

# “Fare thee well, dame”: Shakespeare’s forms of address and their socio-affective role<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Forms of address are words or phrases which are employed to address a person directly; they can be nominal (e.g. *cousin, your Grace, dame*) or pronominal (*thou, you*). The paper focuses solely on nominal forms and discusses their use to indicate both social status and changes in the emotional and affective attitudes of the speaker. Illustrative examples are drawn from a group of Shakespeare’s plays including *Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet, Macbeth*, and *The Winter’s Tale*.

## 1. Introduction

Forms of address are forms “which occur outside the syntactic structure of the sentence as ‘vocatives’” (Salmon 1987 [1967]: 49-50). According to Salmon’s careful categorization (ibid.: 50-59), forms of address may consist of personal names (*Jack Rugby*), terms of family relationship (*cousin*), generic names (*man, boy*), names of occupations (*justice*), titles of courtesy (*your Grace*), endearments (*sweet chuck*), terms of abuse (*whoreson*), and personal pronouns.<sup>2</sup> Pronominal forms of address, and in particular the distinction between *thou* and *you*, have been the topic of many investigations

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<sup>2</sup> As Blake (2002: 308) notes, the boundary is blurred between forms of address proper and such features as invocations or ‘submerged forms of address’, that is, phrases addressed to an individual but which do not involve direct address, as in “*Your Lordship* is right welcome back to Denmark.”

(see Fanego 1997, Busse 2002, and Nevala 2004 for overviews of previous research), hence my concern in this paper will only be nominal terms of address, as these have received much less attention.

As regards Shakespeare's works, the main studies on this topic include Breuer (1983), Salmon (1987 [1967]: 50-59), Replogle (1987 [1973]), Mazzon (1995), Blake (2001: 270-283, 2002), and Busse (2002: 99-186).<sup>3</sup> Forms of address in other writings from the Early Modern period are discussed in Williams (1992), Nevalainen (1994), Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995), and Nevala (2004). The fullest analysis of address forms to date is no doubt Busse (2002), who examines a total of 36 terms in Shakespeare's dramatic works, six terms for each of the six categories listed above, namely terms of family relationship, generic names, occupational names, titles of courtesy, terms of endearment and terms of abuse; personal names, whether first names or surnames, are not included in Busse's investigation. Considering that in Shakespeare's four major tragedies alone, i.e. *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*, there are, aside from Christian names, more than 100 different forms of address (cf. Brown & Gilman 1989: 175), further research is still needed on this issue. It must be borne in mind, however, that despite my decision to focus solely on nominal forms, nominal and pronominal forms of address do not work as separate systems, but in unison, in the sense that there are nominal address forms which tend to collocate preferably, and at times exclusively, with only one of the second person pronouns. In Shakespeare's works, for instance, *lady* usually selects the more distant and respectful *you* (cf. Busse 2002: 111), while the term of endearment *bully* co-occurs with *thou* in all of its 19 occurrences in Shakespeare (ibid.: 163).

In written works in general, and in dramatic plays in particular, address forms fulfil a number of important functions. At their most obvious, as Norman Blake (2001: 271) aptly notes, forms of address "are necessary so that an audience understands who the characters are on the stage, and in Shakespeare, where disguise is often employed, the use of forms of address at different stages of the play is equally important." It is also clear that, since the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries are situated in many countries

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<sup>3</sup> Mazzon (1995) has recently been reprinted as Mazzon (2003); a very much condensed version of Busse (2002) appears in Taavitsainen & Jucker (2003).

and at different times, address forms serve as an efficient means of locating the action in time and place, as happens, for instance, in *Antony and Cleopatra* with terms like *sovereign of Egypt* or *noble emperor*. Beyond this, address forms have an important socio-affective role: first, they signal “the [affective] relationship between characters both generally and at specific moments of high tension. They therefore contribute to the dramatic nature of particular scenes and add emotional emphasis at important points” (Blake 2001: 283). Second, since forms of address reflect differences in social status, they serve as powerful social indicators. As Replogle (1987 [1973]: 102) notes, “[s]alutations ... reflected the hierarchical class structure in which everyone except the king at the top and the manual laborers at the bottom had superiors, inferiors, and equals.”<sup>4</sup>

The study of address forms as signals of social class is of special interest in that social conditions around 1570-1620 were changing rapidly. As discussed by Williams (1992), Nevalainen (1994) and Nevala (2004: 24-25), particularly during the later part of the sixteenth century social boundaries became more permeable: many Englishmen were translated from merchant to gentlemen, from skilled artificer to prosperous merchant. These changes disturbed contemporary critics because the increasing wealth and influence among the ‘meaner’ sort seemed to confuse a social order that, at least in the eyes of the more conservative Elizabethan observers, was divinely assigned. As distinctions blurred between the middle classes and the gentility, critics condemned not only the ambition to rise above one’s station, but also public behaviour that appeared to be socially overreaching. Not rarely, for instance, social climbers were condemned because of the way they dressed. The reason for this was that, in practice, judgements of social status were often based on such external criteria as apparel. In a courtesy book from the period, Giovanni della Casa writes:

For if we meete with a man, we neuer sawe before: with whome, vppon some occasion, it behoues vs to talke: without examining wel his worthines, most commonly, that wee may not offend in to little, we giue him to much, and call him *Gentleman*, and otherwhile *Sir*, although he be some *Souter* or *Barbar*, or other suche stuffe: and all

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<sup>4</sup> See also Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 547): “[f]orms of address reveal a carefully graduated scale of social hierarchy, thus reflecting the power relations of Late Medieval and Early Modern English society.”

bycause he is appareled neate, somewhat gentleman lyke. (1576, *Galateo or a Treatise of Manners*, transl. by R. Peterson, p. 43. Quoted from Replogle 1987 [1973]: 105)

As can be seen from this passage, appropriate dress was important not only because it helped maintain the social hierarchy but also because it affected another public signal of that hierarchy, namely the titles of address that people should use with one another. So great was the Elizabethans' concern with these issues that in the sixteenth century it became common for dramatists and prose writers to use conflicts over forms of address as literary devices to dramatize social conflicts (cf. Williams 1992: 86ff). Thus in *Henry IV, Part 2* Pistol comes bursting upon the scene, and circumspect Shallow, who does not know him, is at a loss how to address him:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) *Pistol*. Shall dunghill curs confront the Helicons? / And shall good news be baffled? / Then, Pistol, lay thy head in Furies' lap.  
*Shallow*. Honest gentleman, I know not your breeding.  
*Pistol*. Why then lament therefore.  
*Shallow*. Give me pardon, sir. (V.iii.107-109)

In another revealing passage taking place after Mark Antony's defeat at the battle of Actium a servant comes onstage to announce to Cleopatra the arrival of a messenger from Octavius Caesar. The servant's failure to accompany the announcement with the requisite title of courtesy is bitterly resented by Cleopatra, who interprets his unceremonious behaviour as an indication of her declining fortunes:

- (2) *Servant*. ... A messenger from Caesar.  
*Cleopatra*. What, no more ceremony? See, my women, / Against the blown rose may they stop their nose / That kneel'd unto the buds.  
(*Ant* III.xiii.37-40)

It will be clear from this preliminary overview that nominal forms of address served a variety of important functions which fully justify the attention they have recently started to receive (cf. in particular Blake 2001: 270-283, 2002; Busse 2002). Before going on to exemplify their use in greater detail, let me just raise the question

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<sup>5</sup> Quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974; general editor: G. Blakemore Evans).

of the extent to which we can assume Shakespeare's usage of address terms to be a reflection of contemporary usage. As might be expected, opinions in this respect are divided. The difference between the language of drama and real spoken language is stressed by scholars such as Mazzon (1995: 39), who points out that "caution is necessary in assessing the evidence [provided by terms of address] since the literary text does not consistently reflect the community's linguistic behaviour in any reliable way"; so also Lass (1999: 150): "we must be cautious about taking the speech of literary characters as evidence for that of real-world persons; characters are not independent of their authors' linguistic habits". However, even if we bear in mind that the language that the dramatis personae speak has been tidied up for publication in print and is subject at all times to literary conventions and constraints, it seems reasonable to concur with Busse (2002: 185) that there is no reason to believe that Shakespeare presented inauthentic language in his dramatic works. As Carey McIntosh (1994: 64) aptly notes, "the language of successful plays must always include utterances that a great many people, audiences as well as authors, feel are appropriate for those speakers." Working on this assumption, in what follows I will proceed to examine address forms in a few selected scenes from *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *The Winter's Tale*;<sup>6</sup> these are plays depicting a wide range of relationships and conflicts between characters of various social standings, but for reasons of practicability I will restrict my analysis chiefly to the relationship between husband and wife as represented in those plays. Throughout the study, the evidence provided by Shakespeare's texts has been supplemented with information from additional sources such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), Spevack's (1973) concordance, Schmidt & Sarrazin's *Shakespeare Lexicon* (1971 [1902]), and the specialized studies quoted in the bibliographical references, in particular Salmon (1987 [1967]), Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995), Blake (2001, 2002) and Busse (2002).

