

BRINGING THE BARD UP TO DATE: TEACHING SHAKESPEARE IN OUR
CURRENT MOMENT

Adrienne Michele Thomas

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Master's Thesis Committee

David Hoegberg, PhD, Chair

Jason Aukerman, PhD

Megan Musgrave, PhD

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This thesis represents the written report of an action research study conducted in ENG-L433/625: Conversations with Shakespeare, a combined undergraduate/graduate course at IUPUI. The study was primarily interested in answering whether there is still value in teaching Shakespeare's plays in modern classrooms and, if so, the best methods for teaching these plays that meet current students' needs. Historical and modern methods of teaching Shakespeare are explored in depth to provide context for the design of the study, as well as the hosting course, as they were designed separately. The primary methods under review are utilizing adaptations, providing historical and contextual background, employing different forms of discussion, and close reading. By collecting data via surveys, classroom observations, and documentary evidence, the findings of this study show that there is not one method that works best for increasing student engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's plays, rather, it is necessary to use multiple methods in conjunction with one another to best meet students' needs.

David Hoegberg, PhD, Chair

Jason Aukerman, PhD

Megan Musgrave, PhD

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Introduction and Rationale

Why do we continue to study the works of William Shakespeare centuries later? Are his plays still relevant to the modern student? What are ways we, as educators, can encourage the study of Shakespeare's works through our teaching methods? As a lover of Shakespeare, and someone who discovered this love as an undergraduate student not that long ago, I firmly believe there continues to be a place for Shakespeare in any literature student's journey. The issue, however, is that students are seemingly becoming less interested in studying the Bard, and colleges and universities are increasingly less likely to require (or even offer) courses on Shakespeare. A 2015 survey conducted by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) found that only 4 of the 52 top universities and liberal arts colleges required English majors to take a course focused on Shakespeare (Polikoff 3). According to James Shapiro, since the Shakespeare requirement at the University of Alabama was dropped in 1991, even though "undergraduate enrollment at the school has more than doubled," the "number of Shakespeare sections is down, which in turn has made it 'easier to eliminate or reduce the presence of Shakespeare in lower-division courses'" (Shapiro). Institutes of higher education are, across the board, teaching Shakespeare less. This trend is the result of many different factors, both practical and ideological.

At this point in time, American colleges and universities are, first and foremost, businesses. It is, therefore, not surprising that education has become even more of a commodity in our current political and economic landscape,¹ but the increasingly

¹ See Klees, "Beyond neoliberalism: Reflections on capitalism and education" for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between capitalism and education.

“competitive ‘outcome-based educational model’” and “consumer-driven environment” of higher education have pit professors against one another to determine which courses get taught and which do not (Shapiro). Having to compete against course topics that appeal to students’ personal interests like children’s/young adult literature or that have enticing or provocative course titles like “Blood Politics” or “Women Who Kill: Portrayals of Women & Violence in Lit & Film”² for enrollment places the onus on how well a Shakespearean professor can *market* their class.

Relying on marketing to teach a course on Shakespeare is difficult because students are increasingly less inclined to study his works, in no small part because they are intimidated by the seemingly foreign language of the plays.³ Although his works *are* written in English, Shakespeare lived so long ago that our language has evolved to the point that reading one of his plays feels more like a translation exercise for many students. This inaccessibility deters many from exploring Shakespeare’s work when they might otherwise be interested. As one of the students involved in this study stated in a survey response, “I’ve never really had that much interest in Shakespeare. I respect his contributions to the linguistic arts but due to the ‘language’ barrier of old modern English and how verbose his work can be, I’ve never really been a fan.”⁴ This sentiment, alongside negative or lackluster prior experiences studying Shakespeare, has led to a steep decline in students’ interest in taking Shakespeare-centric college courses and,

² See Poliakoff, *The Unkindest Cut: Shakespeare in Exile 2015*.

³ See Murphy, Sean, et al., “What Do Students Find Difficult When They Read Shakespeare? Problems and Solutions.”

⁴ See Student T, Appendix B.

therefore, the number of those courses offered. It is important to note, however, that this is not the only force decreasing the number of Shakespearean courses; recent criticism of the literary canon is also a major cause.

While I am not a strict traditionalist when it comes to the literary canon by any means, I do believe the continued study of Shakespeare is valuable and worthwhile. There are many, however, who argue that Shakespeare is simply another dead, white, male author who gets placed on a pedestal and takes away space for more diverse writers.ⁱ This is a valid criticism.⁵ Historically, academia *has* placed too much emphasis on authors who represent the white, Euro-centric, heteronormative, patriarchal systems that have actively worked to disenfranchise women, POC, the LGBTQIA+ community, and those at every intersection in between. This fact is undeniable. However, arguing that because Shakespeare is an “old, dead, white guy” his plays hold no relevance or are no longer worthy of study is simply wrong. Not only does this argument discredit the work of queer, feminist, and post-colonialist scholars who have spent decades proving that there is so much more in these plays than the stories of straight, white men, it ignores just how ingrained into our collective culture Shakespeare remains.

In the last thirty years, there have been over four hundred films of or adapted from Shakespeare’s plays released internationally. Just this past year alone, there were seventeen.ⁱⁱ Not even accounting for the number of television shows, radio shows, internet videos, novels, short stories, plays, poems, or songs inspired by his works, this large number of films demonstrates just how prevalent Shakespeare is globally. Why

⁵ For a more thorough discussion of this criticism, see Dusbiber and Truesdale’s opinions published in Valerie Strauss’ blog through the Washington Post.

would people across cultures, age groups, and socio-economic groups continue to engage with Shakespeare and his works if they are no longer relevant? Based solely on the sheer volume of content created in conversation with Shakespeare, it is clear there is still a strong interest as a society, which I believe is reason enough to continue studying the source material.ⁱⁱⁱ

Purpose of the Study

Because students and schools alike are seemingly less interested in studying Shakespeare, it makes one question if the problem is with the content or the pedagogy. As an acknowledgement of biases, this study was designed under the assumption that the issue is not with the content, but with the methodology. The purpose of this action research study is to determine not only if this assumption is true, but, if it is, what methods are best suited for increasing student engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's plays. As the course itself was designed using a framework of adaptation studies and New Historicism, this study seeks to investigate the impact of methodologies within these schools of criticism versus more traditional methodologies for studying Shakespeare.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following questions:

1. How much is a student's level of engagement and understanding affected by *previous experiences* with Shakespeare? (high school, college, or even independent exposure)

2. What are historical and current methods of studying Shakespeare, and which ones, if any, resonate most with modern students?
3. Is there a best method for increasing student engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's plays?

Review of Literature

This literature review focuses on two major topics relevant to the design of this action research study: historical context and pedagogical framework. The first section explores the answers scholars and educators have had to the questions of why and how we should teach Shakespeare dating back to the late 19th century. In the second section, I investigate scholarship on the ideas and best practices within the theoretical schools of adaptation theory and New Historicism in general as well as how they apply specifically to the study.

Historical Context of Teaching Shakespeare

Why Shakespeare was Taught

The question of why we teach Shakespeare is one that has been asked since his works first made their way into American curriculums, and, while the question has remained the same, the answer has continued to change throughout the last century and a half. By the last third of the 1800s, American colleges were influenced by the massive popularity of teaching Shakespeare that swept through Britain. Eventually, this movement trickled down to the high school level. One scholar claims^{iv} that the “formal movement to teach Shakespeare’s plays in high schools was initiated by the response to the Harvard entrance requirement of 1874” (van Cleve 334).^v Initially to “secure better compositional ability in the candidates for admission to Harvard,” it became commonplace, even expected, for high school and college students alike to study Shakespeare’s plays (van Cleve 334).

During the course of the 20th century, scholars began to question with much greater force whether or not they should teach Shakespeare.⁶ Much of the early hesitation arose due to a lack of student engagement with the complex, and often difficult, plots and language of Shakespeare’s plays. A vast number of scholars and educators, no matter the ever-changing landscape of academia in the 20th century, concluded that teaching Shakespeare was necessary because of the universality of the works and the cultural currency his plays held. In interviews Russ McDonald conducted in 1995 for “Shakespeare Goes to High School: Some Current Practices in the American Classroom,” multiple scholars illustrated this widely held belief.

In the article, Paul Sullivan claimed, “We should teach Shakespeare for the same reasons we should teach the Bible and Homer: they are cultural inevitabilities, codes that are identified with the power class yet which are accessible to ordinary people as ports of entry” (McDonald 155). Similarly, Sheri Maeda argued that

Shakespeare represents a significant strand of the American cultural fabric. His works present us with layer after layer of interesting, engaging questions, issues, dilemmas, conflicts. His characters are both individual and archetypal, so as human beings we can identify aspects of ourselves while appreciating them for themselves. Shakespeare’s use of the English language shows us that words are more than utilitarian. His works reflect a place and time quite different from and, then again, not very different from our own. Shakespeare has influenced or, at least, affected writers and artists around the world. (McDonald 155-6)

⁶ Frey 547.

Both Sullivan's and Maeda's reasons for why we, as a society, continue to teach Shakespeare have a significant amount of accuracy. Shakespeare and his plays *have* held a great deal of cultural currency, in large part for the reasons Maeda listed. Because Shakespeare has been so thoroughly woven into the "American cultural fabric," it can be as pertinent for students to receive a Shakespearean education for cultural reasons just as much as literary ones. Educators aligned with Sullivan and Maeda believed that if students missed out on studying Shakespeare, they would be worse off in the long run, even if they struggled with the material in the moment.

Toward the end of the 20th century into the 21st, scholars and educators began expanding the reasons they believed teaching Shakespeare remained valuable and necessary as students became increasingly less convinced the pedestal that he was placed on was deserved. In the 1990s, attention shifted toward the practical, pedagogical reasons behind "why Shakespeare?" In "Why Teach Shakespeare: A Reconsideration," Robert F. Willson Jr. provides four "highly defensible reasons for requiring literature majors and non-majors to study Shakespeare":

1. Shakespeare is "among the few dramatists whose work is studied in any depth in the American university English departments;"
2. Shakespeare's plays "offer rich materials for the study of prosody;"
3. Shakespeare can "serve English departments in another area—criticism—especially at the undergraduate level." For example, since "*Hamlet* is generally well known to undergraduates... and widely written about by scholars, critical study of the play can almost certainly assure student interest in both Shakespeare and literary criticism;"

4. and Shakespeare is central to film studies, which was a growing field in English departments across the nation (Willson 208-9).

