.

The sexual language of the Elizabethan theatre was in keeping with the relative freedom of the territory in which it flourished. But it was also a heavily male-dominated theatre. There were women among the spectators, but the theatrical profession — whether of writers or actors — was exclusively male since women's parts were played by boys. One of the grounds for Puritan attacks on the theatre was this practice of males dressing and acting as women, which, as a Puritan theologian complained, 'may kindle sparks of lust in unclean affections'. This fear of homosexuality was perhaps grounded on more than theory. Where boy actors were apprenticed to grown-up men in the company, and often lived with them in

the same lodgings, sexual relations between them were always a possibility.

There are very few and fleeting references in Shakespeare's plays to sexual relations between males, and he never confronted the subject openly in any of the plots or main relationships of his plays. It was, of course, a relationship forbidden by both church and state; but Marlowe, who was reputed to be both gay and unbeliever, did in *Edward II* make a tragedy out of the situation of a king who loses his throne and his life because of his love for his favorite, Gaveston. There is no direct representation on stage of the physical relationship between the king and his lover, but we can be in no doubt about what these were. At the climax of the tragedy we see enacted on the stage the murder of Edward by a redhot poker being thrust up his anus in a horrible caricature of the act of sodomy. Shakespeare never confronted these unlawful relationships with that degree of openness. What we do have in his plays are, on the one hand, the flickering sexual ambivalence of some of the roles played by the boy actors, and on the other the unexplained intensity of the attachments of the two Antonios, in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, to people of their own sex.

Shakespeare was particularly fond of the situation in which the boy actor playing the heroine dresses up as a young man. When, within the fictive world of *As You Like It*, the character Rosalind, disguised as the boy Ganymede, offers to pretend to be Rosalind so that Orlando can try out his love for her, what Elizabethans would have seen on the stage was a boy-actor resuming his real boy-self to play a love scene with another, probably young, male actor. The maze of sexual identities here was deeply subversive of fixed gender distinctions (one can understand the Puritan fears).

It has been said that in the Sonnets the feelings expressed by the poet for the young man to whom the first sequence is addressed are more than friendship and less than homosexual desire. The same might be said of Antonio's feelings for

Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, with his willingness to risk his life for his friend by signing the fatal bond, his equal willingness to die for him if only he can see him at his death, his unexplained melancholy, and his description of himself which confesses an unspecified guilt:

> I am a tainted wether of the flock,
> Meetest for death. The weakest kind of fruit
> Drops earliest to the ground and so let me.

In Richard de Zoysa's imaginative production of the play in the eighties, he highlighted Antonio's position as the odd man out, leaving him alone and silent on the stage at the end, when the three happy couples have gone in.

The other Antonio, in *Twelfth Night*, has even less to say of himself than his namesake in *The Merchant of Venice*, but he too risks personal danger to follow Sebastian into the city. In the context of what I have said in 'Love, Power and Pronouns' about the pronouns of address in Shakespearean English, it's significant that in his conversations with Sebastian in 2.1 and 3.3, Antonio says only *you* to him, but when he is left alone in the former scene, he shifts to *thee* in soliloquy:

> But come what may, I do adore thee so
> That danger shall seem sport, and I will go!

The pronoun shift seems to reveal an attachment that he doesn't dare to reveal to the object of it. He is cut to the heart later when, in 3.4, as a consequence of the mistaken identity between the two twins, he thinks Sebastian has ungratefully disowned him:

> But, O, how vile an idol proves this god!
> Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.

The *thou* that had been held back in his earlier conversations with Sebastian, bursts through here under the pressure of disillusionment. (In my notation in 'Love, Power and Pronouns', this would be a shift to T_4.) But these are the only enigmatic shadows in Shakespeare's plays of those unlawful passions forbidden by both state and church.

The polite eighteenth century, the age of Johnson, thought of Shakespeare's sexual language as one mark of the barbarous age in which he lived. But by the nineteenth century there was an even stronger reaction to it from readers, critics and theatre directors alike. In Shakespeare's plays women could talk, or joke, about sex almost as freely and unashamedly as the male characters. And not only lower-class women like Juliet's Nurse and the Hostess but also women of gentility such as Beatrice or Helena. There is no assumption in the plays that a woman's freedom of sexual talk goes with looseness of behaviour. When Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing* is accused of sexual relations with a man other than the one she is betrothed to, all her friends treat it as a foul slander, but the same Hero, with her maid Margaret and with Beatrice, could indulge in uninhibited sex-jokes only two scenes previously. Shakespeare even represents the fourteen-year old Juliet as waiting impatiently and eagerly for the coming of night to consummate her marriage. It's the most physically passionate speech in the play: Romeo's love poetry is ethereal and bodiless in comparison. But nineteenth-century, especially Victorian, norms about female modesty were very different.

In 1807 there appeared a book titled *The Family Shakespeare,* in which twenty plays were reprinted in versions purified of all improper language. The book had no great success immediately, but its popularity boomed in the Victorian period. Within seventy years it went through thirty editions. The first edition had been anonymous, but later editions named the purging hand as that of Thomas Bowdler, a doctor of medicine. Bowdler was thus to contribute a word

to the English language, *howdlerise*. Actually, it was discovered a few decades ago that the task had been initiated, and for the most part carried out, by his sister Henrietta Bowdler. She didn't put her name on the title-page because to have done so would have been to admit that she had read those same offending passages that she had purged. And the Victorian audience to which *The Family Shakespeare* appealed was especially one of women and young girls. They could now enjoy the beauties and wisdom of Shakespeare without tainting their minds. In one of Dickens's novels there is the character of Mr. Podsnap, for whom the question about everything was, 'would it bring a blush to the cheek of the young person'. The young person was, of course, feminine in gender, and was personified by Mr. Podsnap's daughter. Though Dickens laughed at Victorian prudery there, he wasn't free of Podsnappery in writing his own novels. Shakespeare too had, therefore, to be expurgated to keep out everything that might bring a blush to the cheek of the young person. In Henrietta Bowdler's hands Shakespeare had gone through two stages of sanitisation. First, she had selected twenty of what she called 'the most unexceptionable of Shakespeare's plays'; then she aimed 'to remove every thing that could give just offence to the religious and virtuous mind', and the end result was a book that could be 'placed in the hands of young persons of both sexes'. However, not everybody was satisfied even with Bowdler. Lewis Carroll, a life-long celibate, whose only female friends were little girls, whom he sometimes photographed in the nude, at one time thought of producing an edition of Shakespeare that would out-bowdlerise Bowdler. Nor did the spirit of Bowdler die with the Victorian age. The institutionalisation of English literature as an examination subject in the latter part of the nineteenth century required the production of school editions of Shakespeare which were carefully purged on the principles of Bowdler, and these continued in force throughout the first half of the next century.

I remember that the edition of *Julius Caesar* in which I studied the play at fourteen didn't even allow Portia to say that if Brutus didn't trust her, 'Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife'. The word *harlot* was replaced by *plaything*. This continuation of the Bowdler tradition was breached here only in 1943, when for the first time admission to the University of Ceylon was restricted by a competitive examination, the forerunner of the present A-Level. Lyn Ludowyk, in what seemed to be a conscious act of daring, prescribed as the set Shakespeare text *Measure for Measure*, a play about a Vienna seething with prostitution and venereal disease. There were no expurgated school editions of *Measure for Measure*, because it had never been considered a fit play for schoolchildren, so students just had to read it in the *Complete Works*. Ludowyk got a plaintive letter from a nun who had to teach the play in class, and who asked why, when there were so many beautiful things in Shakespeare, he should have prescribed something ugly and unpleasant.

But even in more exalted scholarly milieux inhibitions about the recognition of Shakespeare's interest in sexuality persisted until comparatively recently. Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1930), which pioneered the practice of interpreting Shakespeare's plays through their image structures and was enormously influential for at least three decades, was based on a comprehensive card-indexing and classification of the playwright's images – those drawn from food, clothing, animals, disease, and so on. But when Spurgeon categorised an image, she did so on the basis not of its tenor (what was represented) but of its vehicle (the object or activity through which it was represented). Thus, when Cleopatra says of herself, 'I was/A morsel for a monarch', or when Antony says of her: 'I found you as a morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar's trencher', both images would have been categorised as images of food: sex didn't have to come into the picture at all. Indeed, as Gary Taylor has observed, 'sex'

didn't even appear in Spurgeon's analytical index.[4] Not that sexual activity or the sex organs never appeared as the vehicle in Shakespeare's images. Thus, when Mercutio protests against Benvolio interrupting him and the latter pleads: 'Thou wouldst else have made the tale large', Mercutio retorts: 'O, thou art deceived: I would have made it short: for I was come to the whole depth of my tale; and meant, indeed, to occupy the argument no longer.' We can be pretty sure that Miss Spurgeon didn't detect a sexual metaphor or a bawdy joke in this, though *tale* carries the double meaning to which reference has already been made, *(w)hole* is another sexual pun, and *occupy* has the hidden meaning of 'to copulate'. But supposing we were to reverse Spurgeon's method and analyse and categorise the variety of metaphorical vehicles through which Shakespeare represented the sexual act or sex organs as tenor. We would get a very different result from Spurgeon's, as is shown by the several pages in which Eric Partridge in his book *Shakespeare's Bawdy* listed the extraordinary diversity and fertility of the images through which Shakespeare represented the sexual.[5] But Miss Spurgeon, who sought to elicit from Shakespeare's imagery not only thematic elements in the plays but also an impression of his mind and personality, concluded that 'he was healthy in body as in mind', and, of the five terms she found to sum up the sense of his character conveyed by his imagery, one was 'wholesomeness'. In the month of a genteel English woman scholar in 1930, these attributes unmistakably connoted 'sexual modesty'. One is tempted to say that Shakespeare, if he could have read her, might have found in 'wholesomeness' an incitement to a bawdy pun.