## 2. Address forms and politeness theory

In the recent past, address forms have often been discussed within the framework of the politeness model developed by Brown &

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<sup>6</sup> In addition, Table 4 in the Appendix contains information on forms of address in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Levinson (1987). Thus, in their well-known analysis of politeness strategies in *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*, Brown & Gilman (1989) classify forms of address in terms of degrees of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ politeness, as shown in Table 1. For the purposes of the present research, we could say that negative politeness involves giving deference to the addressee, for instance, by using terms of formal address and honorific adjectives (cf. Brown & Gilman 1989: 168, negative substrategy 5; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 563). Positive politeness, by contrast, implies the use of in-group identity markers such as personal names or terms of endearment (Brown & Gilman 1989: 167, positive substrategy 4).

Table 1. Forms of address along a scale of negative politeness (based on Brown & Gilman 1989: 175-76)

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE	WEIGHTING
*name alone	<i>Antony, Gertrude</i>	no points for deference
unadorned titles	<i>sir, madam, my Lord</i>	one point for deference
names with one honorific adjective	<i>good Charmian, valiant Eros, my good Alexas</i>	one point for deference
titles with honorific adjectives	<i>my dearest queen, courteous lord</i>	two points for deference

\*Names alone, if used among social equals, would count as instances of positive politeness.

Largely in agreement with Brown & Gilman, Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 557) propose a politeness continuum for address forms “on a sliding scale of values.” At one end of the scale they place honorific titles indicating a person’s social status and at the other end nicknames and terms of endearment, but they stress the fact that most address nouns can be placed at various points along the scale, since the interpretation of the use of a given term depends on the context. Thus, as already noted, personal names (*Charmian, Gertrude, Jack Rugby*) may reveal the addressee’s non-titled low social status and thus count as non deferential indicators of “negative or superior attitude” (Nevala 2004: 88), but they can also be in-group identity markers and have a very different pragmatic value as a positive politeness strategy. In the same way, although the use of an occupational title (*doctor, justice*) may serve to raise the addressee’s social status as part of a deference strategy, it is not necessarily so.

Not all scholars agree with the above categorizations, however. Kopytko (1995), for instance, notes the difficulties inherent in the pragmatic interpretation of address forms in earlier stages of the language; in his view, it would be an extremely difficult task to reach “a decision whether a given instance is intended to appeal to the positive or negative face of the addressee” (p. 537). He further notes (p. 538) that “those who view the forms of address (especially of the formal type) ... as ritualised openings of discourse, i.e. pragmatically ‘empty’ instances of pure form,” might consider the evidence provided by them as inconclusive; address terms, therefore, are excluded from his investigation. Yet from studies such as Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) or Busse (2002) it seems clear that the use of address terms in Early Modern England was far from being as automatic and predictable as Kopytko and others appear to imply.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Analysis of the data

#### 3.1 *Love at the top: Antony and Cleopatra*

The exchanges between Antony and Cleopatra can serve to illustrate some of the socio-affective variables controlling the use of address terms in the Early Modern period. Both Antony and Cleopatra belong to the upper ranks of society, and though they are not husband and wife, their affective relationship places them in the same group as royal couples such as Leontes and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* or Claudius and Gertrude in *Hamlet*.

Although in principle the relationship between husband and wife, or between two lovers of the opposite sex, was founded on mutual love and respect, it was not an equal one (see Nevala 2004: 28-29). This explains why in written works from the Early Modern period we sometimes find wives deferentially addressing their husbands with *you*, but being addressed by their husbands as *thou*, “in accordance with the traditional doctrine that he was her lord and master” (Barber 1976: 209). In general, however, pronominal usage between husband and wife varied greatly, and seems to have depended on social status and on the pragmatic factors of the situation (ibid.; see also Busse 2002: 139-141, 143-46). Thus in *Romeo and Juliet* Capulet consistently addresses his wife as *you* (e.g.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 547): “At no point in our historical material is the choice of address form totally predictable.”

III.iv.15, III.v.141), but switches to *thou* when he finally decides to take matters into his own hands and sets the wedding day for Juliet:

- (3) *Capulet*. ... Tush, I will stir about, / And all things shall be well, I warrant *thee*, wife; / Go *thou* to Juliet, help to deck up her. (*Rom* IV.ii.39-41)

In the case of Antony and Cleopatra, their relationship is central to the plot, and consequently their use of both nominal and pronominal address forms is quite complex. Table 2 in the Appendix gives the breakdown for the different nominal terms they use to each other throughout the play.