To sum up, Willson believed the study of Shakespeare was valuable because his works provided opportunities to cover four of the major genres/topics literature teachers should/could touch on: drama, poetry, literary criticism, and film. Rather than arguing that it was important to teach Shakespeare because no other author's work could measure up to the brilliancy of his plays, Willson's reasoning was entirely practical and pedagogical. His argument focused on the multitude of opportunities for learning in a literature classroom provided by Shakespeare's plays, or, in other words, the number of teaching requirements an instructor could check off with just one text. This shift towards practicality is interesting because it was a direct response to the conflict between traditionalists and the new schools of criticism that had risen in popularity over the previous decades. Focusing solely on the pedagogical benefits of continuing to teach Shakespeare aimed to remove the need for critical and/or cultural disagreements amongst academics of the time.

Continuing on the path of the expanding reasoning, in direct opposition to the prevailing ideology of the 20th century, Joan Ozark Holmer posited that "one of the reasons for teaching Shakespeare might be apparently 'irrelevance'—to risk exposing oneself to what is foreign, perhaps even unknown, to lose oneself in the spaciousness of Shakespeare's works in order to plumb what one did not 'know,' whether experientially or vicariously, and to travel the uncharted country of ourselves" (Holmer 193). According to Holmer, it was not the universality of Shakespeare that made his works so important; instead, it was precisely the foreignness of Shakespeare's time and language, as well as

the contexts *within* his plays, that held the most value. This push against the universality of Shakespeare only strengthened in the beginning of the 21st century, but questions surrounding the purpose of literary study itself began to reshape the arguments made against it.

For a large portion of the history of American education, literature was studied for the simple purpose of exploring and understanding literary texts, but, as different critical methodologies developed over time, scholars began concluding that literary studies could, and perhaps should, accomplish that *and* much more.^{vi} Many scholars in recent years, including Wendy Beth Hyman and Hillary Eklund, have argued that the study of literature is a valuable tool for teaching social justice and pushing back against “the forces that denigrate knowledge-based discourses, threaten human values, and whitewash historical events” (Hyman and Eklund 2). As Christopher Schaberg put it,⁷ “the study and teaching of literature” can be used as “an antidote to cultural forces that, in prizing speed, efficiency, and the superficial assimilation of information, dangerously elide the value of slow, careful reading” (Hyman and Eklund 3). *Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare* argues that Shakespeare and other historical literature are particularly primed for this work because it “affords students particular encounters with the far-away, encounters that defamiliarize their modern lives and fosters ethical engagement with the strange or remote” (Hyman and Eklund 7). In other words, Hyman and Eklund believe that the foreignness of historical literature/Shakespeare allows the literature classroom to

⁷ See Schaberg’s *The Work of Literature in an Age of Post-Truth* for a more thorough discussion of this topic.

“function as an ideal laboratory for responding to [the struggles present in other aspects of our institutional and social lives] experimentally” (6).

One of the reasons Hyman and Eklund argue in this way is because they are “aware of the dangers of overly universalizing ‘Shakespeare’ as a social institution[, as t]oo often, Shakespeare’s ‘universality’ has meant white/European cultural supremacy” (Hyman and Eklund 7). However, they also make sure to note that a lack of universality does not mean that Shakespeare’s works are not able to “speak to a wide range of issues related to justice” and act as a valuable, shared cultural text (Hyman and Eklund 8). In essence, many that argue against the universality of Shakespeare still maintain that his works can act as a valuable connector between our modern society and early modern England in a way that provides opportunities for reflection, criticism, and understanding of both societies.

We do not, and likely never will, have a universally agreed upon answer to the question of why we continue to study and teach Shakespeare, and perhaps one day we will reach a point where we decide the Bard is no longer worth teaching. However, until that day comes, it is important for those of us who find value in the study of Shakespeare’s plays to discover the best methods for teaching them. To determine what methodologies are best, it is necessary to first have a clear understanding of the pedagogical practices that have marked the history of teaching Shakespeare in America.

How Shakespeare was Taught ^{vii}

By the late 19th century, Shakespeare’s works were fully accepted into the literary canon; they had made their way into college classrooms and, from there, became an

integral part of high school curriculums across the United States.⁸ This rise in the study of Shakespeare's plays, in turn, led to a rise in scholarship on the teaching methods and best practices used in college and high school classrooms alike. At this point in history, 19th-century scholars were typically more interested in *how* Shakespeare was studied, rather than *why*. A.F. Blaisdell, Carroll Lewis Maxcy, and Eva March Tappan are all examples of such scholars; their works, "Hints in Teaching Shakespeare," "Teaching Shakespeare," and "On Teaching Shakespeare," all aimed to explain what the authors found to be the best ways to teach Shakespeare's plays to students at various levels.

In general, Shakespearean pedagogy of the 1870s through '90s was teacher-centered and philological. Practically all education at this time, not just that of English literature, was heavily reliant on lecture-based classes that placed the professor in a position of authority over the material and, therefore, the student. As Maxcy put it, "Young students cannot [learn to read Shakespeare] alone. They need the guiding hand of experience to show them how to proceed and when they once grasp the idea they can work independently" (107). Similarly, Blaisdell asserts that

At the best we only hope to inspire the scholar with a desire to continue his studies in Shakespeare after graduation. This result will be attained only by a very few, yet we believe that tact and skill on the part of the teacher will enable a class to read our great dramatist with pleasure and profit. (256)

According to these scholars, it was the "guiding hand of experience" and the "tact and skill" of the teacher that *allowed* the student to understand and appreciate Shakespeare's plays rather than the students' own capabilities. During this time, teachers were

⁸ Blaisdell 256.

encouraged to select “choice passages” for students “to commit to memory”,⁹ provide “many explanations and practical hints”,¹⁰ and construct “judicious questions”¹¹ in order to teach students how to read Shakespeare. These teacher-centered methods were dominant, in large part, because the main pedagogical framework, philology, was as well.

Philology, the study of classic or historical texts, was the dominant method of studying Shakespeare for the first twenty-or-so years his works were taught in American colleges because he was “conscripted into courses on rhetoric and philology by Francis James Child at Harvard and by others at Yale, Princeton, Cornell, and Columbia” (Frey 544). According to Charles van Cleve, “The college men” adopted “the methods used in studying the Greek and Latin classics” to “justify the disciplinary value of their subject” (335). In other words, they felt studying English literature was not respectable enough as a discipline in and of itself, so they sought to align it with already established and respected methodologies.^{viii} The methodology itself focused largely on the study of words and the oration of them. A later scholar, Franklin T. Baker, referred to this era as the “‘declamatory’ phase of teaching Shakespeare” as his works were only used as “specimens for reading aloud” (qtd. in van Cleve 335-6). During this era, memorization and oration were paramount in education, and it would be decades before academia shifted its approach.

Shifting away from the philological methodology that dominated the 19th century, 20th-century Shakespearean education prior to the 1930s tended to rely on the literary

⁹ Blaisdell 256.

¹⁰ Blaisdell 256.

¹¹ Maxcy 107.

appreciation school of criticism and would “teach Shakespeare’s ‘art’ primarily in terms of how plot and scene construction contributed to revelations of character and message” (Frey 544). However, this methodology did not last long, as, following World War I, many teachers “seem[ed] to have become a trifle restless with aesthetic and moral appreciation,” and, while the school of literary appreciation did not fall out of favor overnight, this “restless”-ness did eventually lead to the creation of the New Critical school in the 1940s (Frey 546).

At one point in the timeline of Shakespearean pedagogy, the close-reading methodology developed by the New Critics merged with the moralizing tendencies of the school of literary appreciation, and this led to the creation of a “revised image of Shakespeare as an ‘affable,’ ‘tolerant,’ ‘modest’ writer with a ‘unique gift for responding to life as Everyman.’ The poet was eulogized and universalized and mythologized in this era as ‘Shakespeare for Everyman’” (Frey 549). Alfred Harbage, a professor at Harvard in the early- to mid-20th century, championed this moralizing of Shakespeare, and, though he was criticized by many, the beliefs about the “noble and good” Shakespeare that emerged from his work persisted throughout the rest of the century—and perhaps even to this day.

Outside of Harbage’s moralizing methodology, the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s represented the height of New Criticism in literary studies and Shakespearean pedagogy. Moving away from the philological methods—which focused on the “history and meaning of individual words and their relation to foreign and ancient languages, comparative sources, and the biographical circumstances of the authors”¹²—literary

¹² Searle 1.

studies began to shift toward a “different system of linguistic analysis focusing on word patterns, image, metaphors, ironies” (Frey 549). The main methodology, or “practical criticism,” of New Criticism was “‘close reading,’ in which the poem or literary text is treated as a self-sufficient verbal artifact” (Searle 1). Close reading became the standard all other critical methods were compared against; it became so ingrained in literary studies that it continues to hold prominence in pedagogy to this day.

During these same decades, performance-based methodologies of teaching and studying Shakespeare also began to rise in popularity. In 1942, Ben Renz stated, “Drama was never designed for silent reading,” which most teachers readily agreed with, and called for students themselves to put on productions of Shakespeare’s plays^{ix} (58). However, while scholars dating back to the 1890s called for attention in the classroom to be given to the performance aspects of Shakespeare’s plays, this methodology did not become fully mainstream until the 1970s. Most credit J.L. Styan, with his article in the 1974 *Shakespeare Quarterly*, as “the first major scholar to advocate teaching Shakespeare through performance” (O’Brien 168). Following Styan’s article, there was a huge uptick in the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s of performance-based pedagogy.

Performance-based pedagogy largely advocates for student-centered performances rather than the “more convenient, less challenging orthodoxies to be found in comparative reviews of television, film, and stage productions”^x in an effort to encourage engagement with “the possibilities of full participation—ideological, emotional, sensuous, kinetic, somatic—in Shakespearean drama” (Frey 557-8). Ideally, according to Miriam Gilbert, students engaging with performance-based pedagogy “achieve detail, specificity, and even power” over simple “coherence” (603). There are

various methods and exercises of different levels of intensity employed in performance-based classrooms; some educators task their students with putting on full productions of a play, including staging, line memorization, and costuming, while others advocate for less extreme versions that maintain the same intentions.^{xi}

In McDonald's interview with four college/university professors, it was clear that "for these teachers performance is it. Some instructors employ spontaneous reading, and memorization is occasionally still required; but for the most part the preferred method is the preparation of scenes by groups of student performers" (McDonald 146). The purpose, however, behind all performance-based methodologies is to get students to *actively* engage with the text in a way that some argue cannot be accomplished by simply reading it. As Sheri Maeda put it, "my emphasis has always been to get kids on their feet, reading, moving, acting, interpreting, and making dramatic decisions" (McDonald 153). The methods of performance-based pedagogy lean heavily toward student-centered teaching, which also started gaining popularity during this same time frame.