It was only as late as 1947 that Eric Partridge, the distinguished lexicographer, made the first attempt ever at a comprehensive glossary of Shakespeare's language of

4 Taylor, p. 261.

5 Partridge, pp. 40-49.

sexuality, though it can be seen now to have been in some respects incomplete. This was in the book titled *Shakespeare's Bawdy* that I have already cited. Even so, the first edition was limited to a thousand copies and high-priced, so that it must have sold more to collectors of erotica than to Shakespeare scholars. Later popular editions, perhaps for fear of censorship, contained in the glossary such period curiosities as *c**t* and *fu*k*. Not surprising, since the great *Oxford English Dictionary,* when first published in thirteen volumes in 1928, didn't list these and comparable words. There's a story of a group of Australian undergraduates who at that time wrote a letter to the Oxford University Press in some such words as these: 'We have bought the *Oxford English Dictionary* after reading your advertisement, which said that it was the most comprehensive dictionary of the English language ever produced. We have looked in it, and have failed to find the word *fuck.* Will you please refund our money?'

But there was one place where bowdlerisation of Shakespeare survived much longer: that was in the former Soviet Union, down to the end of its days. This was in keeping with official sexual morality in the Soviet Union, which was quite Victorian. The Soviets' treatment of the texts of the classic Russian writers was something that Miss Bowdler might have been proud of. Even in scholarly editions, the bawdy poems of Pushkin and Lermontov were cut to ribbons, and the personal letters of the great nineteenth-century writers, when reprinted, were peppered with little figleaves denoting material that was 'unsuitable for publication'. So it's hardly strange that Shakespeare got similar treatment. There's a translation into Russian of six of Shakespeare's tragedies by Boris Pasternak that may be the greatest version of him in another language — such a translation as only a poet of genius could have produced. But in rendering Shakespeare's sexual language poor Pasternak had to conform to the Soviet norms: otherwise his translation wouldn't have got past the Soviet

censor. Of many examples that could be offered, one will have to suffice here. In *Othello* there is a scene where the hero, agonised by the uncertainty of not knowing whether Desdemona is or isn't unfaithful, demands from Iago proof. Iago answers:

> Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on,
> Behold her topped?

The coarseness and nastiness of that 'topped' is dramatically vital: Iago finds a sadistic delight in torturing Othello with the fantasy it conjures up. But Pasternak has to translate feebly, ineffectually:

> *Khotite li vy poglyadet' taikom*
> *Kogda on s neyu budet obnimat'sya?*
>
> Do you want to look on in secret
> While he and she embrace?[6]

And now to return for the last time to Archy's claim. I have already indicated that he was right part of the time; and wrong at others. But he was essentially correct in emphasising that Shakespeare was a man of the popular theatre susceptible to its pressures and demands — a fact that is too often ignored by those who venerate him as the supreme dramatic and poetic genius. He was of course, a great dramatic artist, but he was also a popular entertainer, and only those who think these two roles are mutually exclusive will find them contradictory. I don't. Actually, Shakespeare would have been a less fullblooded dramatist if he hadn't been writing out of and for the popular theatre. If I ask myself why I prefer Shakespeare to Aeschylus, Racine or Pinter, the answer is that there's one kind of theatrical and literary vitality to be found in a popular

[6] Pasternak p. 306.

theatre that's absent in a ritualistic, courtly or intellectual one; and if so, one must take it with the total dramatic substance in which it comes embedded. The sometimes tasteless sexual jokes, like the sometimes ham-handed melodrama, the sometimes creaking plots, and the sometimes bombastic rhetoric, were bound up with the conditions which also made possible what in Shakespeare we admire and delight in. So let us not on this anniversary make a fetish of that William Shakespeare to whom mountains of learned treatises and critical disquisitions have been erected, and whom the dramatist himself would have found unrecognisable. How fantastic Shakespeare would have thought it that his plays should be studied as school and university texts when he wasn't even interested in publishing them, because for him their existence was in the theatre! Let us then celebrate instead the man who was the most successful playwright of the time because in his heights, his flats and his depths he was always with his audience — Archy's 'big bill', often lowbrowed and frequently coarse.

PUSHKIN AND POETIC LANGUAGE

The first version of this essay was written for the bicentenary of the birth of Aleksandr Pushkin, the greatest of Russian poets.

1

It is commonplace to say that Pushkin is to Russians what Shakespeare is to the British. Commonplace, and misleading. In spite of the lipservice paid to the image of Shakespeare as the great English poet and dramatist, how real a presence is Shakespeare in the lives of most British people, even of educated British people, today? In a recent public opinion poll in Britain, Shakespeare was elected 'Man of the Millennium', but one wonders how much real acquaintance with Shakespeare most of those who cast their votes in his favour had after their schooldays were over.

The relation of educated Russians to Pushkin is very different. I remember an evening I spent with a Russian acquaintance at his flat in the outskirts of what was then Leningrad. When I was leaving, he insisted on presenting me with a book from his own shelves; and what he picked out was a scholarly two-volume selection of documents on Pushkin and his friends. My acquaintance was an industrial manager, and it seems hardly likely that if I had been visiting a man with a similar position in London, he would have found a copy of E.K. Chambers' or Schoenbaum's documentation of Shakespeare on his bookshelf.

But the industrial manager in Leningrad wasn't an exceptional figure. Most educated Russians — and regardless of whether they have specialised in the humanities or the sciences — are familiar with Pushkin, and some of them know long stretches of his poetry by heart. Of course, Pushkin is as

institutionalised in the Russian educational system as Shakespeare is in the British, but one has still to explain why the effect of this conditioning should be more lasting and stronger in the former case than in the latter.

One relevant fact is that the division between what Charles Snow once called 'the two cultures' — the humanist and the scientific — has never been as great in Russia as it is in Britain (and in the countries of her former empire). In Russia university students of the sciences also study Russian literature. But one should take note, too, of the important differences between the relations of Pushkin and of Shakespeare to the modern reader.

In spite of the enormous energy that goes into the cultural industry of keeping Shakespeare alive, including the perpetual efforts of both theatre directors and critics to reinterpret him in the light of contemporary experience, there are elements in his plays that are irreducibly of Tudor-Stuart England — even though we may ignore or slur them in reading or performing him. But Pushkin was a writer of the post-French revolutionary era — the era that in many ways marked the birth of modernity. That modernity is there in his work, even though he was writing in a Russia that abolished serfdom only a quarter-century after his death, and was still, in decisive social, economic and political relations, feudal and medieval. Actually, much of the life of Russian literature in the nineteenth century — the period of its great creative flowering — came from the impact of the modern on a society that was, by Western European standards, archaic. Marxist writers on Russia have spoken of the phenomenon, in the economic and political spheres, of what they call 'combined development' — the co-existence of and the interaction between older and newer socio-political forms and relations. There was a similar 'combined development' in culture and ideas in nineteenth-century Russia. It was the encounter between two worlds, medieval and modern, native Russian and Western European, that made possible the great achievements of nineteenth-

century Russian fiction — Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol', Turgenev and Chekhov —, but its first significant appearance was in the work of Pushkin.

But it's not only the experience out of which Pushkin made his poetry that is relatively more modern than Shakespeare's but also his language. Teachers of Shakespeare, scholars, critics, may underplay the distance of Shakespeare's language from the common reader and playgoer today, but it's a reality that becomes all the more inescapable with each passing year. Already most modern readers of Shakespeare are dependent part of the time on annotations and glossaries for full comprehension of his texts, and it's possible to foresee a time when in the eyes of most English-speaking people his language will be as obsolescent as Chaucer's is for them now. But for his countrymen and women, Pushkin's Russian is still a modern and living language, even though there are elements of his poetic idiom that derive from forms and literary traditions of the time of its creation.

It is part of Pushkin's modernity that his temper of mind was wholly secular, humanist and agnostic. There is no religious poetry in Pushkin[1], nor even any poetry concerned with the consciousness of the religious believer, if we except the enigmatic short poem 'There lived in the world a poor knight'(*Zhil na svete rytsar' bednyi)* that treats so ambiguously the knight's devotion to the Virgin (Dostoevsky was to make dramatic use of it in *The Idiot*). On the other hand, Pushkin was the author of the *Gavriliad* — a brilliant, ribald and blasphemous version of the Annunciation that could only be circulated privately in his time but has been delightedly resurrected in Soviet editions.

Since I have spent the opening part of this essay on affirming Pushkin's modernity, it may seem paradoxical that

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[1] The poem titled *The Prophet* uses its fervent religious imagery really to exalt the poetic mission by equating it with that of a prophet.

I should now assert that in terms of his achievement in creating a national literary tradition the English poet we should compare him with isn't Shakespeare but Chaucer. But there are, in fact, several parallels between the role of the Russian master and that of the English poet nearly half a millennium before his time.

Before Chaucer, English was the language of a provincial culture, that of an island on the periphery of Europe. Anglo-Saxon had indeed produced an impressive body of poetry, but cultural continuity was weakened by the Norman Conquest (though not entirely severed, as the survival of what the scholar John Speirs has identified as the alliterative 'non-Chaucerian tradition' goes to show). But in Chaucer's time, the culture of the court and of the aristocratic élite was still strongly French-based; and there was a flourishing tradition of Anglo-French writing. Scholars of medieval literature have held that when Chaucer began there was a real choice open to him — to write in French or English. Given the international character of pre-Reformation European culture, there would have been a certain advantage in opting for French — that of access to a wider European audience. However, the future of English poetry lay in a different direction from either the Anglo-French or the native non-Chaucerian tradition. That was the direction Chaucer opened up — one that, while preserving the native strength of English speech, would assimilate the elegance and refinement, the formal perfection of the best French and Italian models. It was Chaucer's genius that made this achievement possible; after him, English poetry would no longer be provincial or peripheral.

There are some striking similarities as well as differences between the position of Russian before Pushkin's time and that of English before Chaucer. Russian was also a language spoken on the European periphery, though in a huge sub-continental landmass and not an island. Though Russian possessed this advantage of the size of its linguistic domain, it was more remote than English had been from the centres of

European civilisation, and its cultural flowering more belated. There had been a long tradition of orally transmitted folk poetry and a devotional literature, but written secular literature didn't take off till the eighteenth century. In that century Russia, under the imperial regimes of the two 'greats', Peter and Catherine, had risen to be a major European power; but Russian poetry, indeed the Russian literary language, was still only a half-awakened Sleeping Beauty.

Perhaps the best way to begin to understand the position then of the Russian language at the top of Russian society is to read the opening chapter of Tolstoy's ***War and Peace***, set in the year 1805, when Pushkin was six years old. The first page of the novel has a conversation between two people who belong to the fashionable society of the capital, St. Petersburg — Anna Scherer and Prince Vasili. That first exchange of remarks, except for a few interjected Russian words, is entirely in French. Of Prince Vasili Tolstoy says:

> He spoke in that refined French in which our grandfathers used not only to speak but even to think.