Starting with personal names, the use of these in direct address was much less frequent in Elizabethan English than it is at present, and seems to have depended on a number of complex variables. In many plays of Shakespeare, for instance, we find women using Christian names to their male servants, as a reflection of their low social status. But, as already noted in Section 2 above, Christian names could have exactly the opposite role and serve as in-group identity markers (cf. Blake 2001: 275-276), a positive politeness strategy which, according to Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 588), gained ground in the course of the Early Modern English period. For instance, in their investigation of the changing usage of address forms in correspondence dating from 1420 to 1680, Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg draw attention (ibid.: 568) to the fact that Thomas Cromwell is one of the first correspondents to address his wife by her first name alone (*Elizabeth*), rather than by the more usual form *madam* or, alternatively, by the title *mistress* followed by the Christian name (e.g. *mistress Elizabeth*). In the case of Antony and Cleopatra, their use of their first names to address each other reveals the closeness of their relationship. *Antony* is the form of address used by Cleopatra to Antony a number of times through the play, and it is also, quite significantly, the last word she claims she will pronounce before committing suicide:

- (4) *Cleopatra*. ... To th' monument! / Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself; / Say that the last I spoke was "*Antony*," / And word it, prithee, piteously. (IV.xiii.6-9)
- (5) *Mardian* [to Antony]. ... the last she spake / Was "*Antony*, most noble *Antony*!" / Then in the midst a tearing groan did break / The



name of *Antony*; it was divided / Between her heart and lips. She  
rend' red life, / Thy name so buried in her. (IV.xiv.29-34)

Though Antony uses Cleopatra's personal name just once, his affection for her becomes clear from his frequent use of endearments, a form of address which became more common from the seventeenth century onwards (Nevala 2004: 87-88). It deserves mention that several of the endearment terms that Antony chooses were associated in Elizabethan English chiefly with male speakers. For instance, *chuck*, usually interpreted as a corruption of *chick*, *chicken* (see *OED chuck* n.<sup>2</sup>), is employed in Shakespeare's plays either from male to female, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* IV.iv.2 or *Macbeth* III.ii.45, or between close male companions:

- (6) *Cleopatra*. ... Sleep a little.  
*Antony*. No, *my chuck*. Eros, come, mine armor, Eros! (IV.iv.2)
- (7) *Lady Macbeth*. ... What's to be done?  
*Macbeth*. Be innocent of the knowledge, *dearest chuck*, / Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day, (*Mcb* III.iii.44-47)
- (8) *Armado* [to Longaville, Berowne and Dumaine]. The sweet war-man is dead and rotten, *sweet chucks*, beat not the bones of the buried. (*LLL* V.ii.660-661)

As a term of endearing address, the word *love* is more interesting than it might appear at first. To start with, it is relatively seldom used in direct address (only 54 examples in Shakespeare's plays; cf. Busse 2002: 166), and it is far more common (about twice as often) from men to women than from women to men, a finding which is in keeping with the *OED*'s definition of *love* as "a beloved person: esp. a sweetheart; chiefly applied to a female person, but sometimes to a male" (s.v. *love* n. 9.a).

Turning now to the titles of courtesy, the frequent occurrence of *queen* could be expected, in view of Cleopatra's rank. Stylistic variation is achieved by premodifying this term with different adjectives, which range from being affectionate and positive (*dearest*, *most sweet*, *precious*) to playfully derogatory, as when in I.i.48 Antony addresses Cleopatra as "wrangling queen". Of the other titles given to Cleopatra, *lady*, when used vocatively, is chiefly associated in Shakespeare's plays only with women of high standing such as Cleopatra herself, Regan (*King Lear*), or Silvia, daughter of the Duke of Milan (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*) (cf. Busse

2002: 110-12). However, as a result of the social changes referred to at the beginning of this paper, *lady*, like several other titles, became widened in application in the course of the Early Modern English period (cf. Salmon 1987 [1967]: 52; Williams 1992: 87; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 587) and came to be applied also to the wife of a gentleman. An ironic reference to this process of degrading can be found in the following passage where Mrs Quickly upbraids Falstaff:

- (9) *Mrs Quickly* [to Falstaff]. ... thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me and make me *my lady* thy wife. Canst thou deny it? (2*H4* II.i.91-93)

As a courtesy title, *dame* underwent a similar widening (cf. OED *dame* n. 5). Originally a form of address used to a lady of rank or a woman of position, it was gradually extended to women of lower rank and, after the sixteenth century, left to these. In Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), for instance, Margery, wife of the shoemaker Simon Eyre, is consistently addressed as *dame* by her servants Rafe, Roger and Firk (cf. I.i.199, I.iv.51, 55, 68, II.iii.88, etc.), but when her husband becomes mayor of London they switch to the more deferential *mistress*:

- (10) *Roger*. I forsooth *dame* (*mistris* I should say) but the old terme so stickes to the roofof my mouth, I can hardly lick it off.  
*Margery*. Euen what thou wilt good Roger, *dame* is a faire name for any honest christian, (III.ii.16-19)
- (11) *Lacie*. Yaw, my mester is de groot man, de shrieue.  
*Roger* [to Margery]. Did not I tell you *mistris*? nowe I may boldly say, good morrow to your worship. (III.ii.113-115)

