SEMANTIC CHANGE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A CASE STUDY FROM *SONNET 130*

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses in semantic change in the English language as particularised in a selection of words from *Sonnet 130* by William Shakespeare: wire, rare, reek and mistress. The reasons why this topic has been selected are the need to raise an awareness of the changing nature of the meaning of words and, through the knowledge of the semantic change in these words, to allow a better understanding of Shakespeare's sonnets –thus providing evidence of the need of sound rigorous philological work in the edition of works from earlier periods. An introduction containing the theoretical framework about semantic change and about the relevant linguistic period (Early Modern English, EModE, henceforth) is followed by an account and discussion of main facts concerning Shakespeare's life, works and language, with particular attention to the sonnets. The textual work consists of research into authoritative reference (etymological) works in order to outline the various semantic changes undergone by the above-mentioned words. These changes have been traced back as early in time as necessary, on the one hand, while, on the other, their semantic histories from Shakespeare's time till Present-Day English have also been described. The TFG is closed by an analysis of the main tendencies detected and by the general conclusions.

 Key words: semantic change, historical linguistics, literary language, Shakespeare, sonnets

Resumen

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado (TFG, en adelante) se centra en el cambio semántico del inglés a través de una selección de palabras del *Soneto 130* de William Shakespeare: wire, rare, reek y mistress. Las razones por las que se ha escogido este tema son la necesidad de insistir en la naturaleza cambiante del significado de las palabras y en que un análisis del cambio semántico resulta en una mejor comprensión de los sonetos de Shakespeare, lo cual demuestra la necesidad de una investigación filológica exhaustiva a la hora de editar obras alejadas cronológicamente. La introducción contiene el marco teórico sobre el cambio semántico y el periodo lingüístico que se ha estudiado (Early Modern English, EModE en adelante). Le sigue una breve exposición de los hechos más importantes de la vida de Shakespeare, su obra y su lengua, dando especial importancia a los sonetos. El trabajo textual consiste en la consulta de diccionarios etimológicos de referencia, analizando y describiendo los cambios de significado desde el origen de las palabras estudiadas hasta la época de Shakespeare y/o desde esta el inglés actual. El TFG acaba con un análisis de las tendencias de cambio descubiertas y con las conclusiones generales.

Palabras clave: cambio semántico, lingüística histórica, lengua literaria, Shakespeare, sonetos

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List of abbreviations

OE- Old English

IE- Indo-European

ME- Middle English

ModE- Modern English

EModE- Early Modern English

LModE- Late Modern English

PDE- Present-day English

OF- Old French

OED- *Oxford English Dictionary*

c.*-circa*

1. – Introduction

Since William Shakespeare´s works belong to a specific time-space context, which conditions the extralinguistic and linguistic aspects and their interpretation, it is necessary to be aware of the different changes the English language has undergone with the passing of time and to take into account the results from diachronic linguistic studies for text analysis. This end-of-degree dissertation focuses on those changes, and specifically in semantic change, since it can be used to find the elements that have undergone any kind of change in their meaning from the 16th or 17th century. Therefore, the study of the shifts in the meanings of words across time permits a deeper understanding of the English language and its historical evolution; it provides us with useful tools for the analysis and interpretation of texts; it allows us to trace the origins and tendencies of certain terms; and it is useful to raise an awareness of the fact that languages are not a static entity and that meanings change and are culture-bound. Moreover, the study of semantic change applied to the poems of William Shakespeare, not only helps us to better understand its real meaning, but avoids misinterpretation and future errors in text analysis.

The focus of our analysis is a selection of words (wire, reek, rare, mistress) from Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130*. The main goal of the study is to trace the different changes in meaning undergone by these words from Shakespeare's time till our day, tracing them back to previous meanings when necessary. The description of the various semantic changes has been carried out through extensive consultation of a series of works such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Old English Dictionary*. Finally, Appendix 1 includes links to performances of *Sonnet 130*, so that the oral dimension of poetry his highlighted and the sonnet enjoyed within it. Appendix 2 includes some citations from the OED that could not be included in the analysis for reasons of space.

2.- Theoretical framework

2.a.- Historical linguistics

Historical linguistics is a sub-branch of linguistics whose object of study is all aspects of languages for which the time dimension is essential. There are three main lines of research: History of linguistic knowledge, the study of past stages of language and theoretical aspects of change (diachronic linguistics), being the study of linguistic change included in the last one (Guzmán-González 2005, 3).

2.a.i.- Language change

2.a.i.1.- Characterization and types

Concerning linguistic change, there are some questions which need to be addressed before suggesting a definition: What/who are the agents, mechanisms and causes of linguistic change? Is linguistic change constant or does change appears in sudden episodes alternating with periods of stable variation? What is the difference between change and innovation? This TFG cannot aim, by any means, at even hinting answers to such questions, because they go far beyond its main focus –although some of the findings in the subsequent research may provide interesting data in this respect.

After decades of theoretical research and argumentation on linguistic change, there seems to be a quasi-general agreement that use and users are crucial factors (Janda and Joseph 2003; Clark 2006). In this line, Kenny Smith (2006, 316) mentions, among others, cultural transmission and language use. From this point of view, we could consider that language is an instrument with a number of functions. When this instrument no longer fits its users' needs it is changed to adapt it to the new circumstances:

> Speakers construct new words to add to their vocabulary, to talk about new trends and developments in society…and to take into account technical and scientific innovations (Clark 2006, 112)

Some factors that favour language change may be language- and user-external. Some linguists argue that historical events such as those involving movements of population or

disappearance of societies have linguistic consequences. This is particularly so when the situation changes radically, as stated by Labov (1994) (as quoted in Janda and Joseph 2003, 51): "Catastrophic events play a major role in the history of all languages, primarily in the form of population dislocations."; social changes may boost language change but they cannot cause it: "Linguistic change for instance may be accelerated in periods of massive social change … but these are enabling or encouraging conditions, not direct causes." (Roger Lass 1999, 4)