Later at the same party of Anna Scherer, Prince Ippolit tells an anecdote that he insists must be told in Russian, or else its point will be lost. Nobody can make out, at the end of the story, what its point is or why it had to be told in Russian, for Ippolit is something of a buffoon; but what is evident (in the original Russian text) is that he is unused to conversing in Russian because he makes several elementary errors in grammar. And reading nineteenth-century Russian novels in general (again in the originals, not in translations which render the dialogue uniformly into English), we become aware that among the upper classes French was the preferred language of social intercourse among themselves, while they spoke Russian to their servants and serfs. The distinction wasn't unvarying, and differences of both region and period have to

be taken into account, but there is no doubt about the superior social status of French or the cachet conferred by accomplishment in that language. (One may be reminded of the position of English as against Sinhala or Tamil among the modern Sri Lankan élite.)

Even as far as written communication was concerned, French tended to be the more fashionable language among the privileged. Pushkin, in his novel in verse, *Evgeny Onegin*, when his heroine, Tatyana, sits down to write a love-letter, tells us that he has to translate it from her French into Russian, and adds that the latter language is still 'unaccustomed to postal prose'. But even Pushkin himself, as we may see from the volumes of his collected letters, wrote in French usually to officials and often to family members and friends.

It may seem, therefore, that when Pushkin began he had open to him a choice, comparable to that Chaucer had, of writing in French or Russian. But that would be untrue. Between Chaucer's time and Pushkin's there had been the rise of nationalism, which ruled out the use of a foreign language as the medium of a national literature. In his adaptation, near the end of his life, of Horace's ode, *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*, Pushkin declared that the monument he erected had raised its head higher than Tsar Alexander's column celebrating the victory over Napoleon. The literary achievement would indeed outlast the imperial one.

Like Chaucer, Pushkin naturalised several of the genres and forms of Western European literature into the native language, but he also brought into literature the original life and vigour of native Russian speech. The eighteenth-century poets had achieved elegance or grandeur — notably in the work of Catherine's court poet, Derzhavin, who as an old man was impressed on hearing the schoolboy Pushkin recite one of his earliest poems. But it was Pushkin who created poetry out of the whole range of Russian linguistic expression – from the formal to the colloquial — and thus made possible the

growth of a literary medium that could encompass the whole range of modern experience.

2

Around the period of the First World War classic Russian literature took the British intelligentsia by storm. Constance Garnett's translations of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Chekhov opened for them new literary horizons. It is demonstrable that in this way nineteenth-century Russian fiction had a liberating influence in breaking down the limiting conventions of the Victorian novel, and thus making possible the new directions in English fiction of D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf. (The relevant evidence for this statement can be found in Forster's acknowledgment, in *Aspects of the Novel*, of the superiority of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to any English novelist, in Virginia Woolf's essay 'The Russian Point of View', and in D.H. Lawrence's long love-hate relationship with Tolstoy. The other major English novelist of that period was a Polish émigré, Joseph Conrad, in whose fiction — especially, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* — Dostoevsky was an important presence: Conrad probably read him in French translations.)

But it was the translations from the novelists that created the image of Russian literature in Britain (and elsewhere in the English-speaking world). Even after these developments, Pushkin remained hardly more than a name to the English-speaking reader. In the Victorian period Matthew Arnold had written, 'The crown of literature is poetry, and the Russians have not yet had a great poet.' Pushkin had been dead for half a century, but Arnold obviously knew nothing of him. And even fifty years after Arnold, T.S. Eliot could say slightingly, with the Russians in mind, that a few great novelists weren't enough to make a culture, so one must presume that Eliot was as ignorant as Arnold about Pushkin.

There is thus a paradox — one that Edmund Wilson felt obliged to grapple with at the beginning of his 1937 essay on Pushkin and John Bayley in the opening pages of his book-length study of the poet in 1971[2]. On the one hand, Russians have no doubt, not only that Pushkin made possible the later masterpieces of their literature (without him, no Tolstoy, no Dostoevsky), but also that he remains the summit of that literature. And this valuation has persisted, virtually unchallenged, for over a century and a half. Ever since Belinsky wrote his pioneering essays on Pushkin in the 1840s, only a few years after the poet's death, critics and creative writers of all schools have been agreed in recognising his supremacy. In the 1920s the Futurists did, in the interests of renovating literature, raise the slogan, 'Throw Pushkin overboard from the ship of modernity!' There is a story that Lenin at that time asked a group of young students, 'What do you read? Do you read Pushkin?' 'Oh, no,' came the answer. 'Mayakovsky for us!' Lenin smiled: 'I think Pushkin is better.' But the Futurist revolt against the supremacy of Pushkin was shortlived. Throughout the Soviet period Pushkin was officially canonised as the patron saint of Russian literature, while at the same time the heretical poets — Mandel'shtam, Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva – were equally insistent on his greatness and absorbed his influence.

How do we square the Russian consensus on Pushkin's status as the greatest writer of the language with the fact that he has made virtually no impact on English-speaking readers? Pushkin once said that translators were 'the posthorses of civilisation', but in the case of his own poetry, the carriage turns out to have been held up by irremovable obstacles on the road.

[2] See 'References' under Wilson and Bayley.

The explanation must be sought in the nature of the Russian language and the problems it presents to poetic translation. Russian is a highly inflected language, it has no articles, and it has a variable word-order that the inflections make possible, and these qualities of the language create a great potential economy of language. Nouns, adjectives and pronouns are all declined, and have six cases, with differences between singular and plural and (in many cases) shifts of accent between them; and verbs are conjugated (that's why learning Russian is so hard for the English-speaking foreigner). There's a greater frequency of polysyllabic words in Russian than in English, and since every word has only one accent, a long word may contain a plurality of unaccented syllables. The inflections offer a great abundance of rhymes, that makes the English poet seem poverty-stricken in comparison, and the large number of unaccented syllables means that it is possible to vary rhythm not by placing the stress, as in English, on a metrically unaccented syllable (very rarely done in Russian poetry) but by the varying positioning of unaccented syllables from line to line. It isn't surprising that free verse (always, to my mind, a thinner medium than metrical verse even in English) never caught on in Russian.

What I have described in the last paragraph are the resources inherent in the grammatical structure of the language for expressive poetic purposes. But the relation between a great poet and his language is not just that he draws on the reservoir of possibilities it offers; he discovers, stretches and enlarges them. Indeed, a language comes to full realisation of its potentialities only in the work of a great poet. (Soon after the publication of Pushkin's poetic play *Boris Godunov*, his contemporary Baratynsky wrote to him to say: 'Our wonderful language is capable of everything: I feel that, though I can't bring it to fulfillment. It was made for Pushkin, and Pushkin for it.') Russia was, therefore, fortunate that so early in the

development of its literary tradition it was blessed with the creative genius of Pushkin; and when Russians speak of him as the initiator and pathfinder for the writers who came after, they are referring not only to themes and forms but to the very shaping of the language that he effected. Pushkin set his stamp on the literary language by bringing to fulfillment its potential brevity and concentration, its capacity to contain a rich density of meaning beneath the clarity and simplicity of its surface.

It may appear on first thought that the poets who are most difficult to translate are those who depend on artifices of style or flamboyant images that seem impossible to mimic in another language. But this is an illusion: such difficulties aren't insuperable if a translator of sufficient intrepidity and ingenuity can be found. One would have thought that there was no way to render the verbal contortions and mannerisms of Hopkins in another language:

> How to keep – is there any any, is there none such,
> nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid
> or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep
> Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty...
> from vanishing away?

Yet, incredible as it may seem, Pierre Leyris has translated 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' into French, replacing with brilliant success each turn of phrase, each rhyme and assonance, by an equivalent, and has performed similar feats of virtuosity on other poems of Hopkins. But the problems of translating Pushkin are more intrinsic, and offer no hold for the literary acrobat. The chastity of his language, its freedom from affectation and extravagance, its severe brevity and economy of expression, when deprived of the nuances of rhythm and the linguistic structures that give it sensuous and emotional fullness in the original, may appear only vacuous

in translation.[3] When Turgenev, in his anxiety to convince Flaubert of the greatness of Pushkin, translated some passages into French for him, Flaubert's reaction was to say. 'He 's flat — your poet.' It's all too likely that many readers of English, knowing Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, and learning that Pushkin was held to be the greatest of the Russian masters, have turned to an English translation of one or other of his poems, to react as Flaubert did.

Take the poem that I consider to be Pushkin's greatest achievement —*The Bronze Horseman*. The prologue celebrates the creative moment in which Peter the Great conceived the idea of building a capital on what had till then been waste marshland, and then, after the dream had become reality, the splendour of the new city, St. Petersburg. *Lyublyu tebya, Petra tvoren'e* (I love you, Peter's creation), Pushkin says in that part of the poem, and he means it, for, sharing the elegance and the refinements of Petersburg civilisation, Pushkin wasn't minded to depreciate them. But the narrative that follows is the story of Evgeny, a clerk who looks forward to a life of quiet married happiness with the girl with whom he is in love, Parasha. But then comes the disastrous flooding of the city by the rising of the river Neva, a direct consequence of Peter's decision to build his capital on its banks. Parasha's little house is on the other side of the river from where Evgeny lives, and after days of anxiety when the river is impassable, he makes his way to her house. Or rather, to where her house had been, for there is nothing there now except the familiar willow tree. Evgeny stares, then suddenly bursts into laughter. It's the

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[3] In English translation, that is, and perhaps French, in the light of Flaubert's case, referred to above. But all of Pushkin has been translated into German, and he is said to be widely appreciated by German readers. Perhaps the fact that the structures of the German language bear some similarity to those of Russian may have helped, but, knowing no German, I can't judge.

beginning of his madness, which turns him into a vagrant of the city. One night, he finds himself before the celebrated bronze statue of Peter, astride on a horse with upreared forelegs, Peter's right arm stretched in a commanding gesture. Evgeny shakes his fist at the bronze idol: 'Just you wait, you wonder-worker!' The next moment he begins to run away in terror, because it seems to him that the tsar's face has turned angrily towards him; and as he flees, he hears the horsehooves come clattering after him. Some time later, on a little island off the shore, is found the ruins of a ramshackle house, washed there by the flood, and on its threshold the body of the madman.

