

QUAINT AND QUONDAM WORDS
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More on Quaint and Quondam Words

A few changes have been made in the
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QUAINT AND QUONDAM WORDS

William Kruck's monograph *Looking for Dr. Condom* (1981) has brought forth several responses in the pages of *American Speech* (Ferguson 1983, Thundy 1985, as well as the comments of George W. Williams and James B. McMillan found in the editor's note at the end of Thundy's article).

I should like to add the following comments to the general discussion, drawing chiefly on the uses of terms like *quaint* and *quondam* in Chaucer and Shakespeare.

Kruck investigated a variety of etymologies proposed by the dull or the ingenious for the word *condom* and showed that all of them are almost certainly wrong. The author did not try to come up with a correct one himself, for his aim was, in part, rather to show that the etymology in the explanations he discussed is really guesstymology.

He tells us that the earliest traceable use of the word was spelled *quondam* and was written by a Scot in the year 1705. Kruck seems to feel that this use of *quondam* was an error in spelling by the writer who refers to the first introduction of the instrument to Scotland. But the *Scottish National Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* in their long entries under the letter *Q* confirm more than adequately what a reader of early, particularly medieval, English might have noticed, namely, a northern and especially Scottish fondness for the *qu-* spelling where the southern English often preferred something else, a habit that continued in Scotland much later than medieval times, as the citations in the *Scottish National Dictionary* will testify (it deals only with words in use since 1700). For example, the Scots often used *qu - for* English *wh -* as in *qua*, *quehre* for *who*, *where*. Similarly, they used *qu - for* English *c = [k]*, as in *queele*, *quile*, and *quite* for *cool*, *coal*, *coat* (with additional dialect vowel variation). Contrariwise, the spelling *qu -* sometimes got simplified to *c-* or *k -* in such words as *corter* 'quarter', *markiss* 'marquis', *co* 'quoth'. (Spelling of *qu -* with *c -* or *h -* is also well attested for the English of southern England). So a *quondam* spelling for *condom* by a Scot in the early eighteenth century would not, it appears, have been erroneous or even peculiar.

Now from Chaucer's time onward there also seems to have been a fondness in what Partridge (1961) calls "unconventional English" for *qu -* words when dealing with things related to sex. And a glance at the *Q* sections in Spears (1981) and in Partridge appears to

bear out this thesis especially well for modern times. For an earlier period, Chaucer's use of the word *quaint* (variously spelled) is well known, and the Wife of Bath boasts that her lovers had assured her that she had 'the best *quoniam* [that] might be.'

At various periods *queen* or *quean*, *quail* and *quaedarn* have signified 'prostitute.' *Queen* still means 'homosexual or effeminate man'. A *quoniam* and its possible relative *cony* are still a *quim*; *conundrum* and *quiff* are two other words with the same meaning from earlier centuries. *Quhillelillie*, Ross points out (191, s.v. *rise*), is or was a Scottish word for *membrum virile*, as the dictionaries sometimes put it in the interests of those sensitive people who know no Latin. The word occurs in a line from Dunbar's "In Secretit Place," a seduction poem—to give it a nice name—which is worth reading just for such erotic endearments as "my wally gowdy/My tirlly mirly, my towdy mowdy." But though the *OED* (s.v. *rise*) gives the original line from Dunbar, where the context makes the meaning 'penis' for the word reasonably clear, the dictionary does not, as far as I can see, define the word *quhillelillie* in the appropriate place. Perhaps this also in the interest of modesty.

It is worth recounting here the engaging if questionable etymology given for another *qu-*/*c-* word because it has some bearing on my point. In the middle of the sixteenth century the correct pronunciation of Latin was being debated by French classicists, and the question of *qu-* came up frequently : should it be [k] or [kw]? One word became central to the argument : *quamquam*. The fight became hot and ferocious, as is the academic custom in matters of such importance. Hence, they say, any silly business amusing to spectators, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, and with limbs and skirts flying, was called a *quamquam* or *camcam* and later a *cancan*.¹

To go back, then, to *quondam*. Is it not possible that the word belongs to the group of

¹ See Allen 1970, 107, in the Bibliographical list at the end of this paper. Incidentally, this story seems to have been known to James Joyce: "to kick the time of the clucklock, lucklock quamquam camcam potapot panapan kickakickkack." FW, 531.

qu- words (variably pronounced) which are somehow associated with sex? If so, I think that the word with the meaning *condom* may be rather older than Kruck and the *OED* suggest—an idea that has also occurred independently to Zacharias P. Thundy, writing in this journal (1985); Thundy proposes an etymology based on the euphemistic use of a medieval Latin word *conduma* ‘house’.

Quondam certainly crops up in Shakespeare’s work a number of times in suspiciously suggestive contexts. Pistol, for example, calls Mistress Quickly—whom he has recently married—“the quondam Quickly” (*Hen V, II, i, 8*). This, of course, means the woman that was Quickly until she changed her name by marriage. But considering Mistress Quickly and Pistol is it not possible that it had another meaning? or two? One of them might be simply ‘the late’, for *quondam* (also *condam*) was used in sixteenth-century Latin (though generally *after* a name) to indicate a dead person as distinct from a “quick” i.e. living, person (see Ducange 1937 and Niermeyer 1976). If Shakespeare is using it this way it is not a very witty pun, but then neither are many of his others. However if, as John McCall maintains with support from several editions, Pistol was pronounced and sometimes written *pizzle* ‘penis’, that hero’s line “I have and I will hold the quondam Quickly” may have an added implication above what is normally put on it. George W. Williams, in a note attached to Thundy’s article, astutely points out the similarity of Pistols’ phrasing to that of the wedding ceremony. He also seems certain that both *quondam* and *Quickly* would have alliterated in [kw-]. Evidence in favor of William’s argument is found in the *Middle English Dictionary*, which says that *qu-* generally represents phonetic [kw] in Middle English. But again, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that, then and later, phonetic [kw] and phonetic [k-] were both in use for *qu-* words.