Language varies constantly as innovations are continually being introduced by users; most are short-lived because they do not extend to the rest of the community and disappear. We need, therefore, to introduce here the essential difference between "innovation" and "linguistic change". An innovation can only be considered to have become a linguistic change when it becomes part of the inventory of accepted linguistic resources of a speech community. Furthermore, change usually implies that the old form is lost, although some degree of overlapping is acceptable especially when dealing with semantic change, which "arises by polysemy; that is, new meanings coexist with new ones" (Traugott 2006: 126)[1]. Linguistic change can be defined, then, as "the adoption of punctual alterations ('innovations') by the speech community ('change')" (Guzmán-González 2005, 16), or, in more detail, as

> …changes in consensus on norms of usage in a speech community. During the process there will be some disagreement or conflict on norms at some levels in the community, but if a change is ever 'completed', then it will be possible to say that some community of speakers agrees that what was formerly A is now B. (Milroy 1992, 17)

Interaction between speakers is essential and, therefore, social network analysis plays an important role in determining how linguistic changes are spread. "The prerequisite for such spread of linguistic innovations is a network structure which includes people with loose ties to many social groups but strong ties to none" (Josep and Janda 2003, 62-63) These are the marginal members, which maintain relationships with other different networks and, therefore, bring innovation from one network to another. In this way, we could consider that

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[1] But more on semantic change in subsequent points of this TFG.

change is produced when it is accepted and adopted by central members of the social network, those who are in position to create and impose linguistic rules[2].

In sum, we could define linguistic change as a process by which an innovation that has been produced because of internal (linguistic) or external (speakers, society, culture..) factors and that has been introduced more or less progressively by its relative spread into the speech community after a period of variation, is incorporated in the system of that language. This process is not usually observable by the users of a language at a given stage of its history.

However, not all the components of a language change as fast as others. For instance, syntax is more stable than morphology, morphology is more stable than lexicon… (Mithun 1984, 331). As a consequence of this, we can say that there are different types of linguistic change, depending of the levels of analysis concerned: Phonological change, morphological change, lexical change, syntactic change and semantic change, which is the type this dissertation is concerned with.

2.a.i.2.- Semantic change

Semantic change is the process of (and the result of) change that affects the meaning of words "either in reference to the external world (object, cultural norms, etc.) or in a linguistic-internal sense, including ways in which pragmatic implicatures and inferences may become somaticized (coded) over times" (Traugott 2006, 124). Therefore, semantic change can affect the meaning of the words themselves (by taking up new meanings, narrowing them to a more specific one…) or *denotatum*, the objects or issues to which the words make reference. We can state that semantic change has taken place when it is possible to have a different interpretation of one word which is ultimately extended to/shared by the rest of the speech community and, consequently, introduced in the inventory of potential utterances.

There are different types of semantic change depending on what type of process has taken place. The number and names of these categories are not always the same for different

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[2] Guzmán-Gonzalez, personal communication.

authors although the majority of the categories are shared by most. The model which has been used in what follows is a combination of those in Benjamin W. Fortson IV (2003, 648) and in E. C. Traugott (2006, 125).

1. **Extension** (also broadening or generalization) is the process by which a word whose meaning is restricted or makes reference to a specific thing acquires a broader and less restricted meaning, expanding the possible number of things to which the word makes reference. Old English (OE, henceforth) *docga* (dog) originally made reference to dogs "of a powerful breed" (Traugott 2006, 125) but its meaning was broadened to mean simply "dog" any member of the species and the species itself.

2. **Narrowing** (also named specialization or restriction) is the opposite process. A word having a relatively general meaning suffers a restriction of meaning so that it becomes more specialised or refers to a more restricted set of things. OE *hund* (hound) used to mean "generic dog" but its meaning came to be specialised to a specific type of all the possible types of dogs, a "hunting dog".

3. **Melioration** or amelioration is a process by means of which the evaluation implied by the meaning of a word changes into a more positive one. "Nice" is a frequent example. As recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*[3] (OED, henceforth), "nice" comes from Old French (OF henceforth) *niche* (c1160; *c*1250) from Latin *nescius*. Its original meaning in Latin, recorded in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*[4] (OLD henceforth) was "not knowing, ignorant, unaware", "knowing nothing" although it was preserved through OF as "friendly" (OED).

4. **Pejoration** is the opposite of melioration. "Silly", from OE *gesælig* from Proto-Germanic **sæligas* used to mean "blessed, happy" originally –the first record in the OED, became "stupid".

5. **Metaphor** or metaphoric extension is a process by means of which the meaning of one word is transferred to another one perceived as similar or with which it shares certain characteristics although they belong to different conceptual domains. A typical example is the use of "head" in such expressions as "head of department, family…"

6. **Metonymy** or metonymic extension involves two words already having some sort of connection between them such as the part for the whole, the container for the

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[3] The edition that has been employed for this TFG is the online one, which presently contains the entries from the Second Edition, draft materials with the last inclusions for the Third Editions and the March 2016 update. The complete reference can be found in the reference section so that it will not be repeated subsequently.

[4] The 1982 edition has been used. The complete reference can be found in the reference section.

contained, the material for the object… These are associated and one acquires the referent of the other word. It is not based on similarity but on existing relations. Thus, as recorded in the OED[5], "paper" was originally used to refer to the material :

> 1. A substance composed of fibres interlaced into a compact web, made (usually in the form of thin flexible sheet, most commonly white) from various fibrous materials… (436)

but now it makes reference to: "6. A piece, sheet, or leaf of paper". (437) Therefore, there has been a metonymic change of the material for the object.

2. b. - History of English

Traditionally, English, an Indo-European (IE, henceforth) Germanic language (Baugh and Cable 2002, 28), has been divided into: Old English (OE), Middle English (ME), Modern English (ModE) (further sub-divided into Early -EModE- and Late Modern -LModE-) and Present-Day English (PDE).

OE covers the period from the arrival of Germanic tribes to what today is England in the 5th century to the Norman Invasion in the 11th century. One of its most salient features is its rich morphology, which was reduced in the following periods (ME and ModE). OE is related to Proto-Germanic, defined as: "The common form that the languages of the Germanic branch had before they became differentiated" (Baugh and Cable 2002, 28).