In Shakespeare's works *dame* occurs nine times in direct address. In two of them it is used in combination with the honorific adjective *fair* and is then courteous or deferential (cf. *Comedy of Errors* II.ii.147 [Antipholus of Syracuse to Luciana] "Plead you to me, fair dame?"; *Macbeth* IV.ii.65 [Messenger to Lady Macduff] "Bless you, fair dame!"). Far more commonly, however, *dame* is employed as a contemptuous address form, whether on its own (cf. (12)-(13) below) or premodified by negative adjectives like *deceitful* (*Henry VI, Part I* II.i.50 [Charles, Dauphin of France to Joan de Pucelle] "Is this thy cunning, thou deceitful dame?"), *presumptuous* (*Henry VI, Part II* I.ii.42 [Gloucester to his wife the Duchess]

“Presumptuous dame, ill-nurtur’d Eleanor,”) or *fickle* (*Passionate Pilgrim* 17.10 “O frowning Fortune, fickle dame!”).

- (12) *Albany* [to Goneril]. ... Shut your mouth, *dame*, / Or with this paper shall I stopple it. Hold, sir. – (*Lear* V.iii.155-156)
- (13) *Baptista* [to Katherina]. Why, how now, *dame*, whence grows this insolence? (*Shrew* II.i.23)

In its single occurrence in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *dame* appears on its own too:

- (14) *Antony* [about to leave for battle]. Fare thee well, *dame*, what e’er becomes of me. / This is a soldier’s kiss; rebukable / And worthy shameful check it were, to stand / On more mechanic compliment. I’ll leave thee / Now like a man of steel. (IV.iv.29-33)

According to Schmidt & Sarrazin (1971 [1902]), *dame* is used here for “a woman beloved or courted,” while Busse (2002: 108) argues that *dame* retains in this line its original sense and “functions as a respectful and courtly form of address.” I am not entirely convinced, however, by these interpretations. First, the evidence from Shakespeare’s plays suggests that *dame*, possibly because of the extension in social application referred to above, could easily carry pejorative or negative undertones when used to a woman of high social standing, unless it was premodified by positive adjectives such as *fair*. Second, it is noteworthy that Antony uses this address term in combination with the pronoun *thee*, which might be described as emotional, but hardly as respectful and deferential. On the whole, if we take into account that the adjective *mechanic* in line 32 apparently has the sense ‘unspontaneous, formal’ (cf. *OED mechanical* a. 4), Antony’s description of his own behaviour as shunning “mechanic compliment” suggests that in this scene he is trying to sound deliberately unceremonious, hence his choice of the address forms *thee* and *dame*, and his reference to a “soldier’s kiss.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Besides the uses mentioned in the body of the text, *dame* could also be prefixed to the name of a woman of rank (cf. *OED dame* n. 6.a), as in *Dame Mortimer* (1*H4* II.iv.110) or *Dame Eleanor* (cf. 2*H6* I.ii.91); see (i) below:

(i) *King* [to Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester]. Stand forth, *Dame Eleanor Cobham*, Gloucester’s wife: / In sight of God and us, your guilt is great. (2*H6* II.iii.1)

Of the courtesy titles given by Cleopatra to Antony, the most frequent is *lord* (7 ex.), which throughout the Early Modern English period was the default form of address for members of the greater nobility, including royalty. Like all other titles, it could be made more or less deferential depending on the adjectives and honorific expressions combining with it: *courteous lord* (I.iii.86), *good my lord* (III.xiii.109), *lord of lords* (IV.viii.16), etc. Among the lesser nobility there was a common tendency for baronets and knights to be called *Sir* (cf. Nevalainen 1994: 319), but this term could also be used as a general title for men of any station (Schmidt & Sarrazin 1971 [1902]: s.v. *sir* 2; Blake 2001: 274). Cleopatra, for instance, employs *Sir* to address both Antony (3 ex.) and Octavius Cæsar:

- (15) *Cleopatra* [to Antony]. *Sir*, you and I must part, but that's not it; /  
*Sir*, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it; (I.iii.87-88)
- (16) *Cleopatra* [to Cæsar]. ... *Sir*, the gods / Will have it thus, my master  
and my lord / I must obey. (V.ii.115-117)

Finally, one word on terms of family relationship. The only one occurring in the exchanges between Antony and Cleopatra is *husband*, which Cleopatra, quite significantly, employs as an invocation immediately before applying an asp to her breast and committing suicide:

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Even in this use there is evidence that *dame* could carry pejorative overtones depending on the pragmatic context, as is shown by its frequent combination with names such as *fortune* (*Dame Fortune*) or *partlet* 'a hen, a woman'; cf. *Wint* II.iii.76 and *1H4* III.iii.52 [Falstaff to Mistress Quickly] "How now, Dame Partlet the hen?"