The massive shift in critical approaches that began in the 1970s "promised a revival of interest in ways of teaching that might allow students to reappropriate their response-abilities for the perception and creation of literary/dramatic meaning," resulting in student-centered methodologies of teaching Shakespeare (Frey 552). Essentially, as literary scholars began phasing out formalism/New Criticism—and, therefore, the idea that there was a "right" or "correct" reading of a text—there was a huge surge in pedagogical research focused on discovering and developing new methods that best accommodated students' needs and encouraged more autonomy and confidence. Sharon Beehler explains that when formalism fell out of favor, the notion developed that

meaning is not absolute or even “valued,” in the sense of being “right” or “wrong.” This claim, popularized in the seventies, gave teachers and students the ability to share interpretations and negotiate their readings. Thus, teachers were freed from the onerous burden of being sole and absolute authorities, and students were encouraged to gain confidence in their reading and thinking abilities.

(Beehler 197)

This shift from the teacher as the arbiter of correct information to a collaborator in learning changed education entirely, especially Shakespearean pedagogy. Gone were the days of long lectures and orations alone; now, students were encouraged to work out the meaning of texts for themselves and *negotiate* those meanings with their classmates and teacher through discussion, inspiring critical thinking.¹³

However, this shift in pedagogy did not happen overnight, nor did the lecture disappear entirely. Instead, there was a more gradual change in methodology: a bit-by-bit increase in discussion over lecture, a more collaborative attitude. As Joan Ozark Holmer discussed,

The role of teacher as explainer, one who imparts a body of knowledge gained through years of study and experience, has not changed much. But *how*—by what methods—the teacher chooses to impart that knowledge has changed in individualistic responses to a more open attitude toward pedagogical experimentation. (Holmer 190)

Teachers still had vastly more knowledge than their students—and that aspect of the teacher/student relationship will likely never change—, but the ways in which that

¹³ Beehler 200.

knowledge was shared or taught looked significantly different than it had in the decades prior. Holmer explained that the increase in discussion allowed “for much more spontaneous and active student engagement” than lecture did, which was precisely what instructors wanted to accomplish in this new era (190).

In “Shakespeare Goes to High School: Some Current Practices in the American Classroom,” Sheri Maeda and Martha Christian furthered this point by sharing personal anecdotes. Christian explained that she tried “to avoid lecture,”¹⁴ and that she

learned to dance lightly through historical background if I cover it at all. Plot, character, poetry—I hope these will wash over students. I try not to interrupt every thirty seconds to fill them in on some gem. I’ve learned that my interruptions rarely illuminate any passage but do a great job of destroying interest and encouraging coma. (McDonald 151)

Maeda employed similar student-centered methods with the intention of allowing and encouraging students to think for themselves. She concluded that “The more confident I’ve become with putting the works in the hands of the students and guiding them towards sources or opportunities to interpret and to make meaning, the more successful I’ve been” (McDonald 150). She achieves exactly what Robert Scholes, noted pedagogical scholar, argued student-centered pedagogy should aim toward, that “Our job is not to produce ‘readings’ for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own” (qtd. in Beehler 195). In this pedagogical method, guiding students to a point where they gain the ability to think critically independently is of the utmost importance. The ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s marked the astronomic rise of student-centered pedagogy across the

¹⁴ McDonald 152.

humanities, and this teaching methodology remains one of the most prominent in Shakespearean pedagogy to this day.

Truthfully, 21st-century Shakespearean pedagogy tends to be a hodgepodge of many different methodologies working in tandem rather than one or a few dominant methods. Close reading and in-depth analysis of the text are the main methods students are most familiar with. Even though New Criticism as a whole no longer dominates scholarship and pedagogy, the majority of other schools of criticism were developed by those who could not quite seem to unlearn close reading, which means the method still has a large place in classrooms—especially in high schools. Also, as Shakespeare’s language is one of the biggest hurdles for many students, educators often rely on close reading methods to combat this. The issue with this, however, is that students generally find solely close reading “mind-numbingly dull” (Shoemaker 111). In an action research study conducted by Brandon Shoemaker, he found that students enjoyed close reading the least out of the five methods he tested^{xii} and that the students scored the lowest on the test given to determine comprehension^{xiii} employing this method.¹⁵ Though a majority of teachers agree that learning to read Shakespeare is a worthwhile pursuit, it is widely believed that the majority of students respond better to more active methodologies.

As discussed earlier, performance-based pedagogy has become a dominant form in the teaching of Shakespeare, but the definition of what constitutes performance-based pedagogy has begun to expand beyond student performances and reading aloud. With the proliferation of technology usage and the rising prominence of film studies in literature classrooms, it has become incredibly common to use movie/filmed stage versions or

¹⁵ Shoemaker 113.

adaptations of Shakespeare's plays as teaching tools.^{xiv} This study will be employing this version of performance-based pedagogy rather than the more active, student-led performances the methodology is known for. Although it has been found that students respond very well to the method of using film(ed) versions and adaptations,^{xv} there is a concern among academics that students will only passively view the films or that the adaptation they watch will be too "dumb[ed]-down" to be useful (Friedman 2). This concern, while I have not found it to be the case in my experience, is understandable, so I took measures to try to ensure these problems did not impact this study.^{xvi}

Other popular modern methods of teaching Shakespeare, that unfortunately will not be covered in this study, include multi-modality, digital humanities, social justice work, and Shakespeare in the virtual classroom. These methods embrace the modern shift in academia towards technology and away from the elitist culture historically found in higher education. Work from scholars such as Kyle Grady, Timothy Ponce, Bruce Avery, Sawyer Kemp, Jason M. Demeter, Allison Machlis Meyer, Karin H. deGravelles, and Mary Janell Metzger cover topics from pedagogies of transgender justice in Shakespeare to the use of design thinking as a pedagogical practice in the Shakespearean classroom.

Critical and Pedagogical Frameworks

Although this study employed multiple methods of teaching Shakespeare from various different critical schools, this section will focus on exploring the frameworks provided by adaptation studies and New Historicism, as they were the least familiar to the participants and were not one of the popular historical methodologies discussed in the previous section. As will be explained in further detail in a later chapter, L433/625: Conversations

with Shakespeare was designed to study a sample of Shakespeare's plays alongside works adapted from and influenced by the originals. Because this study was, in part, designed to examine the efficacy of adaptation as an active method of studying Shakespeare, it was necessary that the participants became familiar with the foundational elements of adaptation studies.¹⁶

The elements of New Historicism were similarly foundational in the design of the course and the study, and this is in no small part because they are so deeply embedded within adaptation studies. The sub-sections "History of New Historicism" and "Concepts of New Historicism" provide a thorough discussion of *all* the relevant elements, but one of the core beliefs of New Historicism is that nothing exists within a vacuum; every aspect of human culture is connected, and each aspect asserts a reciprocal influence on all other aspects.¹⁷ This tenet directly informs the concepts of intertextuality, modernization/proximation, transposition, commentary, and analogue, which are some of the rudimentary aspects of adaptation studies. It was, therefore, important that the participants of the study had a solid understanding of the principles of both adaptation studies and New Historicism.^{xvii}

History of Adaptation Studies

Adaptation studies came onto the scene as a form of literary analysis focusing on the comparative relationship between literary classics and their film adaptations. Many

¹⁶ See the first paragraph of "Concepts of Adaptation Studies" below for a list of these elements.

¹⁷ See Musgrave, "New Historicism & Cultural Studies."

argue that adaptation studies was “one of the very first shelters under which cinema studies entered the academy,” and yet, it is undeniable that both film and literary scholars alike have viewed it as an inferior method of studying film and/or literature. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, authors of “A Short History of Adaptation Studies in the Classroom,” recall Timothy Corrigan’s claim that

for most of the twentieth century, adaptation studies failed to capture the interest of film scholars (as the approach taken by their literary colleagues so frequently devalued the film text) and English academics (who regarded the use of film as either offering a cheap substitute for literature or as an excuse to bask in the superiority of literature over cinema). (3)

It was not until a shift in focus of the discipline at the turn of the century that this belief began to change.

According to Kamila Elliot’s history of the theoretical divides in adaptation studies, 20th-century literary scholars “used adaptations to vie for *disciplinary* territory and power,” whereas 21st-century scholars were more likely to use “adaptations to compete for *theoretical* dominion and authority” (Elliott 576).^{xviii} In other words, up until the 2000s, literary scholars focused their attention on fighting to carve out a disciplinary space within academia. They concerned themselves with ending the aforementioned dyslogistic sentiments toward their discipline, which meant that the majority of adaptation studies scholars were not dedicating time to developing their own discipline-specific theories. Instead, they relied on formal-textual theories that were previously established elsewhere in the humanities, such as formalism, aestheticism, and

humanism.¹⁸ At the turn of the century, however, the focus of many scholars^{xix} shifted away from gaining “disciplinary territory and power” toward criticizing the use of the formal-textual theories listed prior and re-establishing the dominant theories of the subject field.^{xx} This massive shift in attention within adaptation studies resulted in a shift both in ideology/methodology and in content.

Adaptation studies began with a sole focus on novel to film adaptations, but this is no longer the case as of the last couple of decades. As Cartmell and Whelehan point out, “While fictional texts and their feature film adaptations remain at the subject’s core, the study of adaptations has broadened to embrace ‘literature’ and the ‘screen’ in the broadest senses of each word” (1). Adaptation studies has come to include media ranging from comics to TV series, video games and songs to plays and operas, paintings to theme parks.¹⁹ The expansion of possible subject matter within the discipline has opened innumerable opportunities for study for scholars and students alike.

Concepts of Adaptation Studies

Although there is an ongoing debate surrounding the theoretical framework of adaptation studies,²⁰ there are multiple elements that a majority of the field agrees are fundamental to the study of adaptation. These elements include intertextuality,

¹⁸ See Elliott 577.

¹⁹ See Pires de Figueiredo 9.

²⁰ See Elliot for a detailed explanation of the debate amongst adaptation studies scholars.

intermediality, defining adaptation, modernization/proximation, fidelity, and Deborah Cartmell's three categories of adaptation: transposition, commentary, and analogue.²¹

While there are many foundational texts in the field of adaptation studies, within the context of this study, the most important is Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation*. The active methods employed in this study were directly influenced by the concepts discussed in Sanders' book, so students were assigned the Introduction and Chapters 1-3 for reading at the beginning of the semester to provide context for the course. As the participants had little to no prior knowledge of adaptation studies, this text formed the basis of the participants' understanding of the theoretical school and the concepts within it. In the assigned chapters, Sanders touched on all of the important elements within the field, including the definition of adaptation and its relationship to appropriation.