The English of the period between the Norman Conquest and the arrival of printing in England in 1476 is generally referred to as Middle English (Smith 2005, 176). ME keeps a close relationship with Old French (OF henceforth), one of whose regional varieties was Anglo-Norman, spoken in England by the Norman aristocracy, the cultivated people and/or social climbers. The Norman Conquest meant the replacement of OE by Latin and Anglo-Norman in official documents (parliament records also) among other written registers,

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[5] The printed 1978 edition was used for this definition. The complete reference can be found in the reference section.

including literary usage. However, English continued to be the language used by the majority of the population and the language in which many texts kept being copied.

During the EModE period, which spans from 1500 to 1700 (Ramoulin-Brunberg 2006, 164), the standardization process of the English language begins to develop. Recent trends in English historical linguistics recognize an additional period between EModE and PDE: LModE, covering the 18th and the 19th centuries (Guzmán-González 2015, 201). In this period, new overseas varieties of English gain distinct profiles.

2. b. i. - Early Modern English

EModE is the period of English when, although most of the crucial structural changes affecting the language have already taken place, the differences with PDE are still many and of importance. The most important developments are mainly phonological (the Great Vowel Shift as the best known) and, therefore, purely linguistic. Extra-linguistic changes of crucial importance are those related to the various standardization processes leading to the rise of the various national standards of PDE (American English, British English…).

As mentioned above, EModE begins in the 16th century, and ends at the beginning of the 18th century. It includes the English historical periods of the Renaissance, the Reformation and Restoration. It is the period of "population growth; changes in the social hierarchy; increasing economic activity; a widening world view; and growing national identity." (Raumolin-Brunberg 2006, 3097). Because of its consequences in the development of culture (and language), one of the most important events was the establishment of the first printing press in England by William Caxton in 1472, which, combined with the increase of financial resources, made writing and reading available to more people than ever before. The language of the period, especially that of the Elizabethan era, is the language of what has been generally regarded as one of the heights of the English literature, with William Shakespeare as the most obvious summit of the whole period.

The main linguistic features of EModE, apart from those in phonology mentioned above concern the use of do-periphrases for interrogative and negative sentences, the consolidation of a more fixed word order, the appearance of certain sets of pronouns and the increase in the use of auxiliary and modal verbs (Ramoulin-Brunberg 2006, 165, 166) As far

as lexis and semantics are concerned, there was extensive growth of the lexical inventory through word formation and widespread borrowing from other languages: from French, and from Latin[6], but also from languages like Spanish or Italian.

2.c.- Text typology

"Text typology is concerned with the identification of the criteria leading to the classification (typology) of texts (or text types, text classes, styles, genres). Depending on the criteria adopted, there are several possibilities of classifying texts." (Ferenčík 2004)[7]

Among the various axes of intralinguistic variation, this TFG is concerned with variation according to use and function. "Register" is the term most widely employed for these varieties or "pragmalects" (terminology by Guzmán-González, personal communication).

We shall employ here the framework defined by M.A.K. Halliday (1985) along the lines he defined as "field" (the situation or social action itself), "tenor" (the participants in the speech act) and "mode" (the particular status assigned to the speech act within the situation).

Among the varieties of English which can be defined according to field are religious English, legal English, scientific English, technical English and literary English. In each case, correlations can be found between the particular subject matter and the linguistic structural features employed in them. This study is obviously focused on Literary English, the variety used for poems, novels, dramatic pieces, and other forms of literary expression.

2.c.1.- Literary English

Literary English[8] is a type of English which uses creative, innovative language, very imaginative, subjective, and often makes use of rhetorical figures (hyperbole, parallelism,

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[6] Causing the Inkhorn Controversy in the 16th century.

[7] The complete reference to the PhD dissertation can be found on the reference section. The original document can be accessed in http://www.pulib.sk/elpub2/FF/Ferencik/INDEX.HTM

[8] http://pediaa.com/difference-between-technical-writing-and-literary-writing/

anaphora, personification…), tropes (metaphor, simile) and other strategies or literary techniques such as ambiguity or wordplay.

Following Burton and Carter, this variety is also characterized by the de-familiarization of language, that is to say, the deviation from the regular structures of language creating a sensation of strangeness on the reader; self-referenciality, which means that there is a focus on the message and its form; "a suspension of the normal pragmatic functions of words"; and other features such as the dependence of the medium, displaced interaction (the reception of a text by the prospective recipient is produced in a different, posterior, time and place), polysemy and semantic density among others. (2006, 269-273)

As for poetry, the poetic language "contains images, or metal pictures, which bring into focus a range of thought and feeling" (Parini 2005, 3). The emotive function of a language, therefore, plays an important role. Also, features such as the figurative language, poetic licenses (breaking the linguistic rules for expressive purposes), the presence of the authorial voice and the structuring of poems by means of rhyme.

3.- The author and his work: William Shakespeare

3.a- Brief biographical outline

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and was educated from 1571 at the King's New School in Stratford (Honan 1998, 43). There he studied the Latin authors and a Latin-based grammar. When he was 18, he married Anne Hathaway and two years later the twins Hamnet and Judith were born, although his son died when he was 11. There is almost no information on Shakespeare's life during these years, often called the "lost years". The exact date when Shakespeare began to write is unknown but evidence shows that a number of his plays were on stage on London by 1592. The attacks from other writers such as the playwright Robert Greene (the fact that he did not attend university was a source of teasing) make us think that he was well known as an author at that time. In 1594, under the patronage of Henry Carey, the company of actors called The Lord Chamberlain's Men was founded. Shakespeare performed his plays with them -soon, it became the leading company in London

scene and in 1603 they were granted a royal patent by King James I. Some of his plays were published in quartos, small-format editions, from 1594 and 1598, although most of these editions had been published without the author's name on them - only after 1598 did the books include his name on the title page.

Shakespeare also wrote a great amount of lyrical works, being of special importance the *Sonnets* which are dealt with extensively in section 3.c. His sonnets, most of them dating probably from the mid-1590s, appeared in 1609. Whether he authorized the publication is disputed. (Birch 2009, 906)

Finally, Shakespeare retired to Stratford "and it was there that he spent his last, sadly few years, from his retirement in 1612 to his death on 23 April 1616" (Hyland 1996, 14). The First Folio would appear seven years afterwards, published by John Heminges and Henry Condell (De Grazia and Wells 2010, 2).