From a translation, and perhaps even from my brief summary, it's possible to comprehend the poem's theme – the counterpoise between state and individual, between the magnitude of political achievement and the human sacrifices that are its price. Generations of Russian readers have felt the immediacy of its subject — a mirror of the central motif of Russian history — the dialectic of the dynamic and the destructive, whether under Ivan or Peter, Lenin or Stalin. But the meaningfulness of that subject alone wouldn't have made the poem what it is — the greatest work, I think, in the whole of Russian literature. Pushkin renders the contrast between the two parts of the poem with the economy and reticence characteristic of his art: the two constituents are set side by side, and left to speak for themselves. There is no authorial judgment, which is neither necessary nor possible, for the tragedy of Evgeny is as undeniable as the graces of Petersburg culture, of which the poem is both the expression and the critique. But the triumph of *The Bronze Horseman* is, above all, a triumph of language. It's not a very long poem, as nineteenth-century long poems go: about 480 lines, in contrast with the prolixity of *The Prelude* or *Prometheus Unbound* or *Don Juan*. Yet it surpasses all these and other Romantic and Victorian long poems in English because of the brevity and concentrated power that Pushkin's language achieves. It's

natural that some of those who have responded to the poem's greatness should have felt tempted to try to communicate it to others through translation. But they have all come a cropper: *The Bronze Horseman* is simply not amenable to translation into English.

So, unfortunately, there are no shortcuts for the English-speaking reader who wishes to read Pushkin. Seventy-five years ago, Maurice Baring, one of the earliest English critics to write on Russian literature with a knowledge of the original language, said in his introduction to the *Oxford Book of Russian Verse*:

> ...since his expression is inseparable from his thought, his work is...untranslatable. To appreciate Pushkin it is necessary to learn Russian.

Vladimir Nabokov, who in his edition of *Eugene Onegin* poured scorn on previous English translators of the work, prudently confined himself to a version whose aims were to be literal and exact — in effect, only an aid to readers of the original — and, addressing Pushkin, described his own edition as

> Dove-droppings on your monument.

However, the reader in Britain, America or the former territories of the British Empire who takes the trouble to learn Russian must also, in approaching Pushkin, re-adjust his preconceptions of poetry. That is because those preconceptions will inevitably be dominated by the model of Shakespeare, which English-speaking readers have been brought up to regard as the yardstick by which all other poetry is to be measured.

Let us recall two memorable lines from Shakespeare — Macbeth's

...Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood.

Even removed from its dramatic context, the force of that highly original metaphor in the first two words will arrest attention. It is as if light itself generates darkness by some change in its density, as we may suppose Macbeth's nature does. In the twentieth century (Eliot and after), a whole aesthetic, a whole way of reading and evaluating poetry, was built on the sensuous and metaphorical intensity of such lines from Shakespeare and comparable effects in Donne, Hopkins or Eliot himself. But, as I have already tried to show in *The Pure Water of Poetry*, there is great poetry that does without metaphor. Eliot himself made the point that it is the vivid simile and not the original and striking metaphor that is characteristic of Dante, and John Speirs made a similar point about Chaucer. This is true of Pushkin too, and critics writing in English have been quick to seize on such similes as the famous comparison in *The Bronze Horseman* – 'like a sick man in his bed the Neva tossed' – or the even more famous simile in *Evgeny Onegin* where the dead Lensky is likened to a deserted house, its shutters closed and its window-panes whitened over with chalk. But what the English-speaking reader may find more difficult to assimilate is that some of Pushkin's most memorable poetry does without figurative language altogether. This poetic mode of what may be called the plain style is rare in English poetry, but let me quote an example of it from Milton: it comes from the beginning of the sonnet 'On His Blindness':

When I consider how my life is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide...

The poignancy of 'in this dark world and wide', though the phrase is metaphor-free and none of its constituent words is unusual, comes in part from the clash between *dark* and *wide*.

The former gives the blind man's inner sensation, both physical and emotional, of his world; the latter his imagined perception of the immensity of the surrounding world, which for him has been shrunk to the dimensions of what he can gropingly feel with his hands, or with his stick. In its abnegation of metaphor and of rhetorical excess, it is remote equally from the Miltonic Grand Style and from Shakespeare's customary metaphorical abundance. And the auditory imagination at work in it is also very different from Milton's usual sonorous magnificence. In the succession of bleak monosyllables, unobtrusively, the *d*-sounds of the three keywords turn the lock on him in the prison-cell of his blindness. Eliot, in the essay now reprinted as 'Milton I', complained of the separation of sound and sense in Milton's Grand Style, and Leavis echoed the charge; but with 'this dark world and wide' we must speak not of separation but of union. And so, with the last line of the same sonnet, which represents the conclusion of Patience's answer to the rebellious murmur of the poet:

They also serve who only stand and wait.

Over-familiarity has probably dulled most readers to the emotional force of this line in its original context, but one may renew it by asking, 'Wait for what?' since waiting normally implies waiting for some event. Is Patience exhorting the blind poet to wait for God's call to active service like that of the thousands who 'post o'er land and ocean without rest'? No, for the word 'only' implies that a harsher duty is laid on the poet — merely of waiting, with no end in sight —, and this fills the simple words 'stand and wait' with the sense of the immense expanse of time through which that lonely endurance must be continued.

Though Milton is in other respects a very different kind of poet from Pushkin, this example may give the reader some understanding of how it is possible that in Pushkin great poetry

can exist without metaphor. Some of the lines that are most haunting to the reader who has met them in their original context may seem commonplace and unremarkable if we quote them out of it. As with the line in which the huntsman in *Rusalka* reports on the Prince, tormented by remorse over the dead woman he had betrayed:

Ostalsya
Odin v lesu na beregu Dnepra.

He has remained
Alone in the forest on the Dnieper's bank.[4]

The emotion is generated by what is left unsaid — as if by the blank spaces between the words. To respond to Pushkin we have not only to rethink the assumption that richness of metaphorical life is an essential constituent of poetry; we must also be aware that a poem doesn't exist only in localised intensities of language. Here is the line that marks the transition from the prologue to the tale in *The Bronze Horseman*:

Pechalen budet moy rasskaz.

Just four simple words, but, in their context, they make an extraordinary impression on the reader of Russian, like a shift of tonality in a musical work. But how can one translate them? Literally: 'Sad will my story be'? The inversion has an artificiality in English that it doesn't in Russian, owing to the variability of word-order in an inflected language. Or, regularising the English word-order: 'My story will be sad'? Flat and banal. Or, attempting to raise the emotional pitch: 'A tragic tale I have to tell'? That is verbose, without any

[4] John Bayley says rightly: 'It has the force and timbre of a line in Racine.' (Bayley, p. 232)

gain in expressiveness. None of these versions will do. Part of the problem lies in the word *pechalen*, which is just as ordinary as the English *sad*, but with its three syllables and its accented middle vowel, carries a weight in the line that the English word doesn't bear. But even if we abandon the effort of translation, we are left to cope with the question of explaining the power of the words for a reader who has acquired an inwardness with Pushkin's mode of poetry. The line is the hinge on which the entire poem turns, and its force is inseparable from its relation to what goes before and what comes after. Comparing this line or that from *Rusalka* with the two from *Macbeth*, we are confronted with the distance between metaphorical expression and seemingly plain statement, between poetry that is meaningful even when detached from its context and that which is dependent on its place in a larger verbal and narrative whole.

Although the conceptions of poetry and the modes of analysis that came into vogue with practical criticism in the English-speaking world have long been questioned, they still tend to colour the reading practices and responses of many people. Those techniques of 'close reading' were evolved in dealing with the short lyric (as with I.A. Richards's famous test pieces for his Cambridge group), and they don't take into account the larger structural relations of the long narrative poem, the epic, or indeed the poetic play.[5] I have argued in *The Pure Water of Poetry* that towards the end of his life, in the last scenes of *King Lear*, Shakespeare developed to the utmost the potentialities of a bare simplicity of language, and achieved a quality of language comparable with the Pushkinian.[6] The dramatic and poetic intensity of a line such

[5] Poetic drama is also dependent on elements that come to life only in performance, and can only inadequately be apprehended on the printed page, but for my present purpose it's unnecessary to discuss them here.

[6] Siriwardena (3), pp. 35-42.

as Cordelia's 'And so I am, I am' would be emptied if we read it apart from the whole scene, indeed the whole play.

Those Anglo-American critics who have been ready to recognise that the characteristically Shakespearean is not the only kind of poetic greatness of the highest order have generally found an alternative mode in Dante or Racine. (In the lecture that is now reprinted as 'Milton II' Eliot described them as great poets who teach us 'what great poetry can do without — how bare it can be'.[7]) But these critics couldn't read Russian (John Bayley is a rare exception), otherwise they should have realised that Pushkin was of that company.[8] Pushkin, while sharing the quality of pregnant simplicity of poetic language with Dante and Racine, is, for me, more attractive than either, because his imagination, like Shakespeare's, encompasses both the tragic and the comic, the extraordinary and the everyday. Shakespeare, Pushkin, Dante, Racine — what they have in common is that they are dramatic poets, to use the word *dramatic* to cover not only poetic plays (which are a small though significant part of Pushkin's work) but also all those genres in which the poet goes beyond the subjectivity of the personal lyric to project himself into the personality and emotions of other people.

3

Pushkin was the younger contemporary of the English Romantics, born in the same decade as Shelley and Keats, but his poetry is in many ways antithetical to theirs. Byron was

7 Eliot, p. 155.

8 So, too, it may be said, was Chaucer, whom John Speirs has contrasted with Shakespeare, Donne and the metaphysicals in two illuminating pages (Speirs, pp. 25-26); he describes the Chaucerian phrase as 'remarkable for its crystalline and limpid simplicity' — words that might have been said of Pushkin's poetry.

the only one of the Romantics whose work Pushkin knew — and his, too, through the medium of what were apparently abominable prose translations into French. In his early youth Pushkin, like many other European intellectuals of the time, was, in his own words, 'mad about Byron', and in his early narrative poems he borrowed the Orientalist trappings of Byron's verse tales. The mature *Evgeny Onegin* owes part of the stimulus for the concept of a 'novel in verse' and for its digressions to *Don Juan*. But while *Evgeny Onegin* grew in the course of its writing, like *Don Juan*, the unity and perfection of the finished poem is way beyond Byron's brilliant series of improvised performances. And the portrait of Onegin in it comes out of Pushkin's recognition of the sterility of the European cult of Byronism that fed on Byron's immature posturing in *Childe Harold* and the verse tales.