According to Sanders, adaptation is "frequently a highly specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels to film; drama into musical; the dramatization of prose narrative and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative" (24), whereas appropriations tend to have "a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others" (36). To frame the distinction between the two another way: an appropriation is always an adaptation, but an adaptation is not necessarily an appropriation.^{xxi} Appropriations, though they tend to depart significantly from the

²¹ See Sanders 23.

informing text, are still adaptations of canonical or well-known texts, which puts them squarely into the analogue category of adaptations.

An analogue adaptation, or appropriation, represents when an adaptation significantly departs from the original text for the sake of making a new work of art, and while “it may deepen our understanding of the new cultural product to be aware of shaping intertexts, it may not be entirely necessary in order to enjoy the work independently” (Sanders 29). An incredibly popular example of an analogue adaptation is Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995), which is based on Jane Austen’s *Emma*. There are also numerous examples of appropriations based on Shakespeare’s works like *She’s the Man* (2006), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), and *A Thousand Acres* (1997).^{xxii} These films are great examples of appropriations because they are able to stand entirely apart from the source material and still be considered great or enjoyable, and, in fact, the majority of viewers would likely have no idea these films were even adaptations without being explicitly told. However, there is an undeniable depth added to the story when one is made aware of this status.

The category of commentary marks a point in between adaptation and appropriation, as it is an adaptation that comments on “the politics of the source text, or those of the new *mise-en-scène*, or both, usually *by means of alteration or addition* (emphasis added)” (Sanders 27). Adaptations that fall into the commentary category are not entirely standalone works, like analogues, nor are they simply transpositional works; these works largely remain true to the original source text, but significant changes or additions are made to highlight an “absence or gap in the original narrative” that the adapter believes is worthy of note or culturally relevant (Sanders 27).

Transpositional adaptations represent the most common and well-known version of adaptation, without question. Transposition is the relocation of the source text modally, generically, culturally, geographically, and/or temporally.²² Historically, adaptation was understood as taking a text from one genre (novel) and changing it into another (film), which is a form of intermediality. Intermediality is an umbrella term for media combination, intermedial reference, and medial transposition. Media combination—otherwise known as multimedia, mixmedia, or intermedia—is “the mixture of ‘at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation’ within a certain text” (Pires de Figueiredo 10). Films are examples of multimedia texts because they combine written texts, scripts/screenplays, with audio and visual media elements into one medium. Intermedial reference refers to the intertextual relationship between media, and there are many different ways this concept can be seen throughout pop culture and academia.^{xxiii} The most important concept of intermediality in adaptation studies, however, is medial transposition. Related to the transposition of genre,^{xxiv} medial transposition focuses on the transformation of “a given media product... into another medium,” which represents the historical understanding of adaptation described above (Pires de Figueiredo 11). However, as explained in “History of Adaptation Studies,” the transposition from novel to film is no longer the singular concentration of adaptation studies.

Other styles of transposition common in adaptations are cultural, geographic, and temporal, which generally fall under the element of proximation. Adaptations that engage in proximation (or modernization) attempt to engage the audience by shifting the culture,

²² See Sanders 25.

location, or time period of the original text to a more accessible one. An example of this style of transposition can be found in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), which mostly maintains the language and plot of the original play but sets the action in modern California instead of Renaissance Italy. At its core, the "'movement of proximation' brings the text closer to the audience's personal frame of reference" (Sanders 26). Transposition is intended to make the original work more accessible or relatable to the audience, and it often forms the basis of commentary and analogue adaptations.

Among all these different models and elements of adaptation, there is one constant that every scholar in the field agrees is present and integral to the study of adaptation: intertextuality. The term intertextuality was coined in 1980 by Julia Kristeva as a way of describing the semiotic relationship between texts, but, over time, a much broader understanding of the term has developed.²³ Now, intertextuality has come to "refer to a far more textual... notion of how texts encompass and respond to other texts both during the process of their creation and composition and in terms of any subsequent individual or collective reader or spectator response" (Sanders 2-3). All texts are inherently intertextual, as Roland Barthes points out,²⁴ but adaptations are even more obviously so since the relationship between the adaptation and the source material is so heavily in the foreground.

This relationship between texts led to the discourse around fidelity, one of the most controversial elements of adaptation studies. For much of the beginning of adaptation studies, the main focus of analysis was on how "good" or "bad" an adaptation

²³ See Sanders 2.

²⁴ See Barthes 39.

was, or, in other words, how faithful it was to its source.²⁵ This discourse is also common among students new to adaptation studies, as it is the simplest and most rudimentary method of analyzing adaptations. Thomas Leitch, a strong critic of fidelity discourse, explained that the “assumption of fidelity is really an appeal to anteriority, the primacy of classic over modern texts which are likely to come under suspicion by exactly the teachers trained in literary studies... who are most likely to be interested in adaptations” (Leitch 162). Leitch used Shakespeareans as an example of some such teachers who use adaptations in their classrooms but are still hypercritical of them and seek to prove the superiority of the original text.²⁶ Fidelity discourse has been almost entirely abandoned in adaptation studies other than in references to the field’s theoretical history.²⁷

History of New Historicism

During the 1960s through the ‘90s, there was a massive upheaval of the status quo of literary criticism that led to the creation of most of what are now considered the major schools of criticism.^{xxv} The scholars taking part in this new wave of criticism sought to push back against the dominant theory of the time, New Criticism, which, above all, argued that the text must be studied as an entity completely separate from the author and the sociohistorical context in which it was written.²⁸ As one of the responses to this pushback, New Historicism made its way into academia in the 1980s, with the term

²⁵ See Sanders 24.

²⁶ See Leitch 162.

²⁷ See Pires de Figueiredo 14.

²⁸ See Veenstra 176.

originating in Stephen Greenblatt's *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*.

New Historicism was also a response to Old Historicism—then just referred to as Historicism—, which was a dominant historical methodological approach of the 19th and 20th centuries. The main difference between the two Historicisms, according to Greenblatt, is that “the New correctly holds that at no stage of history is there one single political vision but rather competing ones, and that the cultural environment which the Old Historicism regarded as an historical fact in, instead, a creation of the historian” (Hoover 362). In other words, Old Historicism did not account for the fact that history is, in reality, the “product of the historian’s interpretation,” not indisputable fact (Fry 252).

New Historicism was deeply enmeshed in the era of change that marked the end of the 20th century and, as a result, was heavily influenced by other disciplines and schools of criticism that sought to break up the status quo such as American studies, psychology and anthropology, women’s studies, ethnic studies, Afro-American studies, and Marxism.²⁹ Many scholars within these fields were interested in studying structures of power and the experiences of marginalized people that have been neglected in the past. They were interested in discovering and investigating experiences and views outside those considered predominant or mainstream. One of the most influential of these scholars was Michel Foucault. His beliefs on the “centrality of power for understanding

²⁹ See Hoover 356, 362-3.

history”³⁰ and his writings on “discourse”³¹ influenced many of the tenets of New Historicism, particularly the belief that power is circulated through the social orders.

Inspired by these various disciplines and methodologies, Stephen Greenblatt first applied New Historicism to his research on ‘Renaissance’ texts, which, under this school of criticism, came to be known as ‘early modern’ texts.³² This renaming was part of a trend within New Historicism that sought to rename eras, “substituting time spans for alleged intellectual characteristics (‘long eighteenth century’ for ‘neoclassicism,’ ‘late eighteenth and early nineteenth century’ for ‘Romanticism’) with the intention of reminding scholars that periods are full of ferment and diversity that offset this or that dominant intellectual trend” (Fry 247). The trend highlights the New Historicist belief that groups within a society cannot be assumed to think the same, act the same, or be the same simply because they exist in the same place and time. As Hoover explains it, “humans have no nature, no ‘transhistorical core of being;” they are unique and cannot be boiled down to one defining intellectual characteristic (Hoover 360). This trend and the ideology behind it perfectly encapsulate the central beliefs of New Historicism, which helps provide useful context for understanding the main elements of the criticism.

Concepts of New Historicism

As with all critical methodologies, New Historicists are not monolithic; there are many differing beliefs found among the scholars, but many elements are viewed as foundational. Some such beliefs are that the interpretation of a text is “subjective and

³⁰ See Hohendahl 97.

³¹ See Veenstra 178.

³² See Fry 247.

culture-bound” and that context is necessary for true understanding (Musgrave).

However, there are, of course, elements within those two main beliefs that provide further nuance. All of these foundational elements were valuable as tools for criticism and as aids for understanding for the participants of the study. It is, therefore, beneficial to discuss the elements as the participants understood them.

The first, most foundational belief of New Historicism is that interpretations of literature are subjective and culture-bound. The terms “interpretation” and “subjective” here are incredibly important, as they signify that there is no one definitive reading of a literary text. There are, instead, many different interpretations in dialogue with one another that are influenced by both the author’s and the reader’s personal and cultural biases. The belief that these interpretations are also “culture-bound” ties into the second most important element of New Historicism: context.

New Historicists believe that every aspect of human culture is connected; literature is impacted by what is going on in society—politically, legally, socially, economically, etc.—historically as well as currently, and interpretations of literature are equally as impacted. Michel Foucault’s teachings on discourse play a major role in this concept, as New Historicists argue that history and literature are discourses—with themselves, with each other, and with all other aspects of culture. This belief creates a sharp distinction from Old Historicism which argued that “history is the background of discourse or literature;” the New Historicism, however, “wants to emphasize,” that “literature itself has historical agency, the discursive power to influence history reciprocally” (Fry 250). Because history and literature are in discourse with one another, they have an equal impact on each other, and this means that the context in which

something is written or consumed has a strong effect on both the work and the interpretation of it. Many scholars, such as Paul Fry and Jan Veenstra, discuss an example that perfectly illustrates this concept that was initially used by Greenblatt in *Forms of Power*.³³

The example centers Queen Elizabeth I's response to Shakespeare's *Richard II* as evidence of the reciprocal nature between literature and history. In 1601, Queen Elizabeth was documented comparing herself to Richard II. This comparison and the resulting anxieties were not entirely unfounded, as in "the wake of the abortive Essex uprising, the image of Richard slain and his throne usurped by Henry Bolingbroke represented real political danger and a serious threat to the life of the Queen" (Veenstra 175). Fry notes that the queen believed "wherever there is sedition..., wherever there are people who want to overthrow her and replace her with the faction of the Earl of Essex, *Richard II* is being performed" (250). The queen saw a reflection of her own situation within the play and deeply feared falling victim to the same fate as the titular monarch. Although the original text, and the general critical reading of it, asserted that Richard II was wrongly deposed by rebels and usurpers, it is undeniable that the king, with his "weakness of temperament," is deposed nonetheless (Fry 250). Queen Elizabeth, therefore, "has to assume that her enemies are staging this play to compare her with Richard II in preparation for deposing her and probably executing her in the bargain for the usual reasons of state" (Fry 250). The seditious faction of the Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth, contemporary audiences and critics, and modern audiences and critics have unique understandings of *Richard II* based on their personal and cultural experiences and biases.