3.b- Shakespeare's language

The linguistic changes that came to characterize English in Shakespeare's lifetime were more clearly visible in the written language: "From the later sixteenth century on texts come to look more 'familiar', partly because of the stabilisation of the kind of punctuation we now use… and partly through the regularisation of orthography." (Lass 1999, 10). This stabilization is a result of the process of Standardization, which goes hand in hand with the rise of vernaculars.

Concerning the language of Shakespeare, Norman Blake explains the most important features of his works: "the first is his vocabulary, which has been a regular focus of comment" because of his capacity for innovation and because of the necessity to make clear what he meant; and "the second feature is grammar. As with his vocabulary, editors in the eighteenth century …deplored the "mistakes" in grammar which they found in Shakespeare´s Works and often emended them" so that his grammar was considered less condemnable (2002, 9). Because of these amendments and because we cannot assure whether "what made its way into print was everything he wrote?" (Stephen and Keilen 1999, 92) it is not possible to know which linguistic features are authentically Shakespearean.

As for morphology, the addition of suffixes, which was a frequent method to create new words, was a recurrent mechanism in Shakespeare´s works: "The OED attributes to him the first use of no less than 164 words beginning with un-" (Barber 1982, 233). Compounding was also a favourite resource, creating such peculiar expressions as "toad-spotted ('marked with infamy, as a toad with spots', King Lear V. iii)" (Barber 1982, 233).

The knowledge of Latin acquired in King's New School clearly influenced Shakespeare's language, especially in two aspects concerning syntax: "the development of compound sentences and extensive noun groups…and the imitation of the compression of Latin expressions through ellipsis in English" (Blake 2002, 17).

3.c.- The *Sonnets*

A sonnet, as defined by Anthony Hecht, is a "fourteen-line poem, usually written in pentameter verse" (Blakemore and Hecht 1996, 6). There are two main types of sonnets: the Italian, or Petrarchan, and the English, or Shakespearean. Although the second is named after the most famous writer to use it, some affirm that it was the Earl of Surrey who "gave it its final permanent shape" (Bullock 1923, 743). "It consists of three quatrains rhyming ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, and concluding with a rhyming couplet, GG" (Blakemore and Hecht 1996, 6). This final couplet acts as a kind of conclusion for the previous stanzas.

There are many questions concerning the *Sonnets* that today remain unsolved. What we know for sure is that in the year 1609, when Shakespeare was already a famous playwright, a new quarto entitled *Shake-speares Sonnets. Neuer before Imprinted* was published by Thomas Thorpe, containing one hundred and forty-four sonnets and a long poem named *A lover's Complaint*. There is not enough evidence to establish a clear date of composition. Francis Meres referred to Shakespeare's sonnets in *Palladis Tamia* in 1598 and that *The Passionate Pilgrim*, a collection of 20 poems published in 1599 by William Jaggard and attributed to "W. Shakespeare", contains *Sonnet 128* and *Sonnet 144* (Burrow 2002, 103).

It is controversial whether Thorpe published the Sonnets with Shakespeare's consent and respecting the order desired by the author. Two compositors are thought to have set the 1609 Quarto, and they "… varied in their spelling preferences and in their level of accuracy"

(Burrow 2002, 92). The second edition was published in 1640 by John Benson, who changed the order of the poems in the Quarto, combined others and changed the pronouns from masculine to feminine assuming that the addressee was a lady in every sonnet (Burrow 2002, 93).

The addressees' names remain unknown - the first one-hundred and twenty-six poems addressed to a young man and the rest dedicated to a mysterious dark lady, except for two sonnets devoted to Cupid, Diana and a nymph. There is much controversy on whether they are autobiographical or not; among those who would believe so is Greenblatt (2010, 9): "They are written in the first person with exceptional intensity and reveal a passionate relationship, mingling adoration, desire and bitter reproach"; others, like Kerrigan (1986, 11), disagree.

With no doubt the collection of Shakespeare's Sonnets is one of the finest masterpieces of English literature: "…being rich and emotionally complex […] It is possible to argue that there exists no work of comparable brevity and excellence that digests such intimate emotional experience" (Blakemore and Hecht 1996, 1).

3.d.- *Sonnet 130* [9]

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
> If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
> If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
> And in some perfumes there is more delight
> Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
> I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
> That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
> I grant I never saw a goddess go:
> My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
>> And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
>> As any she belied with false compare.

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[9] After the edition by Colin Burrow (2008). See Appendix 1 for links to selected oral performances.

Sonnet 130 breaks the convention of love sonnets where the poet's mistress is attributed hyperbolic characteristics, and is falsely compared with objects (roses, lilies, the sun, stars…) which have often been taken as symbols of beauty, purity, etc. in the general poetical tradition. [10] In this sonnet, the author refuses to provide an idealized description of his lover, so that his mistress is not described "as any woman misrepresented by inaccurate and deceitful comparisons" (Burrow 640, 2002). This desire to preserve the nature of his mistress and the celebration of his love is clear in the final couplet. "The poem archly ends with a comparison (*As*…). The emphasis falls in *I think*, which confesses a privately held, self-consciously inaccurate belief" (Burrow 640, 2002).

In his description, Shakespeare uses certain words which to a modern reader unaware of the semantic changes they have undergone might give a far different image – nearing even parody, which does not seem to be the original message at all and which may cause problems both in the interpretation and translation.

4. - Textual work

4. a. Methodology

For obvious reasons of space, in this TFG we have selected just four words in the sonnet –those which were deemed as most clearly illustrating some of the semantic processes listed in 2.a.i.1.–basically because their PDE meanings seem to depart clearly from their 17th-century main senses. These are, as stated above, **wire** (l. 4), **reek** (l. 8), **rare** (l. 13) and **mistress** (ll. 1, 8, 12).

The descriptions offered in the following sections of this TFG have been elaborated by extensive consultation of authoritative reference works, in order to trace a "semantic history" of each word. The "spine" of the textual work is based on the works briefly commented below, although other works (individually referenced in each case) have also been employed:

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[10] For example as in "For my fayre love of lillyes and of roses," (v45), "And her fayre eyes like stars that dimmed were" (v98) from Spenser's *Epithalamion*: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45191

- relevant entries of the most complete and authoritative dictionary of the English language: the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a historical dictionary which provides both the present-day meanings of the words and their individual history. The edition that has been employed for this TFG is the online one, which presently contains the entries from the Second Edition, draft materials with the last inclusions for the Third Editions and the March 2016 update.