Where Pushkin differs most from all his English contemporaries is that he doesn't seek either to create a self-sufficient poetic world or to project an image of a unique personality. No poem, perhaps, manifests the first of these differences better than his *Autumn*, whose subject invites, for us as readers of English, a comparison with Keats's ode. The semi-mythologised figure of Autumn in Keats's poem, the confinement of the poem within the sights and sounds of the natural, the style that implies a certain selectivity of images and diction as properly poetic, all maintain a dividing line between the world of poetry and what lies outside it. There is no such distinction in Pushkin's poem, which in its movement of thought and its tone has the sociable manner of a man conversing about his tastes and pleasures, as he might with a friend. It moves with ease between the everyday and the imagined, the colloquial and the lyrical, with no sense of any discrepancy between them. The artist who at the end of the poem feels the awakening of poetic creation within him is not a special self, different from the one who at the beginning had observed his neighbour making with his pack of hounds for the hunting fields and ravaging the crops in doing so —

the kind of detail that would have shattered the Keatsian boundaries of the poetic.

Only the later Byron, among the English Romantics, approaches Pushkin in this conception of poetry as omnivorous, as an expression of the whole social being. When Auden edited *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*, he gave his own meaning to the term, bringing within it 'poetry... having as its subject-matter the everyday social life of its period or the experiences of the poet as an ordinary human being', and he offered as examples the poems of Chaucer, Pope and Byron. Auden was, of course, confining himself to English poetry, and he didn't know Pushkin anyway; otherwise he should have included the Russian master, who could write without any sense of condescension about the popping of a wine-cork or the pleasures of a sleigh-ride with a pretty woman on a miraculous day of frost and sun together. And like Pushkin, Byron alone of the English Romantics,[9] in his three masterpieces, *The Vision of Judgment*, *Beppo* and *Don Juan*, can accommodate wit and comedy in poetry that isn't simply 'light verse' in the ordinary sense of the term. The doctrine that great poetry must be characterised by 'high seriousness', propounded by Arnold in the Victorian era, was already implicit in the practice of most of the English Romantics. But it's alien to Chaucer, Burns or Byron, and so it is to Pushkin.

But while sharing with the later Byron a freedom from the crippling burden of poetic solemnity, Pushkin is very different from him, not only in his greater perfection of form, but also in the fact that his poetry isn't centred in his own personality. The drama of Pushkin's life – the love affairs and friendships, the vicissitudes of his existence under the Tsarist autocracy, the intrigues that drove him to the fatal duel at the age of 37 – is as fascinating as the Byron story. But with Byron

[9] An exception has to be made for the best parts of Shelley's *Peter Bell the Third*, but Byron's example and influence are pervasive there.

the life seems continuous with the work because both are an assertion of a unique personality, by which he is as much engrossed as he wants us to be. With Pushkin, even when we know, as we often do, the personal circumstances behind the creation of a particular poem, these seem ultimately irrelevant to the art. As I have compared Pushkin's and Keats's poems on autumn, let me suggest a contrast between Byron's *Beppo* and Pushkin's *Count Nulin*. They both have some virtues in common, especially in the co-existence of levity and seriousness. But *Beppo* is Byron's celebration of the freedom of Italian sexual morality at the expense of English prudery and hypocrisy. The satire is written from a standpoint of close personal involvement (down to the ironic glance at his wife). Pushkin's poem is at one level a take-off on Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*: his heroine routs her would-be seducer with two hearty slaps (although the ironic twist at the end hints she is no model of chastity). Pushkin regards his created world with a cool detachment that invites the reader to share his delight in the human comedy, but with no vested interest on the part of the poet.

This is to say, in effect, that Pushkin was not a Romantic, but then he wasn't a classicist either. He wrote in the era when Romantics advanced under the banner of Shakespeare to do battle against classicism, but like Shakespeare, who lived before such categories were invented, he transcended them.

STANDING UP FOR THE SIGNIFIER
Or, Who's Afraid of Noam Chomsky?

I

This is my translation of a poem of Marina Tsvetaeva (Tsvetaeva was born in 1892; she emigrated from Russia in 1921, after the Civil War, returned to Russia in 1939, and committed suicide in 1941.)

> My trusty writing-desk!
> Thank you for surrendering
> your tree-trunk to me, to become a table,
> yet remaining a trunk alive!
>
> With the youthful play of leaves
> above the brow, with living bark,
> with tears of living resin,
> and roots down to the earth's depths!

I have chosen to begin my discussion of language in this essay with a translated text instead of one originally written in English because the translation process helps to focus sharply some of the central issues concerning language and meaning.

What Tsvetaeva celebrates in the poem is creativity. The desk is the poet's other self, her creative persona, and therefore in it is revived the life of the tree-trunk that it was, with the play of leaves, the rough surface of bark, the tears of resin, and roots implanted deep down in the earth – in the very source of life.

What comes through in the translation, I believe, is the metaphorical structure of the poem, which brings together poet, desk and tree. Yet there is another dimension of the poem that disappears in the translation – and that, too,

something not marginal but central to it. I comfort myself with the thought that no other English version has captured it or can capture it.

The Russian word for 'table' is *stol* (when combined with the adjective *pis'mennyi,* it becomes a 'writing table' or 'desk'), and the word for 'tree-trunk' is *stvol. Stol* and *stvol* – two words differing phonetically in a single phoneme, and graphically in a single letter. Moreover, this similarity between them is underlined by the form of the poem. In the first two lines *stol* and *stvol* are end-rhymes; in the third and fourth lines they are again end-rhymes, but in the instrumental case (Russian is an inflected language), — *stolom* and *stvolom* (pronounced 'stalOM' and 'stvalOM' because Russian o's become a's before an accented syllable). It's thus through the near-identity between the sounds of the two words that the table regains the life of the tree-trunk in the poet's imagination. That *stol* and *stvol* are one is apprehended not only in terms of poetic metaphor but through the very physical substance of the words. But there's a further consonance to be found in the poem: 'resin' is *smoly* (here in the genitive case, and pronounced 'smalY'). So we have a complex pattern of phonic resemblances — *stol/stvol; stolom/ stvolom; smoly* – while all these words are linked to each other graphically, in their appearance on the page; *stol...stvol...stolom...stvolom...smoly.*

We are accustomed to talk glibly of form and content in poetry as if they were different things, but where does form end and content begin in Tsvetaeva's poem? Let's concentrate on the desk and the tree-trunk. It's true that desks are made from the trunk of the tree rather than any other part of it. But if you look only at the metaphors, as in the English version, then *tree* would have served just as well as *tree-trunk.* But the Russian for *tree* is *derevo,* and if this was what Tsvetaeva had written, we wouldn't have had the tight unity of form and meaning that the poem presents. Not that I am saying that the poet thought of the metaphor, then selected *stol* and *stvol* for

their phonic resemblance. No, what is almost certain is that her auditory imagination threw up the correspondences in sound, and that these played the leading role in the creative act, generating the metaphors, generating meaning.

This conjecture is confirmed if we look at the poem in its place in the larger literary unit of which it is a part. The poem I have quoted in translation is actually the fifth in a sequence titled 'Desk'. By the time the reader comes to it, she or he has already witnessed several metamorphoses of the desk, all effected through the medium of rhyme, assonance and consonance. In the first poem of the sequence, the desk is a mule that has walked with the poet down every path, and 'mule' is *mul,* while 'walked' is *shol,* and it is a loaded mule which has 'carried and carried'; *nyos i nyos.* Later the desk becomes a 'pillar' (*stolp*), both a pillar like that on which the ascetic saint stood, figuring the discipline of the poetic vocation, and a 'burning pillar', like that which preceded the Jews in their exodus, and thus a portent of the poet's mission. So, in *stol.....mul...shol...nyos...stolp...stvol,* we have a series of monosyllables, linked sometimes by the initial consonants, sometimes by the medial vowel, sometimes by the final consonant, or by more than one of these. And it's these phonic resemblances that transform the desk into mule, pillar and tree.

Supposing we were beginners in Russian and were trying to grapple with the Tsvetaeva poem, but didn't know what *stol* and *stvol* meant. We look them up in the *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary,* and against *stol* we read (I have quoted only the main heads in the dictionary entry and omitted the definitions of phrases in which *stol* is combined with other words):

1. table... 2. board; cooking, cuisine... 3. department; office, bureau...

And under *stvol* we read:

1. (*of tree*) trunk; stem; bole. 2. (*of firearm*) barrel. 3. (*inst.*) tube, pipe. 4. (*mining*) shaft.

In accordance with normal processes of the decipherment of meaning, we select from these definitions those that seem relevant to the occurrences of the words in our text. We decide that head 1 in the case of both words is what we want, and the dictionary gives a definition of *pis'mennyi stol* – the phrase that actually occurs in the first line of the poem — as 'writing table, desk'. So we conclude that what we are dealing with here is a writing-table and a tree-trunk. The native Russian speaker or the foreigner who is familiar with Russian doesn't, of course, have to look the words up in the dictionary, but she or he has still to select from the range of meanings they can bear, learnt by encountering them in varying contexts, those that are relevant to this particular text.

What the dictionary charts are the meanings that words[1] have in the language system to which they belong — in this case, Russian.[2] But, as we have already seen, the phonic correspondences between *stol* and *stvol* – which should be apparent even to our beginner on reading the poem aloud –

[1] Strictly speaking, *lexemes*. There's an ambiguity in the use of *word* in this context: are *table* and *tables* one word or two? Lexemes are 'dictionary words', items in the vocabulary of a language, whether spoken or written. Thus *table* and *tables* are different forms of the same lexeme.