³³ See Fry 250; Veenstra 175.

This example illustrates just one of the many ways in which history, personal context, and social context can impact the various interpretations of a singular literary text according to the New Historicist methodology.

As evidenced by this example, many different kinds of context are of value in New Historicism. One of the most important contextual aspects, that which separates this critical methodology most severely from formalist approaches, is the author and their background. According to Jan Veenstra, New Critical/formalist criticism

regarded the text as an autonomous entity. Their criticism attempted to be objective in that it aimed at articulating the meaning and the literariness of a text in terms of its intrinsic language-system. Their scrupulous principles of analysis carefully warded off all links with the exterior environment, which, in effect, became a forbidden world of authors, readers, and social circumstance. (176)

New Historicism, on the other hand, is explicitly concerned with the author's background (their personal life and experiences, as well as the world/society they lived in), especially in how it influenced their writing, the readers of the time, and the readers of today. This aspect of New Historicism was particularly important for the participants of the study.

The students were, perhaps for the first time, given extensive background information on Shakespeare's life and times as they related to the play they were studying. This was especially true at the end of the semester/study, as the last unit was focused entirely on literary adaptations of Shakespeare's life. Watching *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and reading *Hamnet* provided the participants with depictions of Shakespeare's life and early modern England, albeit fictionalized ones, giving them the opportunity to gain deeper

understanding of the context in which Shakespeare lived and wrote, which, in turn, gave them deeper understandings of his works.³⁴

Within the various contexts New Historicists study, one of the aspects they are most interested in is the structures of power that are at play—both historically and currently. Taking inspiration from Marxist and feminist criticism, as well as cultural studies and Critical Race Theory, New Historicists study the power structures of politics, patriarchy/sexism, race/racism, economy/socio-economic status, religion, and anything else that impacts society on this large of a scale. Like these other critical theories, New Historicism employs Foucault’s theory of circulative power in the study of the impact of power structures on literature.

Foucault understands power differently than many, as he believes power is “not just the power of vested authorities, of state-sanctioned violence, or of tyranny from above,” but is, however, the “way in which *knowledge* circulates in a culture: the way what we think that is appropriate to think—acceptable thinking—is distributed by largely unseen forces in a social network or system” (Fry 249). Or, in other words, “...power is the conformance or conformism of thought to perceived, though not necessarily coercive, social pressures. Power in Foucault is *knowledge*...; it is the reason why certain forms of knowledge come to prevail” (Fry 249). Fry’s explanation of Foucault’s power demonstrates exactly how power can reside and circulate anywhere in a society, as everyone plays a role in maintaining the power structures at play.^{xxvi} New Historicists seek to reveal and understand the systems of power at play in a given society and the

³⁴ See Student C’s answer to Question 2 in Appendix D for a personal anecdote demonstrating this.

relationship those systems have with the society, the various people within it, the literature those people create, and the systems of power present in their own society.

Methodology

Participants

Participants of this study included students from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis' Fall 2022 section of ENG-L433/L625: Conversations with Shakespeare. This course, a combined undergraduate/graduate course, was made up of 21 students (19 undergraduate, 2 graduate). The undergraduate students were all seniors and were almost entirely English majors, as this course counted toward IUPUI's English Capstone graduation requirement. The two graduate students took the course as an elective toward their English Master's degree.

Of the 21 students, 20 consented to be a part of the study. During the first class meeting, my presence in the class and the nature of the study were explained to the students. They were provided with an informed consent document (Appendix E) and were told that by signing it, they were consenting to be observed, to participating in any questionnaires/surveys, and to being included (anonymously) in a written report of the study.

Study Context

Conversations with Shakespeare was designed to explore a number of Shakespeare's plays and the "conversations" modern authors, poets, playwrights, and filmmakers have had with them. My role in the course was similar to that of a teaching assistant, which provided unique benefits and limitations as a researcher conducting a study. Dr. David Hoegberg, the lead professor, and I collaborated to determine which texts to include by assessing his syllabi from years prior and selecting which texts would remain and which

we would replace. In the end, we decided on *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *King Lear* as our central Shakespearean texts. There were also multiple related primary texts assigned for each play including numerous poems,^{xxvii} the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the films *O* (2001) and *A Thousand Acres* (1997), and the novel *The Nature of Blood*.

Because the course was partially a graduate-level course, it only met once a week on Wednesdays for roughly two and a half hours. This greatly impacted the in-class vs out-of-class workload. On days dedicated to one of Shakespeare's plays, the course would follow this format: the participants would be asked to independently, out of class, study the assigned play with accompanying study notes for the next class meeting; at that class meeting, Dr. Hoegberg would give a short, roughly 30 minute lecture to provide contextual information—historical background for when Shakespeare wrote the play, historical background for the setting of the play, a short explanation of the content and timeline of the play, etc.—followed by an opportunity for the participants to ask any questions; the question section tended to quickly develop into an hour-long, full-class discussion where the participants would bring up topics they felt were particularly interesting or confusing;^{xxviii} after that hour, Dr. Hoegberg would transition the students into small-group discussions where they would spend around 45 minutes discussing one of the questions on the provided collaborative worksheet³⁵ before spending the last 15 or so minutes of class sharing their responses with the rest of the class; the final minutes of

³⁵ See Appendix F.

each class meeting were always spent on announcing upcoming assignment(s) and/or answering any final questions about the course or the discussion from that day.

The rest of the class meetings focused on the various adapted versions of the plays. Classes dedicated to the written adaptations of the plays—poems, novels, playscripts, etc.—would follow a similar format, but ones dedicated to film adaptations looked quite different. Because the course met only once a week for a significant amount of time, Dr. Hoegberg and I agreed taking class time to view the films as a class would be best. Classes for the film adaptations followed this format: as students arrived in the room, they were given printed handouts of the study notes for the film; once it was time for class to begin, Dr. Hoegberg or I would greet the class, provide any pertinent information, and then begin the film; the participants would then watch the film in its entirety while taking notes guided by the handout; after the film concluded, they would have a quick, five-or-so minute break to stretch or use the restroom before returning to class for the post-film discussion; because there was only 30-50 minutes of class time left, post-film discussions would always be full-class discussions.^{xxix}

The final unit of *Conversations with Shakespeare* diverged from the format that made up the rest of the course.^{xxx} Instead of studying a Shakespearean play followed by texts related to it, the final unit focused on studying artists' "conversations" with Shakespeare *the Man*. They were no longer examining adaptations of Shakespeare's works but fictionalized interpretations of Shakespeare himself. To accomplish this, we assigned the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and the novel *Hamnet*, which both used historical fiction to explore who Shakespeare was as a man and artist, as a father and husband.^{xxxi}

Study Design

This study was modeled after Valsa Koshy's guidelines for an action research project. In her book, *Action Research for Improving Practice: A Practical Guide*, Koshy explains that she "consider[s] action research as a constructive enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the experience" (9). Educators are meant to enact these steps within their own schools/classrooms rather than another's, which would allow one to understand students' learning more generally rather than their own specific students.³⁶ In other words, action research is a practical and active method of investigating and improving one's *personal* classroom practices and students' learning.

Within action research, both qualitative and quantitative data can be gathered and analyzed, but "it is likely that an action researcher would predominately be working within a qualitative paradigm as the data may be more in the form of transcripts, descriptions and documents for analysis" (Koshy 86). Researchers "engaged in qualitative research are interested in the ways people interpret their own experiences, build their own worlds, make meaning from their experiences" (Bowers 74). I primarily collected data within the qualitative category for this very reason. This study was designed, in part, to determine what causes students' disinterest in studying Shakespeare's plays and which teaching methods they believe are best suited to helping them gain interest and understanding, so the action research design was perfectly suited for gathering data based on the participants' interpretations of their individual experiences.

³⁶ See Herr and Anderson 1-7.

Data Gathering Methods

For this study, I used surveys/questionnaires, gathered documentary evidence, and systematically observed class meetings to gather data. Another oft-used method for qualitative data collection is the interview, which performs a similar function to the survey (Koshy 87, 92). I chose to employ surveys rather than conduct interviews for multiple reasons, the first of which was time. I did not want my research or presence in the class to be a distraction to the students, and I did not want to create a significant additional time commitment to their already busy schedules. With the use of surveys,³⁷ I was able to gather the same data I would have from an interview, but I was able to collect it from every student who agreed to participate in a timelier manner. The surveys were formatted as quizzes on Canvas, which meant it was accessible as an assignment on the course website. Using the Canvas quiz format allowed me to keep track of who had responded, what their responses were, and to award participation points.^{xxxii} Students were given just over a week to complete these surveys, which allowed them to respond thoughtfully and without rushing. This also meant their responses were able to be more carefully considered than they might have been in an interview, which requires immediate responses.

The documentary evidence I gathered was primarily in the form of “class takeaway” assignments students were asked to complete after each class meeting. In the description of the assignment, students were told:

After each class meeting, you can earn participation points by posting on the Canvas discussion board either a “valuable point” or a “further question” that you

³⁷ See Appendix A and Appendix C.

came away from class with that day. A “valuable point” should be an explanation of one valuable point or insight you gained from that day’s discussion and why it was valuable to you. A “further question” should be an explanation of a question relating to the readings that either was not answered for you that day or that follows from and continues the discussion from that day. Both “valuable points” and “further questions” need only be one or two sentences long (excluding quotations) to earn points. The idea here is to encourage not just attending class but also paying attention and finding ways to say in writing what the fruits of your learning are. These postings help both me and the class as a whole by indicating what aspects of the class are helping you most and what needs further explanation or discussion. When you make additional posts by responding to others’ posts or adding follow-up comments and questions, you are extending the online discussion and class community in valuable ways. (Hoegberg)

This assignment, as stated, was intended to extend the discussion outside of class, partially because the class only met once a week. In assigning these class takeaway discussions, we were able to hear from quieter students, see areas where students might be confused, and see where their focus went without the guardrails of a lecture/full-class discussion.