In Present-day British English *dame* has come to be employed as a title conferred on a woman in recognition for services rendered to the Crown or country; see the entry for the Order of the British Empire at Cambridge University Heraldic and Genealogical Society ([http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies/cuhags/orderofc/brit\\_emp.htm](http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies/cuhags/orderofc/brit_emp.htm)). One of the anonymous reviewers points out that this appears to him "a quite extraordinary semantic trajectory, from unmarked denotator of rank, down to term of contempt, and then right up again to honorific title bestowed by royalty." In response to this interesting observation, it could be pointed out that, despite its broadening of meaning, *dame* apparently retained the ability to be used deferentially in certain contexts, as suggested by examples such as (i) above. Therefore, when the Order of the British Empire was established in June 1917 by King George V and the title *knight* was chosen to designate the distinction bestowed on men eligible for the Order, the word *dame*, which historically (cf. *OED* *dame* n. 6.b) was the legal title for the wife of a knight or baronet, must have been seen as the most suitable option for the corresponding distinction awarded to women.

- (17) *Cleopatra*. Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear / Antony call; I see him rouse himself / To praise my noble act. I hear him mock / The luck of Cæsar, which the gods give men / To excuse their after wrath. *Husband*, I come! / Now to that name my courage prove my title! (V.ii.286)

The term *husband*, whether alone or premodified by adjectives such as *dear(est)*, *gentle*, or *good*, could be used vocatively in all social strata, but was not very common; according to Busse (2002: 140), there are only 17 instances in Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, Schmidt & Sarrazin (1971 [1902]: s.v. *husband* 4) suggest that when used among persons of rank *husband* was intended "to give the speech a tone of peculiar tenderness and affection", a hypothesis which seems to be confirmed by its selection by Cleopatra at a moment in the play when she feels that she and Antony will at last become forever united in death, and also by its use in other Shakespearian passages of high emotional tension, such as Blanch's moving address to the Dolphin in *King John* or Virgilia's speech asking Coriolanus not to attack Rome, which has banished him (cf. also *Macbeth* II.ii.13):

- (18) *Blanch* [to the Dolphin]. O *husband*, hear me! ay, alack, how new / Is "husband" in my mouth! even for that name, / Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce, / Upon my knee I beg, go not to arms / Against my uncle. (KJ III.i.305-309)
- (19) *Coriolanus* [seeing Virgilia, Volumnia and young Martius approach in mourning habits]. My wife comes foremost; then the honor'd mould / Wherein this trunk was fram'd, and in her hand / The grandchild to her blood. But out, affection, / All bond and privilege of nature, break! / Let it be virtuous to be obstinate. / ... Let the Volsces / Plough Rome and harrow Italy, I'll never / Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand / As if a man were author of himself, / And knew no other kin.  
*Virgilia*. My lord and *husband*! (Cor V.iii.22-37)

### 3.2 Other husband–wife relationships

In *Hamlet* Claudius usually addresses the queen as *Gertrude*, her Christian name, whether they are in private (II.ii.54, IV.i.6, 28, 38, etc.), or not (III.i.28, IV.v.123, 127, etc). However, when in Act I, scene ii, Claudius first appears on stage before the Court, the formality of the occasion prompts the use of *madam*, which, like *lady*, was a common title of courtesy for women of high rank; note

that, in keeping with the rest of his elevated diction, Claudius refers to himself by means of the 'royal' pronoun *ourself*:

- (20) *Claudius*. Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. / Be as ourself in Denmark. [to Gertrude] *Madam*, come. / This gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet / Sits smiling to my heart, (I.ii.121-124)

Claudius, as the new King of Denmark, is never addressed with his first name by any of the characters in the play, and the queen constitutes no exception in this respect. Whether in private (IV.v.1) or in the presence of other members of the court (III.ii.267, V.ii.291), she calls him *my lord*, a respectful treatment which testifies to the subordinate role of women with respect to their husbands, irrespective of rank.