- Bosworth and Toller's *Old English Dictionary* in the online version based on a digital edition of *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth* (first edition 1898) and its *Supplement* (first edition 1921). It has been used for consulting original meanings of words in OE.

4. b. – Analysis

4. b.i. - Wire

"If hairs be **wires**, black **wires** grow on her head" (l. 4)

This word comes from OE *wīr,* etymologically connected, via Proto-Germanic, with the IE[11] base *wi-* as suggested by the Latin word *vīere* "plait, weave" (OED).

Many meanings have been added to the original in OE (still in use today): it is therefore attested in the OED from that period as "metal formed into a long, slender, flexible rod or strand, usually circular in section" and as "a piece, length, or line of wire used for various purposes", notably "in ornamental work, so, an ornament made of wire" (Bosworth & Toller). New overlapping meanings appear in ME, from the 13th century onwards: "from the 13th to the 16th cent. golden hair was often poetically likened to gold wire" (OED). As explained above, when a concept is transferred into another to which it bears some resemblance, although it belongs to a different conceptual area, it has undergone metaphorization. In *Sonnet 130,* the concept of hair is transferred into that of **wire** and the transference is based in the similarity in their appearance. This will be of essential importance for our analysis. Also of importance is another meaning which is used metaphorically to refer to something which looks like a wire, especially if it is hair: "Something likened to wire or a wire in form, appearance, or texture" (1576 OED). This

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[11] The American Heritage Dictionary Indo-European Roots Appendix
https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html

meaning may have been the one used by Shakespeare in his *Sonnet 130* (in fact this sonnet is cited as an example of this meaning in OED) although he may not have been the first to use **wire** in this sense since this meaning is attested in earlier years before Shakespeare published any of his works.

In the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, a great quantity of very different meanings are created, some of which focus not on the material (metal) but on the appearance and shape, as in botany (attested in OED from 1601 to 1974), or on the object made of it (as in "a lash or scourge made of wire", 1616-1667 OED), producing a metonymic change. As explained above, metonymy is based on existing extralinguistic connections, which are different for each of the words with which it relates. In this case (a long thin stem, root, etc.) the relation is the material (metal) for the shape (slender thread) but in "A lash or scourge made of wire" the relation is the material (metal) for the object made of that material (lash made of metal wire) as with the example of **paper** in section 2.a.i.1., page 9.

From the 18th century onwards, **wire** undergoes extension to "anything non-metallic having the form or function of wire" (1755 OED) and also there is the first attestation in the OED of "a wire for carrying an electric current" (1746 OED). Similar meanings from the 19th century relate wires to their uses in telephones or the telegraph as in: "a wire connecting the transmitting and receiving elements in a telegraph or telephone network" (1813 OED), which shows narrowing (a specific kind of wire for a specific function). Other meanings include the type of hair of a specific breed of dog ("a wire-haired terrier" 1892 OED).

The result of this long history of accumulated meanings is a polysemic situation in which **wire** has 25 different meanings in PDE. Some preserve the original sense in OE, others do not. Polysemy already existed in Shakespeare's time, as it could be expected: there is a coexistence of meanings making reference to **wire** as a material, an object, an instrument used in spheres such as hunting, theatre…, or something having the appearance of hair. This last meaning is the one employed in *Sonnet 130*. Instead of taking the original definition of "metal formed into a long, slender, flexible rod or strand", Shakespeare establishes a metaphor comparing his lover´s hair with slender metal threads. This metaphor (wire as hair instead of metal threads) was especially frequent in Elizabethan poetry. However, the wires compared with hair are those of gold and other precious materials in order to signal the hair's beauty. The key issue and the source of problems is the definition of **wire** (metal thread, cable…) and the appearance of wires.

Firstly, wires in Elizabethan poetry are very rarely –if ever- never black: "If hairs be thought of as wires (as they regularly were by Elizabethan poets, usually, however, as "golden wires", hence the implied contrast with "black wires" (Blakemore 1996, 248).[12] Therefore comparing hair to black wires implies some kind of transgression in this sonnet since it would mean that the mistress' hair does not have a good appearance. As with the rest of comparisons in this sonnet (the lips are not redder than coral, the eyes are not as beautiful the sun…) the author is breaking the poetical conventions of the time: he is not describing an idealised woman, and therefore she does not have a beautiful **<u>fair</u>** hair but **<u>black</u>** hair. The point of the transgression, thus, is the colour, not the material with which the lady's hair is compared. Therefore, we could paraphrase the fourth verse as: "although her hair is beautiful like golden wires, it is not blond but dark."

Secondly, an inattentive reading of the sonnet in which only the most frequent and immediate meanings of **wire** in PDE are taken into account could lead to a totally different (and mistaken) interpretation by modern readers -by which Shakespeare lover's hair is depicted as thick and rough, like an electric cable (which obviously did not exist in the 16th century).

4.b.ii.- Reek

"And in some perfumes there is more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress **reeks**." (ll. 7-8)

The verb **reek** comes from a merger of two distinct words: the OE strong verb of Class II *rēocan* and an OE weak verb *rīecan*, Anglian *rēcan*, from the same base as the strong verb (OED), ultimately Proto-Germanic **reukan*, and connected through it to the IE[13] root *reug-,* meaning "to vomit, belch; smoke, cloud".

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[12] See also Burrow (2008, 640): "Wire, being made of gold, iron, brass, or copper, could not be black unless tarnished, although Barnabe Barnes, when looking for flaws in his mistress, finds […] Her hair disordered, brown and crisped wiry."