The class takeaways assignments also provided the opportunity to see growth and progress over time. Unlike observation, documentary evidence inherently provides a “paper trail,” of sorts. This form of data collection allows researchers to “learn more about the situation, person, or event being investigated” throughout the study (Merriam

and Tisdell 174). By looking at documents that provide examples of individual responses and class trends, researchers can determine where change has occurred.

Another form of documentary evidence I collected was in the form of student writing. As I will discuss in more depth later in the Limitations section, I did not design the writing assignments for this course, which limits my ability to use them as data. However, I believe that analyzing which assignment formats students chose and what topics they elected to write about provides insight into the success adaptation as a method of teaching Shakespeare has on increasing student engagement with the material. The writing assignments, other than the final term paper, consisted of response papers following each module, which consisted of the Shakespearean text(s) and the related adaptation(s). The participants could choose to write an analytical response, an op-ed response, or a creative response, so long as three of the six response papers were analytical.

I also employed participant and non-participant observation as a method of data collection in this study. Participant observation is when the researcher is fully involved in the context of the study; in most cases, this form of observation is seen when a teacher conducts an action research study in their own classroom or school system. They are inherently participatory due to the nature of their role in the classroom. Non-participant observation, on the other hand, “involves observing actions and interactions, perhaps sitting in a corner of the room, silent, but attentive” (Koshy 98). In this study, the majority of the observation data I collected was from non-participant observation of both my “colleagues” and “pupils.”³⁸ I sat in on each class meeting, took notes on the lesson

³⁸ See Koshy 99-102.

and discussion,³⁹ and observed the way students reacted to different texts and teaching methods. However, I did also use participant observation three times over the course of the semester by leading three class meetings. This allowed me to react in real-time to the way students interacted with the material and with my teaching interventions. Because I was an active participant, I was not able to take notes *during* these observations, so I relied on jotting down my impressions and reactions after the fact. I added to these notes after debriefing with Dr. Hoegberg.

As is recommended by Koshy, the observation I conducted was structured.⁴⁰ For every class meeting I observed, as both a participant and non-participant observer, I had an informal checklist of information to look for. Along with always keeping my overall research questions in mind, I also focused my observations on the following areas:

- What teaching methods were used in the lesson?
- What kind of text was the focus of the lesson (play, poem, film, etc.)?
- What kind of discussion was employed during the class meeting (full-group, small-group, both)?
- Did students seem prepared for class? Had they read the assigned readings for the day? Did this translate into their engagement during discussion?
- How were students interacting with one another? How were they engaging with the text/lecture?
- Were students asking many questions? Did this represent confusion or engagement on their part?

³⁹ See Appendix H for an example of my observation notes.

⁴⁰ See “Structuring observations” 99.

Limitations

Because I was not the primary instructor and, therefore, had limited input on the design of the course, there were certain limitations placed on scope of this study, particularly in the interventions I was able to employ. Adaptation studies and New Historicism were already integral aspects of the course design prior to my involvement, so, while I *was* interested in exploring the impact these methods had on student engagement and understanding, they predated—and, therefore, informed—the design of my teaching interventions. Because Dr. Hoegberg’s design of the course was mainly focused on adaptation as a means of studying Shakespeare, there was not an opportunity to employ every popular method of Shakespearean pedagogy, such as active, student-led performances. Over the course of the semester, I personally led only three class meetings, all focused on adaptations,^{xxxiii} which meant I needed to work closely with Dr. Hoegberg when it came to employing the methods I was interested in studying, as he would be the one conducting the interventions for the most part.

My role as a teaching assistant in *Conversations with Shakespeare* also limited the methods of data collection I could utilize. Because I only led three classes, I relied heavily on observations of Dr. Hoegberg’s teaching and the students’ reactions to it. This meant that, while the methods employed would essentially be the same, Dr. Hoegberg’s and my delivery of them might have differed, potentially impacting my perception of student responses. I also did not have input on the design of the writing assignments, which limited my ability to use them as a method of data collection. Because their writing assignments were not explicitly designed the purposes of this study and focused mainly on the adaptation methods used in the course, I felt it would heavily skew the findings of

the study towards adaptation methods to ask the participants how they felt the writing assignments impacted their engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's plays.

Another limitation of this study is that it took place in a classroom made up of senior undergraduate students and graduate students. While I did try to incorporate research by and for high school educators to provide a well-rounded understanding of the pedagogical history of Shakespeare in America, the findings of this study are going to be most applicable to upper-level college educators based on the make-up of the participants.

Preparing for Intervention

At the beginning of the semester, I assigned the "Beginning of Semester Survey" (Appendix A) to establish a baseline. With these questions, I wanted to gauge the amount of experience students had with Shakespeare, their opinion about his works and the study of them, and their reason for taking the course (requirement vs. interest). To study the impact my teaching intervention(s) would have, it was necessary to first understand where the participants were coming from. Students reported a wide variety of prior experience with Shakespeare, both in and out of the classroom. Of the 20 participants, 50% reported that they had previously studied Shakespeare only in high school, 10% only in college, 25% in both high school and college, and 15% had never studied his plays before.⁴¹ Knowing that Shakespeare is a common requirement for high school curriculums, it was surprising to me that three students had never studied his plays

⁴¹ See Question 3 in Appendix B.

before, but, for that very same reason, I was not surprised that half of the participants had only studied them in high school.

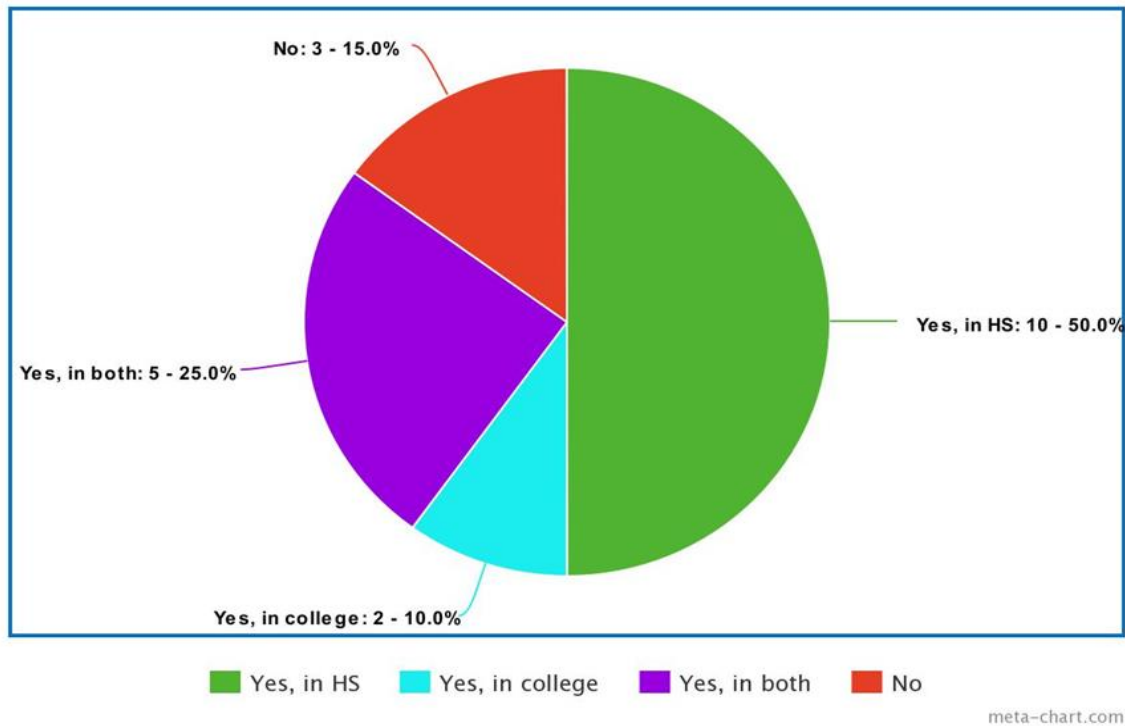


Figure 1: Chart of Responses to Question 3 of Beginning of Semester Survey

To determine the students' level of interest and reason for taking the course, the survey asked, "Why are you taking this course? What was your level of interest in Shakespeare prior to taking this course?" (Appendix A). All of the participants responded in one of three ways: they enrolled because they were interested in studying Shakespeare (20%); they enrolled only because this course fulfilled a graduation requirement (40%); or they enrolled to fulfill the graduation requirement AND because they were interested in studying Shakespeare (40%).⁴² The vast majority of students, this 80%, referenced the fact that this course fulfilled their Senior Capstone requirement, and, as this was the only

⁴² See Question 1 in Appendix B.

Capstone course offered that semester, they were required to take it if they wanted to graduate on time. Of the eight participants who reported that they

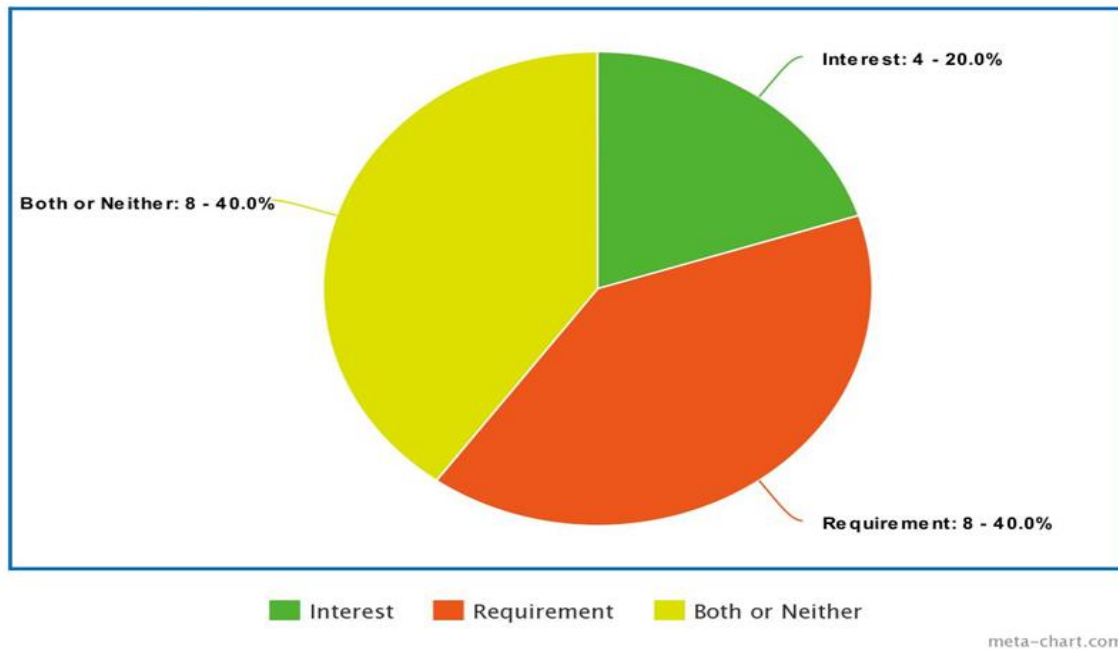


Figure 2: Chart of Responses to Question 1 of Beginning of Semester Survey

enrolled for both interest and requirement, five stated that the primary reason was that it fulfilled their graduation requirement, one that it was primarily because they were interested in Shakespeare, and two that their reasonings were split evenly.⁴³ Taking this into consideration, the amount of participants who registered for the course because of a requirement is closer to 65%. This data supports the trends discussed in the Introduction of this report that students are increasingly less interested in studying Shakespeare and, as a result, there are significantly less courses dedicated to his work offered.

