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EEBO-TCP Editorial Assignment: *Merchant of Venice*

Tasks

Part One: You will modernize (or not), annotate, and edit 35-50 lines of the EEBO-TCP transcription of the 1600 quarto, *Merchant of Venice*. You want to choose a line group that offers insight into one of the plays driving questions (see below).

Tip: By now, I hope you have realized how much editorial intervention impacts the way we read Shakespeare's works. Editors' word choices, their added or omitted lines according to variant texts, treatment of stage directions, regularization of meter and even spelling impact how we receive the play. As you make your decisions, think about how you want someone else to read the play.

Part Two: You will write a 4-5 page essay that reflects on your editorial labor in the context of the play. You must include at least one scholarly source (see also Annotations), and I expect you to liberally cite the *OED*. Please address the following questions:

1. How does your chosen line group inform your interpretation of one of the play's driving questions?
2. What should readers pay particular attention to when they read the text you've prepared? Why?
3. Why did you choose to modernize – or not – the way you did? How does your decision impact your audience?
4. What aspects of editing were most challenging? Most rewarding? Be specific.
5. What questions do you still have about the process of editing and/or the play after completing this assignment?

Tip: You still want to include a thesis statement. For example:

I chose lines x – y because they suggest that the "stuff" of humanity in Shakespeare's MoV is both material and insubstantial at the same time.

Driving Questions

Please either choose one of the questions below to flesh out (I know that's an awful pun, but it was subconscious. I hope you're all thinking about what this play does to our collective subconscious!), or generate one of your own. Once you've chosen a question, then look through the play and select lines that offer you an opportunity to close read and generate textual evidence. Next, review your evidence and take a position.

1. What genre is this play? Look at the title page variants, as well as how plays have been represented over time (as a comedy in F1, published with comedies in early 19th C, etc) and research different productions. Use Aristotle's criteria, but feel free to put pressure on them. (This is a challenging question in the context of a period of literary invention characterized by experimentation.)
2. Scholars debate whether this play is sympathetic to Shylock and Jewish people, or if it's just playing to early English stereotypes – or both. Where do you land?

3. We also debate whether Portia can be considered one of Shakespeare's great female characters; can we overlook the way she treats Shylock? What kind of character *is* she?
4. Student-generated questions here!

Process: Editing the Text

Dramatis Personae

1. Create a *Dramatis Personae* for the entire play. Please place it before your selected line group and be prepared to explain your rationale. Although you are only editing a few lines, your goal is to think how the ordering of your characters ties back to the driving questions the play raises.

Modernization*

1. Number your line selection starting with 1. You will tab out from the end of your line and number the lines in increments of 5.

E.g.,:

To be, or not to be, I there's the point 1

2. Decide upon characters' names and what speech prefixes you think will be most helpful for your audience. If you change names, or use full names, highlight the speech prefixes in **yellow** to indicate your emendation.
3. You may silently modernize vuji's; that means you needn't indicate that you have changed a "v" to a "u," or a "j" to an "i."
4. If you modernize spelling, please highlight your change in **purple** to indicate that you have made a change.
5. Use the *OED* (the only acceptable dictionary in this class!) to look up unfamiliar words in their historical contexts. The *OED* is also a useful tool for figuring out the sense of words in Q1.

Annotation: Explanatory Notes

You must include at least **4 explanatory notes** your line group. Annotations are longer notes that explain something particularly interesting or challenging about the text. An annotation could shed light on an **early modern cultural reference**, **provide deeper context for a word or phrase**, or **connect something in your line group to another moment in the play**.

Writing effective, reliable annotations requires research. If you're puzzled over a word, use the *OED*. If you're curious about what others have said about the line, look it up using *JSTOR Understanding Shakespeare*.

Annotation: Stage Directions

You must include at least **3 stage directions** in your line group. For example:

SD] *Trumpets*.

SD] *Gestures wildly before collapsing on the floor*.

Caution

Be sure to cross-check the EEBO-TCP transcription with the Quarto facsimile. As we have learned, the EEBO-TCP is missing A2v – A3r.

Tips

2. Choose one of the driving questions above, or generate one independently.
3. Describe your setting and how you would stage your selection (no more than 1 para).
4. Make a decision about modernization, edit the selection accordingly (see above), and be prepared to explain your decision. What is gained from modernization? What is lost?
5. Think deeply, critically, and affectively about *your* position on a driving question.
6. Incorporate (gah! Another body-figure!) a topic, opinion, blueprint thesis statement (see *Rams Write*) into your rationale.
7. Integrate an argument from at least 1 scholarly source into your short essay. You may use this argument to either support yours, or as a counter argument.
8. Format your essay, in-text citations, and works cited according to MLA guidelines.

Schedule

- 11/18 Introduce Critical Assignment 4
- 10/31 In-class research workshop: Critical Assignment 3
- 11/4 Paramedic Peer Review: Critical Assignment 3
- 11/6 Final version of Critical Assignment 3 due on Blackboard

Grading

You will be graded on the quality of your reasoning, writing, and argument, as well as proficiency using MLA formatting for your essay, in-text citations, and works cited. Please see the rubric on Blackboard for additional grading information.

*The color-coded modernization schema has been adapted from Claire Bourne's ENGL 445, "Final Assignment Sequence: Editing *The Sea Voyage*," Fall 2019.