Romeo and Juliet was written around 1595, when William Shakespeare was about 31 years old. In Shakespeare's day, England was just barely catching up to the Renaissance that had swept over Europe beginning in the 1400s. But England's theatrical performances soon put the rest of Europe to shame. Everyone went to plays, and often more than once a week. There you were not only entertained but also exposed to an explosion of new phrases and words entering the English language for overseas and from the creative minds of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

The language Shakespeare uses in his plays is known as Early Modern English, and is approximately contemporaneous with the writing of the King James Bible. Believe it or not, much of Shakespeare's vocabulary is still in use today. For instance, Howard Richler in *Take My Words* noted the following phrases originated with Shakespeare:

- without rhyme or reason
- in a pickle
- vanished into thin air
- more sinned against than sinning
- playing fast and loose
- slept a wink
- breathing your last
- point your finger
- send me packing
- bid me good riddance
- heart of gold

- flesh and blood
- with bated breath
- budge an inch
- fair play
- brevity is the soul of wit
- foregone conclusion
- dead as a door-nail
- the devil incarnate
- laughing-stock
- sorry sight
- come full circle

Nonetheless, Shakespeare does use words or forms of words that have gone out of use. Here are some **guidelines**:

1) Shakespeare uses some personal pronouns that have become archaic. In speaking to *one* other person, Shakespeare's characters sometimes use *you* and *your*, as we would today. But often they will use the older *thou*, *thee, thy,* and *thine*:

- Didst *thou* hear a noise?
- I see *thee* still.

- We are sent to give *thee* thanks.
- More is *thy* due.

Special archaic verb forms often go with *thou*:

- Thou *shalt* beget kings.
- Thou *art* mad.

- Thou *knowest*.
- Where *hast* thou been?

In speaking to several other persons, a speaker sometimes uses *ye* instead of *you*:

- At *ye* fantastical, or that indeed / Which outwardly *ye* show?

2) Other archaic verb forms survive in much of the dialogue:

- he *hath* lost   (has)
- it *seemeth*   (seems)

- I have *spoke*   (spoken)
- Macbeth *doth* come   (does)

3) Various auxiliary or helping verbs are used differently from the way we use them today. In questions and negative statements, the charactrs soemties use *no, does*, or *did* the way we would today. ("What *do* you mean?") But often these added words are missing, as they were in older forms of English:

- I know not   (I do not know)
- See you not?   (Do you not see?)
- Dismayed not this our captains?   (Did this not dismay our captains?)
- Goes Fleance with you?   (Does Fleance go with you?)

Often a verb alone is used where today we would expect an added *let* or *may*:

- Retire we to our chamber.   (Let us retire to our chamter.)
- so please you   (May it please you)

The word *would* often means *which* or *want*. *Were* is often used where today we would expect *would* to be:

- *Would* they had stayed!   (I *wish* they had stayed!)
- Thou *wouldst* be great.   (You *want* to be great.)
- Meeting *were* bare without it.   (A gathering *would be* bare without it.)

4) Some familiar expressions occur over and over in the dialogue but have become archaic in modern English. Studying the following list will help you understand more of Shakespeare's lines (use it as a lexicon or dictionary for the questions that follow):

anon	soon, right away	maw	stomach
aught	anything	mettle	courage
aye	always, ever	naught	nothing
betimes	soon, early	nigh	near
durst	dared	of late	recently
ere	before	prithee	please
fain	gladly	quoth	spoke, said
forsooth	truly	sirrah	boy, servant
hark	listen	thither	to that place
hence	for here	thrice	three times
hie	hurry	twain	two
hither	to here	were	would be
issue	offspring	wherefore	why
liege	overlord	whence	from where
like	likely	whither	where to
loath	unwilling	withal	with, with this
methinks	I think	within	inside
methought	I thought	without	outside