I also used the Beginning of Semester survey to determine what methods of studying Shakespeare the participants had encountered before and whether they found

⁴³ See Question 1 in Appendix B.

them effective. There was a wide variety of responses (twelve in total), as many students had encountered many different methods themselves. The most commonly listed methods were viewing recorded stage productions/film versions (44%), reading lines aloud as a class (55%), class discussions (39%), and reading independently outside of class (28%).^{xxxiv} Only one student responded that they had viewed/read an adapted version of the play for a class, and only one responded that they had

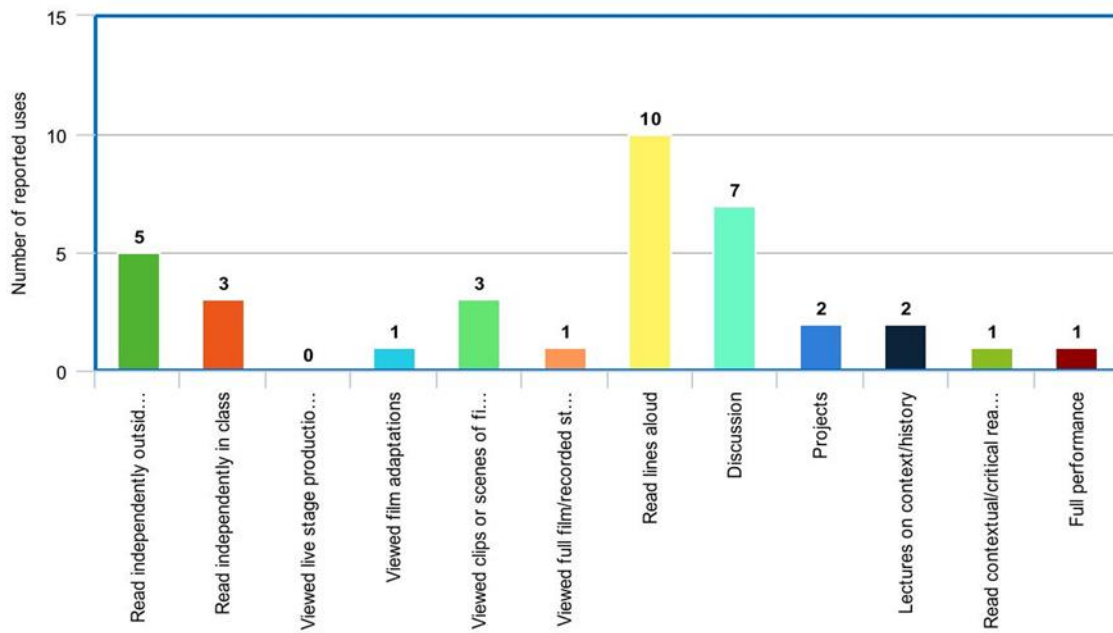


Figure 3: Bar Chart of Reported Methods from Question 4 of Beginning of Semester Survey

received a contextual/historical lecture to provide background information (informed by the New Historicist method). Considering 18 of the 20 participants studied Shakespeare previously, it is incredibly important to note that only two had experienced the teaching methods that would inform the two of the most important interventions of this study.

Another important factor this survey determined was whether or not the participants had prior experience with the plays selected for L433/625. I had two schools

of thought for why this information was valuable: 1) if students have had no prior experience with one or more of these plays, we will be able to determine if these interventions are useful for first-time learners and 2) if students *have* had prior experience with one or more of these plays, we will be able to determine if they feel our methods were more helpful/better suited their needs than previous methods experienced. Of the plays selected for the course (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *King Lear*), 11 students had previously studied *Hamlet* (55%), 3 students had studied *Othello* (15%), 5 students had studied *Merchant of Venice* (25%), and 4 students had studied *King Lear* (20%).⁴⁴ Considering *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays—and the second most taught play in American high schools⁴⁵—it is not surprising that over half of the participants had studied the play previously. However, it was surprising that only 3 participants had studied *Othello*, as it is listed as the fifth most studied Shakespeare play in American high schools (French).^{xxxv} Determining the level of experience the participants had was helpful when beginning the following implementation of interventions.

Intervention

This action research study was designed to test the efficacy of multiple different methods to determine which is best for increasing student understanding and engagement. The methods explored here range between traditional and modern, but they represent only a small number of the possible options an educator may choose when teaching

⁴⁴ See Appendix B.

⁴⁵ See French.

Shakespeare. Based on the design of the course hosting this study, the methods that made the most sense to include were close reading; exploring different genres of Shakespearean adaptations; full-class discussion, small group discussion, and online discussion boards; and providing historical context via lectures and fictionalized interpretations of Shakespeare's life and times.

The eight interventions introduced in this study were employed, either by Dr. Hoegberg or myself, intermittently throughout the semester, often in conjunction with one another. This meant that because they were not being studied on their own, it was necessary to highlight repetition instead, exploring each work using multiple methods. For example, for the first class meeting I led independently, I introduced the method of using a film adaptation to study Shakespeare, but I also utilized methods previously used for other works like full-class discussion and online discussion following class. Repeatedly employing methods, like the different styles of discussion, for different works over the course of the study allowed me to observe their impacts on the participants progressively over time rather than in isolated incidents. This method of introducing interventions may not have provided the most scientific environment for collecting data, but it does accurately represent the structure of a typical literature class, which is an important element of action research. It also means that there are too many examples for each intervention to provide them all with adequate attention. Therefore, instead of discussing each instance of each intervention ad nauseum, I will focus on highlighting the most relevant examples.

Close Reading

Because this study was primarily focused on determining the best methods for creating and maintaining engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's plays, I felt it was important to allow students to first establish which method they would select for themselves. To do this, for each of the assigned plays, students were simply asked to obtain a copy of the text and come to class prepared to discuss the work. The participants were told they could prepare themselves however they liked; they could read the playscript, watch a film or recorded stage version of the play, do background research, or employ any other method so long as they did not simply read a synopsis. Uncertain what to do with the freedom to choose their own method of studying the Shakespearean text, students generally fell back on methods they were taught through previous experiences, and they overwhelmingly chose to independently close read the text.^{xxxvi} Close reading was not initially one of the methods I intended to study, as it is one of the most commonly used and widely accepted teaching methods in literature classrooms—Shakespearean and otherwise—, but the sheer amount of students who selected it when given the freedom to choose any method showed me that it could act as a strong point of comparison against the other methods explored in the study. In having this point of comparison, the participants could then reflect on the differences between this method they had used in prior experiences and the interventions Dr. Hoegberg and I introduced when responding to the End of Semester Survey.⁴⁶ So, instead of discouraging the use of the close reading method in favor of others, I absorbed it into my study as an intervention itself. The participants were still encouraged to employ the method they most preferred

⁴⁶ See Appendix C and D.

while studying independently, but, after making this shift in the scope of the study, I began closely observing the students who reported using close reading while they participated in lectures and discussions.

Discussion

The different forms of discussion, while clearly not the newest or most innovative methods, were integral interventions in this study. For each text, original or adaptation, students participated in three possible types of discussion: full-class, small group, or online. Based on pedagogical research,⁴⁷ personal experience, and participant responses to the Beginning of Semester Survey,^{xxxvii} I felt it was incredibly important to integrate student-centered discussion. As Lyn Dawes phrases it, discussion is a particularly useful tool because “Sharing ideas aloud helps students express tentative ideas and to compare and contrast what they are thinking with what they hear” (Dawes 2). I have found that discussions help students clarify confusions, answer questions, and expand on ideas regardless of the other teaching methods at play, so the three different forms of discussion became a useful tool for the participants, as well as for the study because I was able to observe changes in and the quality of the students’ engagement following each of the other interventions based on their discussions.

Full-group discussions were the most commonly used form throughout the study, followed by online discussions, and then small-group discussions. Every single class meeting involved at least some full-group discussion, and after every meeting, the

⁴⁷ See pages 15-16; Frey; Beehler; Holmer.

students were asked to post and respond to “takeaways” on the Canvas discussion forum. When Dr. Hoegberg led full-class discussions, the students were typically seated in small groups around tables spread around the room, as that was the set up most easily allowed by the provided classroom furniture. However, when I led class meetings, I asked the students to reorganize their seats into a rough circle prior to beginning discussion. I did this to encourage students to actually lead discussion, as facing one another better facilitated conversation and removed me from the front of the classroom and, ideally, from the role of “all-knowing instructor.” I structured the class this way when I led the class on Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet*, but I did not leave the students entirely to their own devices. In the case there were lulls in the discussion or if students were not feeling inclined to bring up topics on their own, I wrote up a Study Notes document made up of issues and questions I believed would spark ideas that we could refer to.

While full-group discussions were at least partially instructor-led,^{xxxviii} the post-class meeting takeaways were entirely student-led. The participants were awarded points for meeting the participation requirements,^{xxxix} but neither Dr. Hoegberg nor myself interacted with the board at all outside of observation.⁴⁸ Providing a completely student-let space for discussion is an intervention that is employed in many online courses, but the implementation of online discussion boards in synchronous, in-person classes has become more popular in our post-Covid e-learning world. Using this newer method of discussion aimed to provide the opportunity for the participants to engage with

⁴⁸ See pages 36-37 for a thorough explanation of the class takeaway assignments.

Shakespeare on their own terms without having to worry about the restraints of a typical classroom setting.