This imbalance can also be observed in *The Winter's Tale* in the exchanges between Hermione and Leontes. In the opening scenes of the play, when Leontes encourages Hermione to persuade Polixenes, King of Bohemia, to stay longer with them, he addresses her once as *our queen* (I.ii.27), but also uses her first name (*Hermione*) twice (ll. 33, 88), plus the endearment form *my dearest* (l. 88). Hermione, in turn, responds with the titles *sir* (ll. 28, 29) and *my lord* (l. 87), though at one point, given their mutual affection at this stage of the play, she addresses him with his Christian name, in combination with the pronominal form *thee*:

- (21) *Hermione*. ... yet, good deed, *Leontes*, / I love *thee* not a jar o' th' clock behind / What lady she her lord. (I.ii.42-44)
- (22) *Leontes* [to Hermione]. ... Is he won yet?  
*Hermione*. He'll stay, *my lord*.  
*Leontes*. At my request he would not. / *Hermione*, *my dearest*, thou never spok'st / To better purpose. (I.ii.86-89)

During his period of frenzied jealousy (Act I.ii.108 and ff), Leontes' confused state of mind is matched by appropriate changes in the forms of address.<sup>9</sup> He now resorts to terms of abuse (*thou thing*, II.i.82) and the ironic and contemptuous *my lady* he uses at II.i.81 ("You have mistook, my lady, / Polixenes for Leontes"). Hermione's attitude towards her husband becomes correspondingly more deferential and distant. Apart from the

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<sup>9</sup> On the subtleties of Leontes' linguistic characterization during his insanity, see Thorne (1971).

customary *sir* and *lord*, we now find her using courtesy titles reserved for the sovereign or equivalent, such as *your Highness* and *my liege*:

- (23) *Hermione*. Who is't that goes with me? Beseech *your Highness*<sup>10</sup> / My women may be with me, for you see / My plight requires it. (II.i.116-118)
- (24) *Hermione*. ... *Sir*, spare your threats. / The bug which you would seek to fright me with, I seek. / To me can life be no commodity. / ... Now, *my liege*, / Tell me what blessings I have here alive, / That I should fear to die? (III.ii.91-108)

An interesting address form is the one used by Hermione in the following lines:

- (25) *Hermione* [to Leontes]. Privy to none of this. How will this grieve you, / When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that / You thus have publish'd me! *Gentle my lord*, / You scarce can right me throughly, then, to say / You did mistake. (II.i.96-99)

Two aspects deserve mention here. First, the surface order Adjective + Possessive Modifier + Noun occurs in Shakespeare especially in vocative expressions (cf. Barber 1976: 233) and there is evidence to suggest that it was pragmatically marked, in the sense that it was apprehended as more deferential than the alternative arrangement Possessive Modifier + Adjective + Noun (i.e. *my gentle lord*). It was therefore resorted to when a suitor was trying to make a request, offer some excuse to, or attract the sympathy of, a superior (Blake 2001: 281; see also Blake 2002: 313 and Busse 2002: 114), as is the case in the example under discussion and in *Macbeth* III.ii.27:

- (26) *Macbeth*. Duncan is in his grave; / After life's fitful fever he sleeps well. / Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison, / Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing, / Can touch him further.  
*Lady Macbeth*. Come on; / *Gentle my lord*, sleek o'er your rugged looks, / Be bright and jovial among your guests to-night. (*Mcb* III.ii.22-28)

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the address term *your Highness* is appropriately combined with the verb *beseech*, which was much more deferential and polite than *pray* (cf. Busse 2002: 114).

Secondly, in Early Modern English honorific adjectives such as *gentle*, *worthy*, *gracious* and a few others denoted not only character traits of the persons so described, but also alluded to their social status.<sup>11</sup> According to Breuer (1983: 59f), as late as Shakespeare's time *gentle* should often be understood not as 'amiable, kind' (cf. Schmidt & Sarrazin 1971 [1902]), but rather as a concept of rank, in its original sense of 'well-born, belonging to a family of position' (OED s.v. *gentle* adj. 1.a).<sup>12</sup> This is most probably the meaning intended by both Hermione and Lady Macbeth in the above-mentioned speeches, where the sense 'amiable, generous' would hardly be an appropriate one for either Leontes or Macbeth.<sup>13</sup> The same applies to *gentle* as used in the following lines from *Antony and Cleopatra*:

- (27) *Antony* [to Octavia, his wife and sister to Cæsar]. *Gentle Octavia*, /  
 Let your best love draw to that point which seeks / Best to preserve  
 it. If I lose mine honor, / I lose myself; better I were not yours /  
 Than yours so branchless. (*Ant* III.iv.20-24)

#### 4. Concluding remarks

I hope this preliminary overview of address terms in Shakespeare has contributed to showing that forms of address present more problems than has been realized in the past and should therefore be given careful consideration, both by editors of Shakespeare, and by his translators into other languages. Despite the limited number of examples examined in this paper, the discussion of terms and honorific adjectives such as *dame*, *husband*, or *gentle* has served to illustrate the complex social, affective and linguistic variables that need to be taken into account in order to adequately interpret their use.

Aspects that have not been considered here, but certainly deserve further investigation, include the extent to which the address forms in individual plays represent those initially intended by the author. In connection with this, note Blake's (2002: 307)

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<sup>11</sup> On this issue see further Breuer (1983) and Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 557-59).

