

ENGL 4303: Introduction to Shakespeare

Assignment 2: History of a Word

Due by Friday, Nov 1, 10:45am, in *hard copy* in class or to my mailbox (Kimpel 331)

20% of Grade

approx. 1000 words

Purpose

Knowledge:

After doing this assignment you will understand:

1. How awareness of archaic and obsolete meanings of words changes or enhances our interpretations of early modern texts.
2. How an early modern audience would have perceived a passage from one of Shakespeare's history plays.

Skills:

After doing this assignment you will be able to:

1. Use two important research tools: the Oxford English Dictionary and the database Early English Books Online.
2. Make a significant connection between passages from Shakespeare and another source from the same period.
3. Craft an argument for how a Shakespearean passage would have been understood by an early modern audience, using supporting evidence from within and outside of the play, a clear organizational structure, and fluid prose.

Task

Produce an approximately 1000-word essay that argues for how an early modern audience would have understood a passage that you choose from one of Shakespeare's history plays that we have read in class: *Henry IV Part 1*, *Henry IV Part 2*, or *Henry V*. You will base your argument on *one word* in your chosen passage and on your research into that word's meanings and uses in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. Your research will draw on two resources: the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), and the database Early English Texts Online (EEBO). Both are available through the University of Arkansas library, from the comfort of your own home or from anywhere else with an internet connection.

Here is a recommended sequence of steps:

Research stage

- Identify 2-4 passages that you might become your focus. To identify these passages, you might . . .
 - Re-visit a few passages that you found interesting, that you have some notes about, or that you simply want to dive into more deeply.
 - If you're stuck, consider re-reading a longish speech rather than rapid exchanges of dialogue. Speeches allow you to grasp the context.

- Read the notes at the bottom of each page for words that have meanings you did not expect.
- Explore the archaic or obsolete meanings of 4-6 particular words.
 - To familiarize yourself with how the *OED* works, look at the “keys to symbols and other conventions” here: <http://0-public.oed.com.library.uark.edu/how-to-use-the-oed/key-to-symbols-and-other-conventions/>
 - Search for the “Oxford English Dictionary Online” in our library’s online card catalogue, or simply go here: <http://libinfo.uark.edu/eresources/help.asp?TitleCode=OED>.
 - Look up some interesting words one by one. Be sure to read through *all* of the potential meanings of the word and when those meanings were recorded. Consider whether anything from this range of meanings sheds further light on a passage that you have chosen.
 - Make a note of other texts from between 1500 and 1700 that the OED uses as examples for texts in which the specific word is used with that particular meaning.
- Look up other early non-Shakespearean English texts in which your chosen word appears.
 - EEBO is available by typing “Early English Books Online” when searching for Databases on the library’s website.
 - You can look up a book by title, author, or year. Start with the texts you found listed in the OED.
 - If reading early modern typeface is too daunting, try to find a text that has a searchable file of its text.
 - By searching through an electronic version of the text, identify the context in which the word that you have chosen is used.

Writing stage

- Outline your paper. Here’s a sample of what the outline could include—
 - Introductory paragraph that identifies your chosen passage, why the passage is significant (to larger themes in the play), and what word sheds light on the passage’s meaning.
 - A paragraph about the word you have chosen and its range of meanings.
 - An argument for how you think the word is being used in the passage you’ve chosen.
 - An example of how this word is used in another source with a similar range of meanings.
 - A concluding argument for how the word you have chosen would have enabled the audience to understand the larger passage and to make broader cultural associations.
- Draft your paper.
 - Follow your outline to write.
 - Be sure to include direct quotations from Shakespeare.
 - Compose clear transitions between paragraphs that help the reader follow your broader argument.
- Revise and proofread your paper.
 - Run grammar-check and spell-check to catch basic errors.

- *Optional:* Contact the Writing Center (CLASS+) for assistance with structure, style, and mechanics.
- Print out your paper and read it aloud. This is the most proven technique for catching errors and improving style.

Here are a few steps I suggest you avoid:

- Choosing a passage that you feel you *should* investigate more because we spoke about it in-depth in class, rather than something that piques your own interest.
- Choosing an abstract and too-obviously significant word that appears very often in the plays, such as “honor.”
- Narrowing in on one passage or word too quickly rather than finding a passage and a word that will work well for the assignment. You will probably have to explore several options first.
- Worrying about how to cite the OED or your early modern source properly. You can cite the Shakespeare text by Act, Scene, and Line numbers, and you can include the author, title, and year of your other text in the body of your paper. Then, just cite the text by page number. I think it will be obvious to me what you are citing.

Criteria

I will assess whether your paper meets, exceeds, or does not meet the following criteria, using a template like this:

Needs Improvement	Criteria	Above and Beyond
	<i>Argument:</i> States a clear argument for how an early modern audience would have understood a specific Shakespearean text. Makes this argument persuasively using direct evidence and careful analysis.	
	<i>Research:</i> Identifies an interesting range of meanings for a word, clearly contextualizes this word in another source, and demonstrates the significance of this research to a Shakespearean passage.	
	<i>Structure:</i> Paper is clear to follow, paragraphs are limited to one main idea that is stated at the beginning, transitions between paragraphs connect reader to larger argument.	