[2] Actually, Russian, English or any other language isn't a single system but a complex of different varieties, differentiated by the class, regional distribution, ethnic character, age-group etc., of their speakers. Dictionaries, in listing meanings, follow 'standard' usage, which in practice is that of socially or culturally privileged speakers, while sometimes including 'sub-standard' usages, listed as 'dialectal', 'slang', 'vulgar', etc. When in this essay I speak of 'the system of a language', this must be understood as meaning 'the system of a particular variety of a language'.

are one of the sources of meaning in the poem, but they are outside any account of the meanings of the two words that could be contained within a dictionary definition. And quite naturally so, because while these correspondences are undoubtedly linguistic features, they are not part of the system of the language. They exist only in the context of this poem. For instance, if *stol* and *stvol* appeared in a Russian carpenters' manual about how to saw tree trunks for the making of tables, their interactions in terms of meaning would be very different, and what they share in their sound structures would be irrelevant to the meaning of the text. And so with the further relationships set up through the phonic patterns of the sequence with *mul, shol, stolp*... All these relationships are context-bound, they don't derive from any general interconnection between these words in the language system.

So far, we have been looking at the relationships of meaning between some of the words in Tsvetaeva's poem created by their linguistic contexts — the context of the eight-line poem with which I began as well as the larger context of the whole sequence. But there's a still broader context in which we should place this linguistic creation, and that is the extra-linguistic situation in which it was written. This context is necessarily open-ended; it isn't possible to specify, in advance of interpretation, what facts or circumstances may or may not be relevant to the reading of the text. But one can set out at least some of the more prominent of these. Tsvetaeva wrote 'Desk' between 1933 and 1935 as an émigré in Paris. The desk had no doubt accompanied her on her wanderings. But in the poetry the travels aren't merely geographical: the desk has gone with her on her creative journeys, sharing their labour like a beast of burden. Not only was Tsvetaeva an exile when the sequence was written, like the Israelites following their pillar of fire: she was also isolated. Cut off from her natural audience back in Russia by the hostility of the Soviet regime to émigré writers, she was also cold-shouldered by émigré literary circles in Western Europe, immersed in their

petty sectarian politics. At the time Tsvetaeva wrote 'Desk' she — one of the greatest of modern Russian poets at the height of her powers — was unable to publish any of her poems. And yet, as her daughter, Ariadna Efron, has recorded. Tsvetaeva went to her desk 'every day of her life, like a worker to his bench, with the same feeling of responsibility, inescapability, impossibility to do otherwise... She was deaf and blind to everything other than her manuscript, in which she was involved by the sharp edge of her thought and her pen.'[3] 'Desk' is shaped by this dedication to the integrity and absorption of a lonely vocation – like that of the saint on his pillar – by the awareness of being an exile, not only from homeland but also from other human beings, and yet with the conviction that through the creative act she serves a mission for which she has been marked out. It is only by placing the poem in this total context that we can grasp the full significance of its enactment of that creativity which is its subject. 'Roots down to the earth's depths' — this line gets its force from Tsvetaeva's uprootedness at the time she wrote it; yet against that fact she not only asserts but manifests in the very physical being of the poem its rootedness in the teeming substance of language, whose full body nourishes its poetic life.

2

I have chosen Tsvetaeva's poem in order to lead into the reflections on language, creativity and linguistics that are the subject of this essay. I shall begin these reflections with two aspects of linguistic theory. One is the distinction between signifier and signified, the other is the principle that in the linguistic sign the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. I'm using here, and elsewhere in this essay, the terms

Translated from Tsvetaeva, p. 539.

signifier and *signified* introduced by Saussure, which have the advantage that they can be applied to other sign-systems as well as to language. But in relation to language, one can understand the terms as denoting respectively the form of a word, whether spoken or written, and what it means. The relation between the two, as linguistics maintains, is arbitrary. There is, for instance, no reason in the nature of things why *dog* or *balla* or *chien* or *perro* or *sobaka* should represent a particular four-footed animal: this has been determined only by the convention of a particular linguistic community. In spite of the fact that we label certain words 'onomatopoeic' because we think there is a natural correspondence between the sound of such a word and its meaning (*tinkle*, *boom*, *rustle*), that meaning has still to be learnt because it depends on the conventions of a particular language, just as much as the meaning of any other word does. And all attempts to discover an inherent tendency for a particular speech-sound — vowel or consonant — to be associated with certain meanings, whether in one language or across languages, can always be refuted by counter-examples.

What I want to question is not the arbitrariness of the signifier-signified relationship but the inferences that orthodox linguists draw from it. Let us ask: Can one signifier have a relationship in respect of meaning with another signifier? The usual answer would be: only in ways that are recognised by the system. For instance, the signifiers *topic, topical* and *topicality* are related in ways that are determined by the regularities of the English language. But the fact that *topic, top* and *topography* happen to begin with the same set of sounds would be regarded by linguists as a fortuitous circumstance that has no effects in terms of meaning.

But to take this position is to forget the materiality of the signifier, to treat it as simply a token, a counter, whose only function in the linguistic transaction is to be exchanged for a signified. It is to ignore the fact that linguistic

communication can take place only through spoken sounds and written or printed shapes which have their own material form, and which can enter into relationships with each other quite apart from those defined by the rules of the language system. We have just observed this in the case of the Tsvetaeva sequence. The phonic and graphic relationships between *stol, stvol, stolp, shol* and so on in the poem and the ways in which they combine to create meaning can't be accommodated within the uniformities of a language system as those of *topic, topical* and *topicality* can. In the case of these last three words, we would say, for instance, that the addition to *topic* of the morpheme *-al* transforms the noun into an adjective, and we would point to other parallel cases such as *statistic, statistical; logic, logical,* and so on. Similarly, we can say that by adding the morpheme *-ity* to *topical* we transform it into an abstract noun, as with *practical, practicality* or *whimsical, whimsicality.* But the relationships between signifiers in *stol, stvol, stolp, sbol* and so on have nothing to do with the morphological rules of a language system, unlike those of *topic, topical* and *topicality.* And this difference can't be effaced by constructing another set of rules, because there's a fundamental difference between the two sets of relationships. The relationships of the first set are, as we have seen, context-bound, tied to that particular poem, and are incapable of being generalised and systematised by rules as the second set can. Even if some of the same words as those that I have been discussing in Tsvetaeva's poem occurred in another text, the relations between them, as I have shown, would be very different.

In the language of Tsvetaeva's poem, therefore, there are elements of the systematic as well as the non-systematic. What belongs to the language system includes the orthography of the words in the poem and the syntax of its sentences, which are both regular (I am speaking of the original Russian text), as well as those aspects of its meaning which could be

contained within a prose paraphrase.[4] But the phonic patterns of the poem and the relationships of meaning set up by them in this specific verbal context, as well as the significances the poem acquires from its extra-linguistic context — these lie beyond the language system and aren't open to definition by its rules.

The theorists who tried to cope with the distinctiveness of poetic language at the very beginning of the rise of modern linguistics were the Russian Formalists — Roman Jakobson and his associates. The extra-linguistic contexts of literature weren't significant for the Formalists, but they were intensely concerned with the differences between poetic and ordinary language. It's pertinent to observe that in Russia several of the Formalists had close links with the group of experimental poets who called themselves 'Futurists', and of whom the most gifted was Mayakovsky. The Formalists pointed out that in everyday utterances where language is used as an instrument for getting things done, our attention isn't focussed on the character of the utterance itself. If I tell you, 'Please knock off the fan,' you don't stop to speculate why I said 'knock off' instead of 'switch off'. Language is here just a transparent medium of reference to things and people in the world, and of acting on them. But in the poetic or literary function of language, the Formalists said, attention is drawn to the properties of the utterance itself, through the parallelisms and oppositions between signifiers, through rhythm, rhyme, similarities of sound, connotations, metaphors and other devices. You can see how Tsvetaeva's *stol* and *stvol* would

[4] My verse translation will provide an indication of what these are, though it isn't a literal paraphrase, and carries its own rhythms and other phonic effects which may, I hope, make it pleasing as a poem in its own right. For instance, in the alliteration of *tree-trunk* and *table* there is a shadow of the linking that Tsvetaeva achieves more strongly with *stol* and *stvol.*

fit into this analysis. According to the Formalists, literature was to be defined precisely by its practice of what they called in Russian *ostranenie* – that is, 'making it strange', or, as it has sometimes been translated, 'de-familiarisation'. Ordinary language, in other words, is like a set of worn coins with which we transact business without being conscious of the medium of our transactions. Literature, on the other hand, by the linguistic devices at its command, deprives language of that familiarity, sharpens our sensitivity to it by, as it were, minting it anew.

The Formalists wanted in this way to identify the specificities of literary language, making 'defamiliarisation' a criterion of 'literariness',[5] but it's important to clarify for ourselves what we mean by 'literary language' here. Let's go now not to a poem but to a joke. I once heard somebody dropping this remark in connection with a trip that a group of people were arranging: 'Married people can bring their spouses, and others can bring their spices.' We greet such a remark with a smile because we recognise it as witty. But as far as the sense-content of the utterance is concerned, we could say exactly the same thing in other ways, for instance, 'Married people can bring their spouses, and others can bring their boyfriends or girlfriends', and nobody would smile. Why this difference? I know analysing jokes is the least funny of exercises, but since it's necessary for my purposes, I'll say that in talking of *spouses* and *spices,* we are enlisting the material properties of the two signifiers, those combinations of sounds that they have in common, to highlight the contrast

[5] The Formalists, in fact, went further: they believed that the literary language itself tended to lose its 'strangeness' when a particular style became familiar by long usage; it then needed to be renewed by literary revolution. There's a close parallel here with the endeavour of the Anglo-American literary modernists around the same time to regenerate the poetic idiom, summed up in Ezra Pound's slogan, 'Make it new!'

between their meanings. And in using *spices* to mean what it does here, we are wrenching the word from what it normally signifies, we are breaking the established semantic rules of the linguistic system, so we achieve the surprise-effect of innovation. And finally, the remark is perhaps witty because of what it hints at but doesn't say — that 'spices' may be more interesting than boringly familiar spouses.

