

## The Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary – how and why to use it

Although it is immensely scholarly, the HTOED is also quite user-friendly, and full of fun and enlightenment to anyone who has an interest in the English language.

The Thesaurus has two volumes. The first is the main text of the Thesaurus, and the second is the Index. You can open Volume I of the Thesaurus to any page, and begin browsing. It's as simple as that. Of course, if you have a specific word in mind, and want to find words that through the ages have been similar to it, you can go to the Index first to find the reference number for what you are looking for.

Let's begin browsing at page 1081, which happens to be the place where you will find the word 'love', and all its many related meanings. Here are some of the riches available to you:

- **The joy of browsing** – The HTOED is a browser's delight, since the concepts on each page gently segue from one to the next. In the pages immediately after *love* is described the thesaurus examines *liking, win the affection of, terms of endearment, tenderness, and kisses*.
- **Instantly get a feel for the history of English** - The HTOED lists words in the chronological order that they appeared in the language. The user can see when words entered the language and when they stopped being used. The verbs *love* and *hate*, for instance, have been with us continuously since Old English, whereas the words *wedding* and *divorce* both date their entry into English from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The first word for the concept of love-affair (*amour*) does not appear until 1567, by which point English has already had 34 different words and terms for the concept of marriage.
- **Find words that are related, but not quite synonyms** - Every thesaurus will have synonyms for *love*, but it is only in the HTOED that under this headword you will also find words for brotherly love (*philadelphia*), love as a weapon (*weapon-love*), insincere love (*cupboard love*), excessive love or affection for a husband (*maritality*) or for a wife (*uxoriousness*), and many other closely related, yet not synonymous words.
- **Explore the breadth of our language** – There is no other thesaurus in the world that will present you with such an embarrassment of riches – there are 100 different entries under 'terms of endearment', ranging from the tender (*sweet, honey, and sugar*) to the not so tender (*sucket, pug, and my cabbage*) to the inexplicable (*bagpudding, flitter-mouse, and nug*)
- **Bask in the acquisition of knowledge that is simply enjoyable for its own sake** – After you've read through all the words for kinds of love and affection you will come to the section that deals with words about hate. And while it may not ever be required knowledge, it's nice to know that there are more words for *love* than there are for *hate*.

With any examination at all it is obvious that the HTOED is full of the kind of tremendous scholarship that is found through long study. We would like to emphasize, however, that it is also full of the simple enjoyment that comes from losing yourself in a book.