[13] *The American Heritage Dictionary Indo-European Roots Appendix*
https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html

To the original meanings in OE, the majority of them still in use, many others have been added although two clear groups can be differentiated, with minor deviations. In a first group, the OED records a series of meanings dating from the OE period and lasting, most of them, until the 20th and 21st centuries. The majority of the meanings from this group make reference to the verb **reek** as the action of emitting smoke, vapour or fumes, or things having the appearance of smoke. The source or cause of the vapour or the smoke is identified in some definitions: "Of a chimney, or a thing that contains something burning or smouldering: to emit or discharge smoke", while in other cases it is not. It is worth mentioning that these meanings are neutral, they do not contain any additional connotations and one of them ("Of smoke or vapour: to be emitted or exhaled; to rise, emanate", OE OED) is the one used by Shakespeare in his *Sonnet 130*.

The second group of meanings, which includes the current interpretation of **reek** in PDE, dates from the 16th or 17th centuries approximately. Here, the act of emitting vapour of smoke includes smells –with negative connotations added: "To give off an unpleasant or unwholesome odour or fume". (1609 OED) In our time, the verb maintains those negative connotations and is defined as "To be strongly suggestive or reminiscent of something unpleasant, disreputable or undesirable." (first attested in 1679 OED), another case of metaphorical extension. Consequently, the type of semantic change undergone by **reek** can be characterized as pejoration because the meaning shifts from neutral to negative.

Critics disagree on whether the negative meanings existed before the 16th or 17th centuries. Burrow marks two clear stages: "rises like smoke. The sense "to stink" is not recorded before the eighteenth century" (2008, 640); but Blakemore considers that the neutral and negative meanings coexisted before that period:

> "although the strongly pejorative sense […] is apparently unrecorded before 1679 or 1710, the various forms of the word had much earlier frequently carried unpleasant connotations (of smoke, sweat, marsh vapour, etc.) […] "reeks", therefore, is not so neutral as it is generally considered by most commentators." (Blakemore and Hecht 1996, 248)

Although the neutral meanings from the first group coexist with those more negative of the second group from the 16th or 17th centuries, causing a polysemic situation, it is clear that a change has been produced and it could cause problems to interpret **reek** in *Sonnet 130*.

If this line is read just taking into account the current meaning today the implication might be that the lady has bad breath –with the comparison with perfumes maybe supporting this interpretation. I agree with Blakemore & Hecht, however, in that reek here means just "exhale, emit air" with no negative meanings attached. In this reading, the poet admits that his lover's breath does not smell unusually well but simply well, on the average; the comparison is employed to make it clear that his intention is not to idealise his lover:

> "Shakespeare could have used a gentler and more flattering word if he wished to imply that his mistress was a paragon of earthly delights. The expression is on a par with the earlier descriptions of dun breasts and hair made of black wire." [14]

4.b.iii.- Rare

"And yet, by heaven, I think my love as **rare**
As any she belied with false compare." (ll. 13-14)

The word, comes from ME *rār(e)*[15] which is a borrowing from classical Latin *rārus*, meaning "of loose structure, porous, widely spaced, infrequent, seldom found" (OED) through OF *rer*, meaning "unusual, exceptional, seldom found (end of the 12th cent.)" (OED).

The semantic change occurred in **rare** seems to me less evident than those described in the previous words. The original meanings are those of the words from the language they were borrowed: "(of an organ or tissue, soil, or other substance) having the constituent material or particles loose or not closely packed together; not dense or compact… (of air or a gas) having low density, thin"(1400-1990 OED), and referring to the colour: "thin, faint; pale"(1440-1985 OED). These meanings and others which are similar make reference to the physical characteristics of something which is not compressed or crowded but loose, or to something frail or pallid.

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[14] Shakespeare Online http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/130
[15] rār(e (adj.) Also rēre. (a) Of thin substance, light, airy; of soil: loose, light, aerated; also, light-colored; of a human organ, the skin, etc.: porous, spongy; (b) sparsely distributed; (c) thinly woven; (d) scarce, seldom found; (e) of small quantity, small. From the ME Dictionary http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED35926

However, a second group of meanings does not indicate any physical observable features but frequency: "occurring infrequently, encountered only occasionally or at intervals, uncommon."[16] This meaning lasts from the middle 15th century to the 21th century and it is the principal meaning of the word today. Directly connected with this is the third group of meanings for **rare**: "Unusually good, fine, or worthy; of uncommon excellence or merit".[17] The semantic change involved here is amelioration; while the second group of meanings ("uncommon, infrequent, occasional") are generally neutral, the third group add a positive value of exceptionality, beauty and extraordinariness: "precious, superb, of fine and unusual quality. The word has more of the sense of something wonderful and rich than in its modern uses. Shakespeare uses it far more frequently in the later plays."[18] This is the meaning present in *Sonnet 130*. The poet characterizes his loved one as being special, wonderful, although his mistress is not exceptionally beautiful.

Blakemore and Hecht define **rare** as "splendid, excellent" (1996, 248) and Burrow as "exceptional, precious" (2008, 640), that is to say, the meanings of the third group, without adding any more comment on the meaning.

4. b.vi. - Mistress

"My **mistress**' eyes are nothing like the sun," (l. 1)
"Than in the breath that from my **mistress** reeks." (l. 8)
"My **mistress** when she walks treads on the ground" (l. 12)

As attested in the OED, the word **mistress** comes from ME *maisterace* (presumably having entered the English language in the 14th century). It is a borrowing from Anglo-Norman and Middle French *maistresse, mestresse*: 'governess, duenna', deriving from OF *maistresse*, formed by the addition of the French suffix –*esse* to *maister* (master) to form the feminine word. *Maister* is connected to the IE[19] root *meg-,* meaning high official (< "he who is greater").

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[16] See Appendix 2 a.
[17] See Appendix 2 b.
[18] Shakespeare Online http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/130
[19] https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html

Many meanings have been added to the original of the French word from which **mistress** was borrowed: "governess, woman in a position of authority, owner",[20] some of which are still in use today: it is attested for that period in the OED as "A female tutor or teacher, esp. in a school; a woman who teaches a particular subject" (1340-1987), "The female head of a family, household, or other establishment" (1375-1997" and "A woman who employs others in her service; a woman who has authority over servants" (1393-1993); and others which did not reach the present day. These are related to the meaning of a woman as a divine or god-like figure, a muse or a patron or a governess.[21] In the next centuries, the number of meanings increases rapidly.