	<i>Style:</i> Prose style is clear, smooth, and engaging.	
	<i>Mechanics:</i> No grammatical errors or typos.	

Bonus / Deductions

- Late hard copies will lose 5 points after 10:45am on the due date, and every 24 hours after that.
- You can receive 2 bonus points if I receive an electronic notification that you have visited the Quality Writing Center (CLASS+)

Examples of Effective Revision

One important area of improvement for most student writers is rephrasing the first sentences of paragraphs to refer back to the overall argument. For example—

Example 1: In Act 3 Scene 3, King Henry V uses the word ‘leviathan’ in his speech towards the Governor of Harfleur.

Suggested re-write: In his speech to the governor of Harfleur, King Henry V uses the word ‘leviathan’ to warn the governor that Henry’s men could be ungovernably violent.

Example 2: Other definitions of ‘bond’ listed in the *OED* date back to medieval and Old English times.

Suggested re-write: Medieval and Old English definitions of bond focus on class and rank, suggesting that Antonio’s “bond” with Shylock has turned the former into the latter’s slave.

Another area for improvement is when introducing quotations. The re-write below also corrects a run-on sentence.

Example 3: Because honor cannot protect against physical injuries, it is a mark for death, he explores this in the following lines, “Can honor set a leg? . . .”

Suggested re-write: Because honor cannot protect against physical injuries, it is a mark for death. Falstaff explores this theme when he asks, “Can honor set a leg? . . .”

Sample Paper Outline: The Sting of Ceremony in *Henry V*

Argument: Based on Henry V’s use of the term “ceremony” in his soliloquy and elsewhere in Act 4, Scene 1 of *Henry V*, it is clear that symbols and rituals such as coronation create a painful distance between the king and other human beings. A fuller understanding of the religious and pejorative connotations of “ceremony” also reveals that Shakespeare draws on the anti-Catholic

and anti-Semitic attitudes of his audience in order to communicate the complete failure of ceremonies to ease Henry V's soul, just as political and religious ceremonies failed the souls of Henry IV and Richard II.

Paragraph 1: What “ceremony” means in speeches by Henry V.

In Act 4, Scene 1, Henry V reflects on “ceremony” both in his soliloquy (4.1.223-282) and in his speech while undercover (4.1.101-113). A key line from the latter passage is, “His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man.” In other words, it is only “ceremonies” that distinguish a king from other human beings. Henry V develops this theme more fully in the soliloquy, in which he blames ceremony for his sleepless nights.

Paragraph 2: Alternate meanings of ceremony according to the OED, and what these reveal about Henry V's use of the term.

A note in my edition of the play indicates that “ceremonies” means “symbols of royalty.” However, from looking up “ceremony” in the OED, I learn that the word has the meaning “Performance of rites, ceremonial observances” in both religious *and* political contexts (see definition 3a). It can also have disparaging connotations (see definition 1b). In the soliloquy, Henry V makes full use of these religious and pejorative uses, calling ceremony an “idol” and a “god.”

Paragraph 3: An example of how another sixteenth-century writer uses “ceremony,” and what this reveals about what Henry V means by the term.

Under definition 1b in the *OED*, there is a quote from a 1531 work by J. Frith, in which the word “ceremony” appears: “Shall we become Jewes and go backe agayne to the shadowe and ceremoneye sith we haue the bodye and significacion which is Christ?” Here, the accusation of “ceremony” is associated with perceptions of Jewish worship and contrasted with Frith's ideal form of Christian worship. Looking up the full text of Frith in EEBO, we find out that the quote comes from Frith's argument against the doctrine of Purgatory. Frith uses “ceremony” to describe religious beliefs and practices that he considers misguided and harmful, including prayers for the dead to help them pass through purgatory more swiftly. For a sixteenth-century audience, then, “ceremony” would be associated not just with kingship rituals but with the kinds of religious practices that anti-Catholic writers critiqued, while drawing on anti-Semitism to make those practices seem all the worse. It is likely that Henry V's speech would tap into a broader hatred for “ceremony” shared by the audience.

Conclusion: How all of this research illuminates the passage from Henry V more fully.

It is already clear from Henry V's soliloquy that he experiences the same insomnia described by his father in Henry IV, Part 2, 3.1.4-31. Henry IV had hoped that Henry V would have an easier time governing since he inherited the crown peacefully, but this appears not to be the case. The notion of ceremony not being particularly effective recurs in a brief passage in which Henry V explains all he has done to make amends with the usurped Richard II—paying five hundred people to pray for Richard's soul, and funding two chapels where priests say masses for Richard,

all to assist him through purgatory (Henry V, 4.1.296-300). However, Henry V doesn't really think these ceremonies will be effective: "More will I do; / Though all that I can do is nothing worth" (4.1.300-301). Thus, ceremonies cannot set Henry V's soul at ease, either through a smooth coronation as the legitimate successor of Henry IV, or as a means to reconcile with the soul of the usurped and executed Richard II. Shakespeare's audience would have drawn on their anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism to share Henry V's loathing of ceremony.