Now I think that Jakobson and the Formalists would have had to agree that this joke could be brought within their formulation of the poetic or literary use of language. After all, it draws attention to the character of the utterance itself, and does so by enlisting certain properties of the two signifiers *spouses* and *spices,* and yoking the latter with an unusual signified. But once this is conceded, then we have to recognise that ordinary everyday discourse is shot through with ways of using language that foreground the material properties of the signifier, or undermine the relation between a signifier and its 'proper' signified, as given by the linguistic system. Not only poets and creative writers, not only sub-editors writing newspaper headlines, advertising people writing copy, and political propagandists putting out slogans (who are all professional wordsmiths of a kind), but also ordinary people often use language in ways that could be brought within the description of literary language by the Formalists. They crack verbal jokes, make puns, invent metaphors, enlist, consciously or unconsciously, the phonic qualities of signifiers to create meaning. Thus, creative language in literature isn't a separate thing from non-literary language: it's a special case of the creativity that's inherent in all language. It's necessary to underline this because the general practice of twentieth-century linguistic science has been to fence off the poets and creative writers — those wild men and women — in a special reservation where they can be given licences to deviate from the laws of language so that linguists can get on undisturbed with their work in the normal territory where those laws are said to be upheld.

It's likely that an academic linguist will at this point complain of unfairness and ask: 'But what about stylistics?' Certainly, stylistics is now an acknowledged branch of linguistics, is taught as such by university departments, and its material is often drawn from literary and other texts where the extra-referential functions of language are important. But stylistics is actually one kind of applied linguistics. What it addresses itself to is the same kind of activity that was engaged in by literary departments in traditional practical criticism, only with more precise and sophisticated tools for dealing with the linguistic features of the text.[6] An exponent of stylistics could examine, for instance, the Tsvetaeva poem, and s/he could provide exact descriptions of the phonetic correspondences and contrasts on which the structure of the poem rests. What s/he couldn't do would be to relate this to a systematic generalising theory in the way that a theorist of syntax, examining the sentence, 'You're going home, aren't you?' would relate it to a general analysis of the form of English interrogative sentences. I'm not implying that the exponent of stylistics is to blame for that inability: I'm saying that in the very nature of the case there can't be such a systematisation. But where the limitation does lie is in the model of language that has been inherited by linguistics — a model that, recognising the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified, takes this as a warrant for ignoring the materiality of the signifier and its role in meaning, and for ignoring also the relationships between signifiers that arise out of that materiality. It seems to me that the emergence of a branch of linguistics called stylistics is an inadequate attempt to compensate for that deficiency by setting up a kind of kitchen department to deal with those aspects of language that the dominant model has ignored. It's a parallel

6 Practitioners of stylistics, however, aren't generally concerned with making literary judgments as critics are.

phenomenon to the recent emergence of another branch of linguistics called sociolinguistics. Again, this is an outcome of the fact that the structural linguistics that in one form or another is still dominant in university departments tries to theorise language in terms of structures that are independent of the social context of discourse. So, as a concession to what it has excluded, it tolerates a separate sub-discipline of sociolinguistics, though I can't conceive of any worthwhile linguistics that isn't 'socio' because language is a social creation and a social activity. However, even that tolerance isn't extended to sociolinguistics by every academic school of linguistics. In fact, Noam Chomsky, the dominant figure in academic linguistics today, has compared sociolinguistics depreciatingly to butterfly collecting: 'You can also collect butterflies and make many observations. If you like butterflies, that's fine, but such work must not be confounded with research.'[7] It will be clear from my description later of Chomsky's conception of linguistics that sociolinguistics can't form part of what he sees as a proper science of linguistics.

Before I leave this section of the present essay I must make a qualification regarding the Formalists' conception of the innovative character of literary creativity to which I have referred, For this purpose, I will again draw initially on a joke. Though creativity in language is always an escape from the rigidity of a linguistic system, not all such creativity is liberating in the larger, social sense. My example comes from one of the George E. de Silva jokes that were at one time popular among the English-educated classes in Sri Lanka.[8] Many of them would be relevant to my argument, but I shall make use of just one. The story says that a proposal was made

7 Quoted from Davies and Taylor, pp. 4-5.

8 George E. de Silva was a politician who became prominent in pre-independence Sri Lanka, and was a local equivalent of Sam Goldwyn in that many anecdotes were circulated about his alleged misuse of language.

in the Kandy Municipal Council for the building of a public urinal, and George E. de Silva is supposed to have said, 'Why only a urinal? Why not an arsenal as well?' It's now well known that this and other such jokes weren't ignorant linguistic errors by the mythicised George E. de Silva but inventions by Cox Sproule, a Kandy lawyer, well-known wit and writer of light verse of the time. I suggest that there are at least three different elements that went into the humour of this story. In the first place, in inventing it, Cox Sproule was deliberately exploiting the possibility of making connections between signifiers against the system of the language. He was seizing on the resemblance, phonetic and graphic, between the two crucial signifiers to transfer *arsenal* from the semantic field of warfare to that of the excretory functions (not that Cox Sproule could have described what he was doing in that way). In that respect the story was a flight of linguistic creativity on the part of the joke's inventor: and the pleasure it gives the hearer comes partly from the shock of unexpected innovation. Secondly, the joke is scatological: it uses in disguise a word, *arse,* that is tabooed in polite discourse. It circumvents this taboo through the breaking of a linguistic rule, by disengaging *arsenal* from its proper signification, and the satisfaction to be found in the release from a social prohibition enhances our pleasure in the joke's creative ingenuity. But there's a third source of its humour that can be identified only by restoring the joke to the social, extra-linguistic context in which it was first circulated. At this distance of time it's difficult to identify with certainty the motivations for Cox Sproule's invention of the George E. de Silva jokes. But George E. de Silva's nephew, L.O. de Silva, says in his memoirs that his uncle was 'the first Sinhalese lawyer to practice at the Kandy Police Court, and the entrenched Dutch Burgher lawyers did not take kindly to his cavalier intrusion'.[9] It seems to me, however, that there must

[9] De Silva (Lloyd Oscar), p. 251.

also have been, both in the creation of the jokes and in their reception and popularity, another socio-political factor at work. George E. de Silva came from what was regarded as a lower caste: his political ascent had to be made against the Kandyan Sinhala feudal classes, who regarded him as a social upstart, and he remained a maverick member of the political establishment who often espoused radical causes.[10] The jokes about his supposed malapropisms must, therefore, have been a way of putting him down n the eyes of the English-speaking classes, for whom 'errors' in English were always laughable when committed by those who were deemed to be social inferiors. Thus, the linguistic creativity of Cox Sproule's jokes served, in the social domain, the conservative purpose of ridiculing a figure regarded as an upstart outsider who was making his way in the professional and political worlds.

But if a popular joke can combine the creative and the retrogressive, so can a literary work. Just as I would say of a Cox Sproule joke, 'This was very funny and very clever, but it served the interests of those who wanted to put George E. de Silva down,' so I would say of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, 'This was a highly innovative work, full of creative originality in the way it renewed the language of poetry; and yet it was also snobbish, misogynist and morbidly puritan in its sex-horror.'

3

Of the three planes or levels of language that have been distinguished by linguists – the phonological, the syntactical and the semantic – it's the first two that have played the leading role in the construction of twentieth-century linguistic theory. What's common to the two levels, as conceived by

[10] L.O. de Silva seems to confirm this by saying that George E. de Silva 'ignored or overcame the personal ridicule heaped on him by Kandyan and Burgher alike' (ibid., p. 139).

linguistics, is the linear succession of elements, such that each element has a relationship with others with which it can be combined (termed 'syntagmatic') and a relationship with others that can be substituted for it (termed 'paradigmatic'). For instance, the word *cat* is phonologically a sequence (or what linguists call a 'string') of three phonemes standing in syntagmatic relationship with each other. And each of these phonemes is in paradigmatic relationship with others that can be substituted for it to form an English word: for instance, making substitutions in the first, second and third positions respectively, we can produce *bat*, *cut* and *cap*. Similarly, at the syntactic level, *cat* enters into syntagmatic relations with other words in the sentence *The cat sat on the mat,* and into paradigmatic relations with words that can be substituted for it to make an acceptable sentence: for instance, *The girl sat on the mat.* Thus, the idea of *difference* is at the heart of modern linguistic science, treating each word as a distinct entity, which enters into combinations with other words in ways that are regulated by the system. That's why poetic language, where words enter into unauthorised combinations or even melt into each other, is a challenge to this rule-governed order. If *stol* is also, in some sense, *stvol* is also *mul* is also *stolp,* then for the orthodox linguist, chaos is come again. So poetic language has to be marked off as separate territory. But, as I have shown, this linguistic apartheid can't be sustained, because what has been excluded keeps breaking into the language of ordinary people — in puns, in riddles, in jokes, in slips of the tongue, in dreams.[11]

[11] Some of these phenomena of language (in the case of dreams I am thinking not of their visual imagery but of the verbal forms that are sometimes heard in dreams) were illuminated by Freud, though not everything in his theories can be regarded today as valid. Chomsky would presumably treat them as examples of the deviant phenomena to be observed in linguistic 'performance', and, therefore, as lying outside the proper territory of linguistic science.

The most influential development in academic linguistics during the last few decades has been Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar. Chomsky first became famous by contesting B.F. Skinner's behaviorist view of language, and asserting against it the 'creativity' or 'innovativeness' of language which couldn't be reduced to behaviorist stimulus and response. But all that Chomsky means by 'creativity' is that we can both produce and understand sentences that we have never heard before — and this shows we have internalised the rules of the language. There is, moreover, a strong element of biological determinism in Chomskyan linguistics. The grammar of every language is claimed to embody underlying features of a universal grammar that are inherited genetically. I can't see the pursuit of a universal grammar as anything other than a wildgoose chase which can never produce results verifiable for every language.[12]

Nor, in spite of the play Chomsky makes with the term 'creativity' is there a place in his system for the more important kinds of creativity in language that we have been looking at. Let's consider the analogy of the game of chess (an analogy that, as it happens, Saussure was fond of using for purposes that were different). In any chess game, other than those of raw beginners, the player is likely to encounter dispositions of the pieces never before experienced and to make moves never made before. Indeed, the number of possible moves in a game of chess is just as 'astronomical' as Chomsky declares the number of sentences in one's native

[12] There are estimated to be about 5000 living languages and an unknown number that have become extinct in the course of human history: how is it possible to test a hypothetical universal grammar against even a majority of them? Scientists in any other field of science would hardly tolerate generalisations built on such flimsy empirical evidence as is offered by Chomskyans.

language that one will understand to be.[13] However, in a game of chess it's always possible to determine whether a move is legitimate or not because there's a fixed code of rules by which that question can be decided. Chomsky's view of language is very similar: 'the use of language in the ordinary free and creative fashion'[14] that he speaks of means simply the ability to produce sentences that may be new but stay within the rules of the system: otherwise Chomsky would pronounce them to be deviant. What he has no conception of is creativity that goes beyond or against the system. Actually, Chomsky's model of language is based on mathematical logic and artificial computer languages, where a computer will unhesitatingly reject as an error a command that breaks the rules of the language. But natural human languages aren't closed systems like computer languages; they are open-ended structures that are constantly subject to innovation and variation.