The 15th century is the period when more new meanings are incorporated: To the six original meanings, another six meanings are added: 1. title of address, 2. a woman expert in some field, 3. a loved woman/a lover, 4. a governor, 5. a woman having power to control, and 6. a thing personified as female. The meanings that appear in this century are the result of expansion in (5); pejoration in (3), when **mistress** means prostitute or women with which a man maintains an illicit sexual relationship (except in those cases in which it means woman courted by a man, where the change involved is expansion); amelioration in (4, 2); metaphorization in (6); or metonymy in (1).

In the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the new meanings reflect a process of expansion ("A female possessor or owner *of* something; one who has a specified virtue, condition, or quality in her possession or at her disposal", 1530-1930 OED) and amelioration ("The wife of an important member of a community, as a farmer, a minister, etc.", 1683-1960 OED), ("Used in the titles of female court officials having duties of the nature of control or superintendence", 1710-1952 OED). These meanings and those of the 15th century reflect the changing social situation of England as well as the changing position of women in society.

The meaning of **mistress** in *Sonnet 130* seems to be, in all likelihood, "a woman loved and courted by a man, a sweetheart"[22] since it is a love poem. This particular meaning is attested in quotes from the 15th to the 19th centuries" and the type of semantic change

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[20]*Dictionnaire Étymologique de l'Ancien Français* http://deaf-server.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/lemme/maistre#maistresse
[21] See Appendix 2 c.
[22] See Appendix 2 d.

involved in its development is expansion since it includes a new role: the woman as the loved one.

However, it might be interesting to explore the social position occupied by a **mistress** at the time. Terttu Nevalainen has written about the "generalisation of titles in Early Modern Britain […] motivated partly by increased social mobility, partly by reasons of courtesy and prestige" (1999, 438). Nevalainen comments that in the 16th and 17th centuries, the economic wealth and land owning were more important than lineage, making definitions of gentility more flexible than in previous periods. While some families failed, other ascended through the wealth acquired through trade, by the royal favour or by the tenant of lands. "The most thoroughgoing changes affected the titles of Master (Mr) and Mistress (Mrs) … used with reference to the lesser nobility of Tudor and Stuart England." (Nevalainen 1999, 438) Therefore, **Mistress** was a title given to the women belonging to the landed gentry, that is, wealthy landowners that were below the peers but still belonging to the upper class and higher than yeoman and husbandman, who worked the land. To be more specific, "An esquire or a plain Gentleman was called Master, and women of these ranks, both married and unmarried, had the title of Mistress." (Nevalainen 1999, 438) An esquire was below a knight and higher than a gentleman, and was usually the heir of a knight or the eldest son of a peer. However, because of the mentioned social mobility, among other reasons, "the title of Master was naturally extended to gentlemen who had earned their position by virtue of their office rather than by birth." (Nevalainen 1999, 439) That is to say, it was used to refer to people of a lower rank, giving more importance to riches than to lineage. Because of this change, "Shakespeare's First Folio was entitled Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies (1623)." (Nevalainen 1999, 439) The same change happens in the case of women but more radical so that **mistress** is extended to denominate all women, independently of their rank:

> Thus, in his Falstaff plays Shakespeare had already generalised the corresponding title of Mistress to all his female characters (Salmon 1967, 53). Mrs continued to be the abbreviated form used of both single and married women by the end of the EModE period, although the shortened form Miss also appeared as a title of (young) unmarried women. (Nevalainen 1999, 439)

Here there is a clear process of expansion. First, that expansion is from a title referring to the wife of an esquire to a title referring to the wife of a gentleman (a lower rank)

as well; Shakespeare uses **mistress** to refer to all women or female characters in his works, no matter what their social position, their wealth or marital status.

There has been constant polysemy throughout the history of this word. In some cases the meaning was ambiguous so that another word was used instead of **mistress** to avoid confusion or uncomfortable situations, as in the case of the meaning "female sweetheart" (1425-1891 OED), which may have caused interpretation problems since "By the late 19th cent. this usage was generally avoided as liable to be mistaken for sense": "A woman other than his wife with whom a man has a long-lasting sexual relationship" [23](1439-1989 OED) This sense is close to the definition of prostitute and should not be confused with the meaning "sweetheart". Burrow comments on the possible interpretations of **mistress**:

> "She is referred to as "the mistress" in the commentary, and that word, like "friend", carries a range of senses: it can mean "the woman who commands my affection" as well as "the woman who illicitly takes the place of a wife". Her role is slightly different in each poem, and there is no particular reason to think her as one person" (2008,131)

The woman described by both definitions is a woman who receives love from a man -both meanings appear in the same period. However, the nature of that love is different: presumably licit vs illicit. *Sonnet 130* is a love poem in which the author declares his love for a woman who, for him, is unique: *My* is given a proud emphasis to distinguish the poet's mistress from the majority of Elizabethan sonneteers' mistresses." (Burrow 2008:640) but still an average looking woman: "his mistress is a real down-to-earth woman, not the sort of idealized fiction imagined by other love poets" (Blakemore, Hecht 1996:248). Her social rank is not known. Therefore, **mistress** in this sonnet does not necessarily make reference to a woman with whom the poet has an extramarital sexual relationship –the point being that she is the woman loved by a man who courts her.

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[23] See Appendix 2 e.

5. – Results

The six processes mentioned in section 2.a.i.2. (pages 9 and 10) (expansion, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphor and metonymy) have been shown to be involved in the semantic changes undergone by the words selected for this TFG, although their frequency and the amount of semantic change is not the same for each of them.

In the word **wire**, the most relevant process is metaphorization (wires made of precious metal were used as a metaphor for the poet's lover's hair); but there were other processes affecting words whose importance for our study is secondary. These processes were metonymy, as a relationship is established from shape (slender threads) to material (metal threads); expansion, since a sense was added to include also something non-metallic which has the form of function of a wire; and narrowing in the cases in which the uses, shapes, materials or colours are specified. The metaphor may induce contemporary readers to think that the hair of the poet's mistress was rough like cables although Shakespeare was describing a black but "precious" hair.

In **reek,** the most important process is pejoration (from smoke or vapour to bad smell). As noted in 4.b.ii., the risk for the inattentive modern reader here is to interpret that the lady's breath stinks while the poet simply affirms that it cannot be compared with perfumes since it is not perfect. Other processes involved are narrowing, when the source or cause of the smoke was specified, and expansion, in those cases in which **reek** refers to the remembrance of an unpleasant situation, without identifying its cause.

