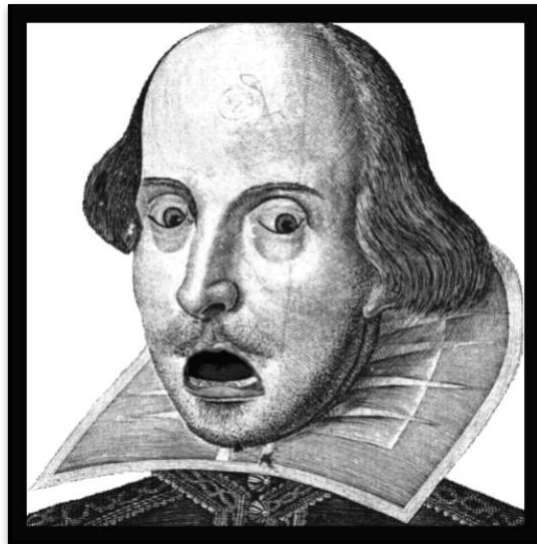


sounding
SHAKESPEARE!



Assignment Summary:

I teach this assignment when teaching *Hamlet* in my general education literature surveys, but I have also included the project in proposed courses on oral reading in the nineteenth century and on Shakespeare performance and adaptation. The project seeks to profile how both reading practices and the cultural reception of Shakespeare have changed, while also honing students' close reading and research skills. Also, beware—this project will require goofiness!

Task: Record yourself reciting a passage from *Hamlet* according to the instructions of a recitation/elocution manual printed from 1750-1950. Research the manual, its author, and—if you would like—other relevant historical context. Write a reflection (3-4 pgs double-spaced) on how your recitation and research informed your understanding of the passage, as well as the play as a whole.

ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

Passage Selected: DATE

Close Reading Due: DATE

In-Class Recitation Workshop: DATE

In-Class Research Workshop: DATE

Recitation Recordings and Reflection Due: DATE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Develop close reading practices by engaging with a brief passage from Shakespeare’s Hamlet and practicing acute attention to language, syntax, form, and the use of literary devices.
- ❖ Explore how performance practices have changed how readers of the past and present engage with, interpret, and understand Shakespeare and Shakespearean drama.
- ❖ Consider how autobiographical and historical context inform these performance practices.
- ❖ Gain familiarity with research tools and university resources, including the OED, HathiTrust Digital Library, ECCO, NCCO, and the digital studio.
- ❖ Experiment with how reading aloud can make apparent nuances difficult to “hear” in silent reading.

PROCESS STEPS

Selecting your passage

Read through the “Passages for Recitation” document on ICON. Select first, second, and third choices for passages you would like to recite. You can choose based on the “passion” you are supposed to convey, the manual containing the passage, or, of course, the passage itself. Come to class on the day specified above and you will sign up for a passage in class. You cannot recite the same passage as another student.

Initial Close Reading

In 1-1.5 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt Times New Roman font, perform a close reading of your passage. The first paragraph should provide a concise summary of the passage (what is the character saying, in your own words?) as well as the context of the passage in the scene, act, and play as a whole. In the second paragraph, perform a close reading of the passage, analyzing the form (*how* the content is expressed) by attending to literary devices like rhyme, alliteration, assonance, word choice, punning, metaphor, symbol, etc.

Find the passage your manual

Locate your manual on HathiTrust Digital Library: <https://www.hathitrust.org/>. HathiTrust is a digital collection of scanned documents, and if the documents are in the public domain, you can access them for free! Find your passage by searching your online manual.

Practice Reading!

Each of the passages corresponds with an emotion, or what elocutionists called a “dramatic passion” (envy, disgust, joy). Each manual has a set of instructions about how to perform each passion. Read through and take notes on your manual’s instructions for the passion you’re supposed to convey. Then, practice reading your passage with your body and voice imitating the instructions of the manual. This is supposed to feel silly! We will devote some class days to practicing and

experimenting with imitating these passions, but you should practice on your own too.

Research your manual

In preparation for your Reflection Paper, you will want to research your manual in order to contextualize the author's instructions for recitation. Some questions to guide your research (you don't need to answer all of them):

- Read the manual's "Preface" or "Introduction." Why was this author writing this manual? What did s/he want to teach his/her readers? Why does s/he think recitation or elocution is important?

- When was it first published? Where was it published? What important historical events were occurring in this time and place that could have influenced this author?
 - Oxford Reference Timelines (select by century):
http://www.oxfordreference.com/browse?avail_0=lib&isQuickSearch=true&pageSize=10&sort=titlesort&type_0=timelines

- Who is the author? What was his/her career? How might have his/her life influenced his/her ideas about performing Shakespeare and reading aloud more generally?
 - Oxford Dictionary of National Biography:
<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/>

- Research the history of your "passion" by looking up the word on the Oxford English Dictionary. How was the word understood in Shakespeare's time? The time of your manual? Ours?
 - Oxford English Dictionary:
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/>

- Can you find record of any performances of *Hamlet* in the decades before this manual was published? Can you find reviews of these performances? Who acted in them? Do you know who acted in or directed these plays?
 - ECCO (Eighteenth Century Collections Online):
http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/ecco/start.do?prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=uiowa_main
 - NCCO (Nineteenth Century Collections Online):
http://gdc.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/gdc/ncco?p=NCCO&u=uiowa_main

Record Your Recitation:

Once you've practiced performing (in voice and body!) your passage with the passion your manual suggests, audio record your performance.

You can record yourself with

- The University of Iowa Library's One Button Studio:
<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/onebuttonstudio/>
- Using Garage Band, Audacity, or iPhone voice memos

The only requirement is that you turn in a clear, high-quality .mp3 or .mp4 recording of your passage to the ICON Dropbox. In your recording, include your name, and a brief introduction of the passage, including the scene #, act #, and character's name. Then, recite your passage according to the manual's instructions! The more melodramatic, the better!

Research and Reflection Paper

Write a 4-5 page reflection in light of your research and your experience practicing and recording your recitation.

- 2-2.5 pages of this reflection should provide historical and biographical contextualization for your manual's instructions based on your research. These pages should answer the question: how does the historical and biographical context of this manual influence its instructions on how to perform Shakespeare?
- 2-2.5 pages of this reflection should comprise of your personal reflections on the experience: How did your reading of this passage change through the act of performing with your voice and body? Do certain words or phrases seem more important? Different in meaning? Deserving more or less emphasis? What was difficult about delivering these lines according to the instructions on the manual? How did these difficulties affect how you read the lines? If you were to write an elocution manual, how would you differently instruct actors to read this passage?