<sup>12</sup> This meaning is clear in *The Winter's Tale* IV.iv.93: "You see, sweet maid, we marry / A gentler scion to the wildest stock, / And make conceive a bark of baser kind / By bud of nobler race."

<sup>13</sup> Modern audiences would tend to interpret the use of *gentle* in (25)-(26) as subtly ironic, but it is unlikely that it would have been so intended by either Hermione or Lady Macbeth.



important observations regarding the lack of stability in the use of address terms between the quarto (1603, 1604) and Folio (1623) texts of *Hamlet*, which “suggests that forms of address were not accurately preserved by composers and that in performances actors may have altered individual forms of address, included additional ones and excluded some which were in the prompt copy.”

Also worthy of mention is the fact that analyses of address terms have so far tended to focus on just one text type, for instance, Early English correspondence (cf. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995, Nevala 2004), or on individual authors such as Chaucer (cf. Honegger 2003) or Shakespeare (cf. Salmon 1987 [1967], Replogle 1987 [1973], Mazzon 1995, Blake 2001, 2002, Busse 2002). It would be important, too, to broaden the scope of research and compare the use of a selected group of address forms in Shakespeare and other contemporary playwrights, and in other contemporary text categories.

APPENDIX. *Terms for husband–wife relationships in some Shakespearian plays*

Table 2. *Nominal address terms in Antony and Cleopatra (in brackets: number of occurrences)*

ANTONY TO CLEOPATRA	CLEOPATRA TO ANTONY
<i>personal names:</i> Cleopatra (1)	<i>personal names:</i> Antony (5)
<i>titles of courtesy:</i> queen (1), my queen (3), my dearest queen (1), most sweet queen (1), wrangling queen (1), my precious queen (1), sweet queen (1), dame (1), lady (3), my Thetis (1), Egypt (4)	<i>titles of courtesy:</i> courteous lord (1), my lord (3), good my lord (1), lord of lords (1), dear dear my lord (1), sir (3), noblest of men (1), o infinite virtue (1)
<i>endearments:</i> my love (1), o love (1), my chuck (1), my nightingale (1), girl (1), gentle (1), sweet (1)	<i>endearments:</i> dear (1)
<i>terms of abuse:</i> you kite (1), thou spell (1)	<i>terms of abuse:</i> none
<i>address terms used in invocations:</i> Cleopatra (1), my queen (1), triple turn'd whore (1), this false soul of Egypt (1), this grave charm (1)	<i>address terms used in invocations:</i> Antony (1), o Antony, Antony, Antony (1), husband (1)

Table 3. Nominal forms of address used in the exchanges between three couples of high standing

LEONTES TO HERMIONE Hermione (3), our queen (1), my lady (1; used ironically), my dearest (1), thou thing (1)	HERMIONE TO LEONTES Leontes (1), sir (6), my lord (5), gentle my lord (1), your Highness (1), my liege (1)
CLAUDIUS TO GERTRUDE *my dear Gertrude (2), sweet Gertrude (1), Gertrude (7), Gertrude, Gertrude (1), good Gertrude (1), madam (1)	GERTRUDE TO CLAUDIUS my lord (2), *mine own lord (1)
MACBETH TO LADY MACBETH my dearest partner of greatness (1), my dearest love (1), love (1), dearest chuck (1), sweet remembrancer (1), dear wife	LADY MACBETH TO MACBETH great Glamis (1), great Glamis, worthy Cawdor (1), my thane (1), worthy thane (1), my lord (1), gentle my lord (1), my royal lord (1), my worthy lord (1), sir (2), my husband (1)

\*The quarto (1604) readings *my dear Gertrude* (II.ii.54) and *mine own lord* (IV.i.5) are replaced by *my sweet queen* and *my good lord* in the First Folio (1623) text of *Hamlet*.

Table 4. Terms for husband–wife relationships in a comedy of bourgeois life: The Merry Wives of Windsor

FORD TO MRS FORD	MRS FORD TO FORD	PAGE TO MRS PAGE	MRS PAGE TO PAGE
	<i>personal names and nicknames:</i> sweet Frank (1)	<i>personal names and nicknames:</i> Meg (1)	<i>personal names and nicknames:</i> George (2), good George
<i>Titles of courtesy:</i> Mistress Ford, Mistress Ford (1), mistress (1)	<i>titles of courtesy:</i> Master Ford (1)		
	<i>generic names:</i> man (1)		
<i>terms of abuse:</i> brazen-face (1)			
<i>terms of family relationship:</i> wife (3)	<i>terms of family relationship:</i> good, sweet husband (1)	<i>terms of family relationship:</i> wife (1)	<i>terms of family relationship:</i> husband (1), good husband (1)

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