



ASSIGNMENT 7
EARLY MODERN ENGLISH

This assignment explores purposeful ambiguity in poetry. *2 pages or 750 words*. Unlike writers of legal or medical prose, poets use ambiguity for artistic effect. The quality of a poem is sometimes gauged by a poet's ability to sustain multiple meanings through careful employment of ambiguous vocabulary. Shakespeare is such a poet. His aim is rarely to record as accurately as possible his feelings and impressions (as might a psychologist or a diarist), but instead to create sensations and intellections within his readers. An intellectual uncertainty caused by lexical ambiguity is one such sensation.

Choose two of the bolded words below. Use the *Oxford English Dictionary*. 1) Describe two or more meanings that your words have, and 2) how those meanings affect the in the poem.

For example, *marriage* in line 1 means the state of matrimony, a dowry, the ceremony itself, any intimate or commercial union, and so on (see *OED*). The word *impediments* in line 2 also has a legal sense, as does *writ* in the last line and many other words in this sonnet. So one could read *marriage* as implying, not necessarily denoting, a commercial union.

SONNET 116

Let me not to the marriage of **true** minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it **alteration** finds,
Or bends with the remover to **remove**.
O no! it is an ever-fixed **mark**
That looks on **tempests** and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring **bark**,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be **taken**.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's **compass** come;
Love **alters** not with his brief hours and weeks,
But **bears** it out even to the edge of **doom**.
If this be error and upon me **prov'd**,
I never **writ**, nor no man ever lov'd.

—William Shakespeare