In **rare**, the process that is of more relevance is amelioration since the meaning "uncommon", which is the most frequent meaning of the word today, is neutral but **rare** in the sense of "precious", which it the meaning **rare** has in the sonnet, is more positive

As for **mistress**, the six processes described in previous chapters are involved in the semantic history of this word. We find amelioration (sometimes mixed with expansion) in those cases in which **mistress** comes to mean woman of high rank, woman as a goddess, as a governor or as a skilled person; we also find pejoration in the changes from woman of virtue to woman who maintains an illicit sexual relationship with a man. Metaphor comes up when **mistress** is used for things personified as females and metonymy appears in the case in which **mistress** is a title of respect since there is a relation of the "person" for "the

way to make reference to the person". Finally, we can find expansion when **mistress** refers to women having control over something (without identifying it), and in the extension of the title **Mistress** to women of lower rank and later to all women. There is also narrowing in the senses for a woman skilled in something, or a loved woman. However, the two most relevant processes for this essay are expansion and pejoration: expansion is involved in the meaning that **mistres**s has, in my view, in *Sonnet* 130: "sweetheart"; pejoration, is involved in the incorporation to **mistress** of the senses: "illicit lover/prostitute".

6. – Conclusions

The most frequent process found in the analysis of *Sonnet 130* is expansion –also the most frequent for words present in the language from the very beginning, where meanings tend to grow less restricted, more generalized, and to expand to convey wider ranges of meanings or to augment the *denotata*. Moreover, it is important to note that, in polysemic situations, the process of expansion sometimes occurs parallel to a process of narrowing, as it is the case of **wire** or **mistress**. Pejoration and amelioration are the next in the scale of frequency, while metaphor and metonymy are the least frequent processes.

The amount of semantic change varies enormously from meaning to meaning, ranging from drastic changes to small nuances, as it happens in **rare**. Moreover, in some cases the meanings of the words appear clearly grouped by periods, as in the case of **wire**, while in others the different meanings overlap in waves or dispersed, as in **mistress**, making it more difficult to separate the different episodes of change. Also, the rate of change is different for each word (the appearance of new meanings in **mistress** is continuous while the opposite happens for **rare**), which has clear influence over the degree of polysemy and accumulation of meanings of each word.

As noted above in the introduction (page 4) for this TFG, this topic was selected, first, in order to contribute to the general awareness of the changing nature of the meaning of words and second, to show how that awareness is essential for a better understanding of Shakespeare's sonnets in particular (and Shakespeare's works in general). Through a detailed study of the semantic changes undergone by just a probe constituted by four words

from *Sonnet 130*, we hope to have provided evidence that semantic change may lead to misinterpretations (which, most importantly, can get fossilized if spread and established) because the most likely and appropriate meanings of words at the time a particular work has been written have not been taken into account.

The English language has experienced many crucial changes at all levels in its long history, and these are to be taken into account when analysing a text from any given earlier period. Wrong readings and misinterpretations are a real risk –especially when editions and translations are not the product of rigorous philological work. This is the kind of work needed so that the poet's mistress in Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* is not perceived as a somewhat smelly, bad looking woman but a real woman, yet precious and unique for her lover.

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APPENDIX 1

Poetry has an inescapable oral dimension that can be accessed and enjoyed more easily than ever in our times thanks to the new technologies. There are many recorded versions of the *Sonnets,* some of them by famous voices as Shakespeare is an obvious must for actors. For reasons of copyright, this appendix contains only the links to those performances found in open access.

Some performances of the sonnet are the following:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5aWWPATT74

In this video, one of the actors from the cast of the TV series *Doctors* performs some sonnets as part of a BBC project to celebrate the year of Shakespeare.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP06F0yynic

This is the version by Alan Rickman. The sonnet forms part of a collection recorded and published in CD named *When Love Speaks (Shakespears's Sonnets)* released by EMI Classics in April 2002 with the voices of artists such as John Gielgud, Imelda Staunton, Ralph y Joseph Fiennes, etc. The title was taken from *Love's Labour's Lost: "And when love speaks, the voice of all the gods makes Heaven drowsy with the harmony"* (l. 681)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsxVtwsNVUs

This video is part of an online recital in which the Australian actor David Meadows performs all 154 of William Shakespeare's sonnets. This project is exclusive to YouTube.

APPENDIX 2

This appendix contains quotations from the OED that complement the definitions of the words in the analysis. They have been included in this appendix for reasons of space.

a. (page 22) "in "tr. Thomas à Kempis De Imitatione Christi (Trin. Dublin) (1893) 9 (MED), Be rare [L. rarus] amonge yonge peple & straunge folkes." (1500 OED)

b. (page 22) "1483 Caxton Cato 2 b, Therin they fonde many noble and rare books" (OED)

c. (page 23) "A female patron or inspirer of an art, religion, way of life, etc. " (1387-1709): "a1387   J. Trevisa tr. R. Higden Polychron. (St. John's Cambr.) (1869) II. 23 (MED), Maistresse [L. praesul] of þilke welles is þe grete spirit of Minerua." (OED)

 "A woman, goddess, or thing personified as female, which has control over a person or is regarded as a protecting or guiding influence" (1393-1679): "a1393   Gower Confessio Amantis (Fairf.) viii. 2331 (MED),   For Nature is, under the Mone, Maistresse of every lives kinde." (OED)

"A woman who has charge of a child or young person; a governess " (1330-1599): "c1330 (▸?a1300)   *Sir Tristrem* (1886) l. 102 (*MED*),   To hir maistresse sche gan say Þat hye was boun to go To þe kniȝt þer he lay." (OED)

d. (page 24) "c.1425   in R. H. Robbins *Secular Lyrics 14th & 15th Cent*. (1952) 152   Now good swet hart & myn ane good mestrys I dew recumend me to yower pety." (OED)

e. (page 25) "?a1439   Lydgate tr. Fall of Princes (Bodl. 263) i. 2566   Callid..a fals traitouresse..Off newe diffamed, and named a maistresse Off fals moordre." (OED)