

Shakespeare's Weird Words

#4: Powerful language, Shakespearean swearing, and other fun or unusual words

Powerful language

Weird word	Meaning	Example
avaunt	go away	Avaunt! be gone! In <i>Othello</i> , the title character says this in response to Iago's suggestions about Desdemona's behaviour.
beseech	beg	Your name, I beseech you, sir? In <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , Nick Bottom asks the name of one of the Titania's followers.
chide	scold	I will no further chide you. In <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Sebastian accepts Antonio's friendship.
churl	rude person	O churl! Drunk all and left no friendly drop To help me after! In <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> , Juliet uses this term for Romeo, who's drunk every drop of the poison.
entreat	beg	Shall I entreat thy love? I will. This is a very small part of a love letter in <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> from Don Armado to Jaquenetta.
fie	an interjection expressing dismay	Fie, how my bones ache! In <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> , Nurse complains about running around to deliver messages between the young lovers.
tarry	wait or linger	I'll tarry no longer with you. Farewell, good Signior Love. In <i>As You Like It</i> , Jaques doesn't really enjoy Orlando's company.
woo	propose love	When I come to woo ladies, I frighten them. In <i>Henry the Fifth</i> , Henry acknowledges to Katherine more experience as a soldier than as a lover.

Shakespearean swearing

Weird word	Meaning	Example
by my troth	by my faith	By my troth, I speak my thought. In <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i> , Don Pedro assures Claudio that Hero is worthy of marriage.
forsooth	truly	Because the King, forsooth, will have it so. In <i>Henry the Sixth, Part 2</i> Queen Margaret speaks for King Henry, challenging a courtier named Salisbury.
marry	an exclamation meaning "By Mary"	Of Mantua, sir? Marry, God forbid! As part of an elaborate trick in <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> , Tranio pretends that the Pedant is in danger as someone visiting Padua from Mantua.
zounds	by god's wounds	Zounds, sir, you are robbed! In <i>Othello</i> , Iago uses strong language to alarm Brabantio about Desdemona's marriage to Othello.

Other fun, unusual words

Weird word	Meaning	Example
fain	glad or gladly	I would fain know what you have to say. In <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i> , Leonato is having trouble getting a story out of Dogberry and Verges.
haply	by good fortune	Haply, a woman's voice may do some good. In <i>Henry the Fifth</i> , the French Queen Isabel joins the peace negotiations.
methinks	it seems to me	Methinks it is like a weasel. In <i>Hamlet</i> , the title character discusses the shape of a cloud with Polonius.
sup	to eat supper	Will you sup with me tonight, Casca? In <i>Julius Caesar</i> , Cassius invites another senator named Casca to have supper together.

Sources for definitions:

Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary & Language Companion, by David Crystal and Ben Crystal (Penguin, 2002).
Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed through the Vancouver Public Library (2020)

Other fun, unusual words (continued)

Weird word	Meaning	Example
perchance	by chance, perhaps	Perchance he is not drown'd. What think you, sailors? After the shipwreck at the beginning of <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Viola hopes Sebastian is not drowned.
perforce	unavoidably, inevitably	These unseasoned hours perforce must add Unto your sickness. In <i>Henry the Fourth, Part 2</i> , Warwick worries about the King's illness.
prithee	please, from <i>I pray thee</i>	Prithee, be content. In <i>Twelfth Night</i> , Olivia tries to comfort Malvolio, who's been the victim of an elaborate prank.
twain	two, or separate	O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain. In <i>Hamlet</i> , Gertrude describes her broken heart in this way.

Explore

Using your newfound knowledge, see if you can figure out each of the lines below.

Note: they include words from earlier 'Weird Words' resources.

Zounds! I'll entreat no more.	Well, come what will, I'll tarry at home.
Fairies away! We shall chide downright if I longer stay.	By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you.
I prithee, good Prince Hal, help me to my horse.	Methinks I see my father.
Perchance he's hurt i' the battle.	Ay; prithee, sing.
I beseech you, what manner of man is he?	Avaunt! and quit my sight!
Nay, it perchance will sparkle in your eyes.	Fie, thou'rt a churl.
Avaunt, thou witch!	Haply I think on thee.

Create!

Now that you're familiar with these words, try using them in your own writing.

So, who says these lines?

Here's who says each of the quotes on page 3, and in which play. (Tip: don't read this part before completing your exploration and reflection!)

Zounds! I'll entreat no more.
The title character in *Othello*.

Well, come what will, I'll tarry at home.
Hal in *Henry the Fourth, Part 1*.

Fairies away!
We shall chide downright if I longer stay.
Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

By my troth,
I was seeking for a fool when I found you.
Jaques in *As You Like It*.

I prithee, good Prince Hal, help me to my horse.
Falstaff in *Henry the Fourth, Part 1*.

Methinks I see my father.
The title character in *Hamlet*.

Perchance he's hurt i' the battle.
Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*.

Ay; prithee, sing.
Orsino in *Twelfth Night*.

I beseech you, what manner of man is he?
Viola in *Twelfth Night*.

Avaunt! and quit my sight!
The title character in *Macbeth*.

Nay, it perchance will sparkle in your eyes.
Arthur in *King John*.

Fie, thou'rt a churl.
The title character in *Timon of Athens*.

Avaunt, thou witch!
Antipholus of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors*.

Haply I think on thee.
Sonnet 29