The declared aim of Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar is to formulate a set of rules that can, in principle, generate all and only the acceptable sentences of the language. These, it should be noted, are decontextualised sentences, divorced from any relation to a current of discourse or to an extra-linguistic situation. And how is the acceptability or non-acceptability of a sentence to be determined? By the intuitions of native speakers of the language. There are large conservative social assumptions that lie concealed here, in spite of Chomsky's dissenting role in relation to the American political establishment. The very aim of constructing a single grammar is a denial of the *heteroglossia* that, as Mikhail Bakhtin argued so eloquently, is intrinsic to language. How exclusionary Chomsky's conception of language is can be demonstrated from the distinction he draws between 'pure' and 'impure' languages.[15] Chomsky's theory of language is

[13] Chomsky (1), p. 12.

[14] Ibid., p. viii.

[15] Chomsky (3), p. 17.

concerned only with 'pure' languages. As an example of an 'impure' language he offers the mixture of French and Russian spoken by the 19th century Russian aristocracy. On this basis he would have to exclude many language varieties in the contemporary world: for instance, the English spoken by many middle-class Sri Lankans with its frequent admixture of Sinhala or Tamil words and phrases. Against this, it must be said that hybridity is a natural and permanent condition of language.

Chomsky's theory of syntax is directed towards creating an idealised rationalised model of linguistic structure. The differences between the model and observable language use are taken care of by Chomsky's distinction between *competence* and *performance*. The latter consists of the diverse, variable, phenomena of actual language use, open to idiosyncracy and error, that are excluded as not the proper object of linguistics. What linguistics has to concern itself with, according to Chomsky, is *competence*, the ordered, rule-governed system of a language, assumed by him to be internalised by native speakers.

It is no accident that the pre-twentieth century tradition of linguistics that Chomsky values most highly is that of the Port-Royal grammarians of the Cartesian school. 'Pursuing the fundamental distinction between body and mind,' writes Chomsky, 'Cartesian linguistics characteristically assumes that language has two aspects.'[16] The two aspects turn out to be what he calls 'inner and outer': the manifestation of the former in a sentence relates to the thought it expresses, and the latter to its physical form in speech. Thus the Cartesian mind-body dualism is related by Chomsky to the distinction between semantics and phonetics. Where Skinner had tried to explain language in terms of a crude behaviorist materialism, Chomsky's linguistics treats the mentalist aspect of language

[16] Chomsky (3), pp. 32-33.

as its inner real essence, and speech as only its outer, superficial materialisation. His linguistics represents, indeed, the most thoroughgoing attempt to depreciate the material body of language that has been made in the history of the science. Against this it is necessary to assert that language is one of the most palpable manifestations of the interdependence of body and mind. This is true not only of spoken language but also of unspoken thought. It isn't possible to *equate* thinking with language because then it becomes impossible to explain the phenomenon that one often writes down a sentence and then thinks, 'No, that isn't quite what I wanted to say.' So, as Steven Pinker points out, there must be 'a something I wanted to say' that is different from what I said.[17] Yes, but it is an equally common experience to discover what one really wants to say only in the process of saying it or writing it. Hence, instead of supposing that one first thinks in some mental language that is independent of speech or writing, 'mentalese', and then clothes the thought in language, spoken or written (however rapid the process may be supposed to be), the most reasonable conclusion seems to be that thinking and language are interactive in the process that issues in an utterance. There is certainly plenty of evidence of mathematicians, scientists, poets, thinking in the *initial* stages of conception in visual or other images independent of language – Einstein having his first intuitions of relativity in a vision of himself riding a light-ray and holding a mirror up to his face, Kekulé discovering the structure of the benzene molecule in a dream of a snake biting its own tail, Osip Mandel'shtam experiencing the first stirrings of a new poem in a wordless rhythm sounding in his head. But though a scientific theory or a poem can be conceived in the womb of thought without language, its further gestation and delivery require the intervention of language. Actually it is Mandel'shtam himself who has given expression to this

[17] Pinker, p. 57.

interdependence of thought and language most suggestively, in a poem:

> I have forgotten the word I wanted to say.
> The blind swallow returns to the mansion of shadows,
> on clipped wings, to play with the transparent.
> The song of the night sings on in oblivion.
>
> To mortals is given the power to love and to recognise,
> for them sound too is poured into their fingers;
> but I have forgotten what I wanted to say,
> and the thought without flesh returns to the mansion of shadows.

Even from my inadequate translation it should be possible to see that Mandel'shtam's poem carries an awareness both of the underground, sublinguistic life of the mind and of the necessity of language to bring thought to daylight consciousness: 'the thought without flesh returns to the mansion of shadows.' It is this kind of dialectical recognition of mind-body, thought-speech interdependence that must be set against the Cartesian dualism of Chomsky and his followers.

Further, Chomsky's linguistics downplays the bodily aspects and accompaniments of speech. Intonation is an important component of speech that affects meaning: the same sentence, spoken with two different intonations, can mean very different things, but by regarding the phonetic form of the sentence as of the surface only, Chomsky's system can't accommodate this fact. Moreover, other bodily aspects that accompany speech – facial expressions, gestures and stances of the body – can make a difference to meaning too, but these phenomena are excluded by the Chomskyan conceptualisation of language. There are linguistic theorists who have tried to overcome these objections by distinguishing between *sentence*

meaning and *utterance meaning*, the former being the decontextualised meaning of a sentence in some theorisation of language, and the other the meaning of the sentence when spoken within a specific context of situation and action. But this is like saying that there are two kinds of birds — live birds who nest and fly, and stuffed birds in museums, and that not everything that's true of the first kind is true of the second. In fact, outside the pages of textbooks and treatises on language, sentences never occur without a context of situation and a context of discourse — that is, as utterances.

At the dawn of modern linguistics Saussure found the study of language, in his own words, 'straddling several domains simultaneously, physical, physiological and psychological, belonging both to the individual and to society'.[18] Saussure set himself the task of sorting out this confusion by defining the proper object of study of linguistics. Such definition is, of course, a crucial academic strategy: on it depends even the creation of academic departments and chairs; but apart from that kind of motivation, it serves to carve out an intellectual territory over which the scholar can preside as his or her rightful domain, undisturbed by interlopers from other fields. As a result of the mode of Saussure's original demarcation of that territory and its consolidation by his successors, what prevails in the dominant schools of linguistics is a model of language as rule-governed, systematic, and ordered by fixed codes of meaning that are independent of context. Reading Chomsky, one feels that he would have been more comfortable if ordinary language were like mathematical logic or artificial computer languages, from which he derives in fact his theoretical language and his models. This goes with his lack of sensitivity to any aspects

[18] Saussure, p. 25. Saussure didn't actually write the *Course in General Linguistics*; it was put together after his death by two pupils from their lecture notes, but it's our only source of access to his ideas.

of language other than the denotative — a limitation that not only makes him so arid to read but also cripples him as a theoretician of language: any acceptable theorisation of language must encompass its many-sided life.

In the first two parts of this paper I focussed on two types of linguistic practice that are anomalous in relation to the ordered model of language to which I have just referred. One is the combination of signifiers to create meaning in ways that aren't legitimised by the rules of the system: the other is the displacement of signifiers from what is, again by the rules of that system, their proper signified. These linguistic phenomena occur not just in the writing of extraordinary original geniuses but in common speech. So in actual language use there is, as I have already suggested, both system and non-system. What orthodox linguistic science attempts to identify and explicate are the rules of the system, defined as *la langue* by Saussure and as *competence* by Chomsky.[19] What is outside its province is the non-systematic, the non-rule governed, in language use. When Saussure and Chomsky excluded *parole* and *performance*, respectively, from their theoretical purview, they were following these lines of segregation. But in casting *parole* and *performance* out of the privileged territory of linguistic science, Saussure and Chomsky must have seen what they were excluding as merely the erroneous, deviant, irregular phenomena of language use. It has been the main purpose of this essay to show that in doing so they were also eliminating everything genuinely creative and innovative in language. We need, therefore, to invert the theoretical model that has been given us by orthodox

[19] The difference between the two concepts is that Saussure's *la langue* is an abstraction of a regular system elicited by the investigator from the variable phenomena of speech, while Chomsky's *competence* is meant to have a psychological reality as the knowledge of the system of the language internalised, though unconsciously, by its speakers.

linguistic science. We should recognise that under normal conditions meaning is always open to instability, flux, innovation and diversity. It's only after that recognition that we should grant that there are special, sanitised areas where meaning is put on a slimming diet and thinned down for regulated and strictly defined referential purposes, and there the systematising linguist will feel fully at home. That doesn't mean that there's no place for linguistic science in the domain outside. But that requires a different kind of linguistic science — what Roy Harris called an 'integrational linguistics' — 'a linguistics which takes as its point of departure the individual linguistic act in its communicational setting'.[20]

[20] Harris, p. 166.

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Why does modern English have a single pronoun of address, *you*, while other European languages have two? Why do Sinhala and other South Asian languages have a multiplicity of such pronouns? Why did English also have two pronouns of address at one time, and later shed one? These are some of the questions to which Regi Siriwardena offers answers in 'Love, Power and Pronouns', a rewrite of his monograph of 1992, *Answering the Other*. Combining sociolinguistic and literary-critical approaches, the study illuminates the crucial role of second-person pronouns in power and personal relationships.

There are three other studies in this book, focussed in one way or another on language: an inquiry into a little-discussed subject, Shakespeare's language of sexuality; an essay on the Russian poet Pushkin which considers how he could create great poetry virtually without metaphor; and a critique of the ideas of the dominant figure in academic linguistics today, Noam Chomsky. The whole book should be of equal interest to readers of literature and students of linguistics.

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