Williams also feels that the other Shakespearean uses of the word *quondam* are “perfectly straightforward.” This is probably true for most of them, but surely not for the lines in *Troilus and Cressida* which Thundy cites. Here, I think, is an especially provocative use of the word in a play full of provocative usages. Hector, on a truce visit to the enemy

camp, says to Menelaus (IV, v, 179—82):

*By Mars's gauntlet, thanks.
Mock not that I affect th'untraded oath.
Your quondam wife swears still by Venus glove
She's well, but bade me not commend her to you.*

Gauntlet and *glove* are clearly paired here, as are *Mars* and *Venus*, and *oath* and *swear*, but what the pairings signify is not so clear. McCall (1977) and Partridge (1972) both gloss *Venus glove* as 'female pudendum', and Williams' note cites a similar occurrence and gloss in Middleton's *Changeling*. But, with Thundy, I feel that, in this *T&C* quotation at any rate, it seems possible that at least one of the paired words *gauntlet* and *glove* suggests *condom* or *quondam*: this last word is mentioned in the same breath as BOTH Mars and Venus. And Mars is more than the symbol of war; he is also the lover of Venus, though not her husband. And we know that the similarly unfaithful Helen, the quondam wife of Menelaus, is a Greek woman who prefers Trojans.²

There is another possible piece of supporting evidence in Shakespeare for this reading of *glove* and *gauntlet*. In an exchange between Hal and Falstaff in *2 Henry IV*, the prince insults Falstaff with this line: "Why, thou glove of sinful continents" (II, ii, c. 289). McCall, again plausibly, suggests a pun between *continents* and *continence* (sexual), but says nothing about *glove* and so leaves the pun rather unfinished. But if the *glove* were some kind of *quondam/condam*, then *sinful continence* would make a good deal more sense and

² Had I known when I first wrote this paper of Martin Green's book **The Labyrinth of Shakespeare's Sonnets**, I could have saved myself some of my "proofs" that Shakespeare possibly knew and punned about condoms. Green has a longer array of citations, mostly different from mine, to pretty well prove his case. He also, of course, noticed the uses from **T & C** and from **Henry V**. He is not, however, concerned with etymology, as I am. Pages 20-24 of his book might profitably be read in conjunction with this paper.

probably be a good deal more insulting, too. (Of course, the line may read “thou **globe** of sinful continents,” as it does in some editions, in which case there probably is no pun and one less piece of evidence for equating *glove* with *condom/quondam*.)³

One other use of *quondam* in Shakespeare that strikes me as suggestive is a passage in *Much Ado* (V, ii), a short scene which should be read in toto for the necessary context. Benedick, urging Margaret to fetch Beatrice to speak to him, engages her in a series of exchanges full of sexual innuendo. When she leaves, he declares that “Leander, the good swimmer, Troilus the first employer of pandars, and a whole bookful of those quondam carpet mongers . . . were never so truly turned over and over as my poor self in love. . . . I can find out no rhyme to *lady* but *baby*,... for *scorn horn*, a hard rhyme.” One cannot with any pretence of certainty fit a *condom* meaning on *quondam* here, though the whole passage calls for it. The odd phrase “a whole bookful of quondam carpet mongers” is not dealt with very well by the commentators anyway, so it invites speculation.

Of course, words like *glove* and *quondam* occur in Shakespeare and elsewhere quite innocently; otherwise there could be no punning and no double entendre.⁴ There is also the tiresome question whether such an instrument as the condom was known to Shakespeare. The first two certain written references that Kruck has been able to track down were printed indeed in Shakespeare’s lifetime and referred to cloth sheaths designed to prevent venereal infection—gloves of a sort.⁵ But the references appeared in medical treatises and in Latin and on the continent. There is no reason why Shakespeare could not have heard of the in-

³ But I find that Joseph Wallfield in an extended review of Kruck’s book, with a number of addenda, has pretty well demonstrated, I think, that *condom* is derived from the Italian word *guantone*, more specifically a Venetian variant, *gondon*, words for a glove or gauntlet.

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I have read, as every hunter of pun and double entendre in our earlier authors should read, Larry Benson’s delightful monitory article “The ‘Queynte’ Punning of Chaucer’s Critics” (1985). However valid his warning words may be for Chaucer, there is no doubt at all about Shakespeare’s fondness for suggestive pun and innuendo.

⁵ See note 2 above. I did not understand the reference to *syringe* in the lines quoted by Kruck for the first *printed* occurrence of *condum/quondam* in 1706: “Then Sirenge and Condom / Come both in request / While virtuous quondam / Is treated in jest.” However, I note that in John Farmer’s *Vocabula Amatoria* (1896), a glossary of amatory words in French authors from Rabelais to Zola, there occur the glosses *seringue* ‘penis’, *seringuer* ‘copulate’. Perhaps there is some connection. And James Joyce has the following “While yet an adolescent (what do I say?) while still puerile in tubsuit with buttonlegs you got a handsome present of a self-raising syringe and twin feeders ... and you should repopulate the land of your birth.” **FW** 188, 28-35.

ventions, if such they were, but no special reason why he should have, and no way to prove that he had. The difficulty, as always in such matters, is to decide when ingenuity is being overactive.

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