The final form of discussion, small group, was slightly less common but still an integral aspect of the course. For these discussions, the participants were split into groups of 5-8 (depending on attendance), and each group was assigned a different discussion question/prompt.⁴⁹ Getting students to focus their conversation on one aspect of the play or adaptation with the input of only a few others was intended to give them the opportunity to critically and thoughtfully engage with the text without being overwhelmed. It narrowed their focus and encouraged deeper engagement with the text. But, because the groups were asked to take notes in a collaborative document and share out to the rest of the class after the allotted time for discussion was over, everyone still had access to the information and ideas discovered by the other groups. Each of these three methods of discussion were intended to accomplish their own individual goals in increasing student engagement and understanding of Shakespeare's plays, but they also worked as useful tools for collecting data on the success of the other interventions employed in this study, like adaptation.

Adaptation

The interventions designed to test adaptation methods of teaching Shakespeare were perhaps the most integral in the design of the course and, as a result, attempted to cover the entire range of adaptation styles. The adaptations chosen for this course showcased different genres—including poems, novels, playscripts, and films—, cultures,

⁴⁹ See Appendix F for an example of the worksheet participants were given.

geographic locations, and time periods than the original Shakespearean plays. It was important to Dr. Hoegberg and I that the participants were exposed to more than just film adaptations—even though they did prove to be one of the most successful interventions—as they are the most commonly used style of adaptation in other Shakespearean courses.

The first, and most repeated, adaptation intervention the participants experienced consisted of studying poems inspired by one of Shakespeare’s plays. For example, assigned alongside *Hamlet*, students were asked to read “King Claudius” by C.P. Cavafy, “Elegy of Fortinbras” by Zbigniew Herbert, “Polonius” by Miroslav Holub, and “Ophelia: in Defence of the Queen” by Marina Tsvetaeva. Each of these poems were analogue or commentary adaptations of *Hamlet*, as they all either positioned themselves from different characters’ perspectives or used an event or character as an opportunity to comment on a social issue of the poet’s time. To best explore the poems in conversation with Shakespeare’s play, time towards the end of the class meeting dedicated to the Shakespearean text was allotted for rereading and then discussing the poems immediately after finishing discussion of the source material. This meant the original play was fresh in the students’ minds, so the ways in which the poems changed or diverged from the source were even more pronounced. Using poems allowed for the participants to engage with different forms of poetic language and themes than those found in Shakespeare’s plays while also gaining a deeper understanding of the original story.

The next adaptation intervention used in this study employed a text within the same genre, drama, with a very different effect. The only play, outside of the Shakespearean texts, students were assigned was *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, an absurdist retelling of *Hamlet* from the perspective of his two school friends. The

students were asked to independently close read the play outside of class, but during its dedicated class meeting, led by Dr. Hoegberg, the students were shown clips of the film version directed by the author, Tom Stoppard, intertwined with full-class discussion.

The class meeting where the novel adaptation intervention was introduced followed the same format as a class dedicated to a Shakespearean text, except two meetings were allotted for covering the material as it was a much longer text and represented an adaptation of both *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. The novel, *The Nature of Blood*, was specifically chosen for this very reason. Being an adaptation of two plays presents a unique opportunity for students to explore the relationship between two of Shakespeare's plays as well as their relationship to the adaptation.

The final adaptation-based interventions were centered around film adaptations of *Othello* and *King Lear*. These interventions employed concepts from both performance-based pedagogies and adaptation studies. For both *O* (2001) and *A Thousand Acres* (1998), a class meeting was dedicated to the viewing of the film followed by full-class discussion.⁵⁰ To combat passive watching, the participants were given Study Notes intended to guide their thoughts.⁵¹

Historical Context

This study was also designed to test contextual methods of teaching Shakespeare, which can be seen through multiple interventions inspired by New Historicist

⁵⁰ Return to page 34 for a more thorough explanation of how a film adaptation class meeting was formatted.

⁵¹ See Appendix G.

methodologies. In general, relevant historical background was introduced for each of the plays to provide adequate context. This information was generally shared in the form of lectures conducted by Dr. Hoegberg. However, the interventions that are of particular interest to this study involve studying Shakespeare the man. For these interventions, participants viewed the film *Shakespeare in Love*, and read the novel *Hamnet*, which are both fictionalized depictions of Shakespeare's life. While both of these depictions of Shakespeare and his life and times are, indeed, fiction, they were selected to get students thinking about the man behind the plays and how his world and experiences may have influenced his writing. New Historicism asks us to consider the context of when a story was written and who it was written by, and these stories depicting Shakespeare allowed students to more easily engage with an author that can feel incredibly removed from our current realities. The intention behind this intervention was to remove the barrier of time and distance from students' understandings of who Shakespeare was, which would then allow for them to gain deeper understandings of the plays he wrote.

Results

Beginning of Semester Survey

The results of the Beginning of Semester Survey are largely discussed in the section titled Preparing for Intervention,⁵² as this survey was a necessary element for informing the actual implementation of the study rather than the theoretical design. Because of the nature of action research, I felt it was important that the study be applied directly to the students in this specific course as well as students of Shakespeare in general. The results of Questions 1, 3, and 4, having been discussed thoroughly prior, will be skipped in this section. The remaining questions are as follows:

- In your opinion, why do we still study Shakespeare centuries later?
- Have you read or watched Shakespeare's plays outside of a classroom setting? If yes, what plays and why?

These two questions, rather than determining the students' prior experience with Shakespeare, were intended to establish whether *they* believed Shakespeare to be relevant and what role he played in their lives outside of the classroom (if at all).

The results of the first of these questions were particularly interesting because a lot of the participants echoed sentiments popular with Shakespearean professors in the 19th and 20th centuries. Not a single student responded that they believed Shakespeare should no longer be studied, which could be a result of their belief that Shakespeare does truly remain relevant, or it could simply be because of the wording of the question—which I later realized was written in a way that might not have been welcoming to disagreement or dissent. However, regardless of this possible error, the majority of the

⁵² See Appendix A.

responses were incredibly positive toward the study of Shakespeare and his plays. Student A stated that while “one can't underplay the role bardolatry played in this... ultimately Shakespeare is fundamentally an excellent writer” and that “His work showcases a number of facts of life during the transition from the classical to modern periods of storytelling” (Appendix B). The sentiment that we as a society still study Shakespeare because of his talent as a writer was reported eight times, and the belief that it is because he and his works are representative of an era was reported three.^{xi} Other students responded that they believe we still study Shakespeare because of the cultural influence he remains to have or because of how well his works lend themselves to the study of English,^{xli} but, by far the most reported reason was that it is simply because the stories, characters, or themes remain relevant to this day.^{xlii} Student M provided a great representation of this belief when they said,

I think part of the reason we still study Shakespeare is because his plots and characters are so ingenious, so detailed, that we are still discovering new layers and new interpretations even still. And even though they were written centuries ago, his characters are so well rounded, so human that we can still relate to them, still see reflections of ourselves in them. (Appendix B)

That this sentiment is so strongly reported by this sample of students proves either that this belief is correct or that this belief has been so strongly engrained in our society and educational system that they simply accept it as fact.

The responses to the final question of the survey initially surprised me. Of the 20 participants, 11 reported that they engaged with Shakespeare's plays outside of the classroom, generally in the form of movies or stage productions. I expected this number

to be much lower. However, most of the adaptations that students reported engaging with outside of class are popular films that are either direct adaptations, like Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* or *Gnomeo and Juliet*, or that have become famous in pop culture for being adaptations no one realized were adaptations (in other words, analogue adaptations), like *The Lion King*, which is based on *Hamlet*. That over half of the participants reported that they have, in some form, watched versions of Shakespeare's plays outside of a classroom setting provides significant evidence of the cultural influence he continues to hold in our society.

Classroom Observation

Other than the two surveys, classroom observation represented the main method of data collection for this study. As I attended every class meeting, I was able to observe the participants during every stage of intervention, which provided me with first-hand experience of the participant's growth/change throughout the study.

At the beginning of the study, the majority of the participants were hesitant to participate in full-class discussion, as is often the case at the start of a course; however, it seemed that based on the increased level of participation with non-Shakespeare-related discussions, the students were hesitant due to their lack of experience with/knowledge of the course content. While it could have been explained by the individual traits of the students, it did seem that the participants who reported having more prior experience with Shakespeare's works were far more comfortable engaging in discussion.

As the study progressed and the participants gained experience with more of the plays, it became clear that the answer to the first research question posed in this study is

that engagement and understanding are both increased as experience increases. Over the course of the semester, the participants were engaging more and more thoroughly with the plays, and, by the end of the study, the students were even referencing discussions and analyses of previous plays in both full-class and small group discussions.

It was also clear through my observation that there were methods of studying Shakespeare that resonated more with some participants than others. In the initial discussions of each play, it was clear that students who relied solely on close reading had less of an understanding of the content and themes. These students participated in discussion less, asked more basic questions, and relied heavily on their classmates during small-group discussions.^{xliii} On the other hand, practically all of the participants showed major increases in engagement and understanding of the original play after reading or viewing an adapted version. For example, after viewing *O* (2001), the first film adaptation of the study, every student in attendance contributed to the full-class discussion and the majority were more interested and engaged in the conversation than they had ever been previously. Seeing this huge shift in engagement after an intervention was incredibly exciting, and it contributed significantly to the conclusions drawn at the end of the study.

Class Takeaway Posts

The class takeaway posts represented an incredibly unique opportunity for observation and documentation in this study because they were completely student-driven. As the participants were not given any prompts or guidelines for their online discussions, everything they chose to write about was completely determined by them, and this

granted me insight into the topics each individual student was drawn to in a way that was not possible in classroom discussions simply due to time restraints.

At the beginning of the study, the participants were more likely to use the class takeaway posts as an opportunity to ask clarifying questions or bring up something that was discussed in the preceding class meeting. However, as the semester drew on, more participants expanded the content of their posts to more deeply engage with the relevant plays and/or adaptations. Their posts began drawing from outside works/events, things they were not able to bring up in class, discussions of previous works, or even previous courses they had taken.

Writing Assignments

Although, as I mention in my [Limitations](#) section, I did not design the writing assignments for this course, I believe student writing is one of the most effective ways of measuring a student's understanding of the course material, so I want to touch on a few findings based on the assignment formats and topics students chose.

As engaging with adaptations of Shakespeare's plays was the primary focus in Dr. Hoegberg's design of this course, as well as an important aspect of this study, it was interesting to see how many students chose the creative option for the response papers. As analytical essays are the most common genre of academic writing used in the literature classroom, it came as no surprise that most students opted to stick with what they knew best, but between two to five students chose the creative for every response paper. Overall, only 9 participants chose the creative option, but between them, they

wrote 21 responses consisting of poems, short stories, diary entries, and a film review.

The most interesting thing about these participants choosing the

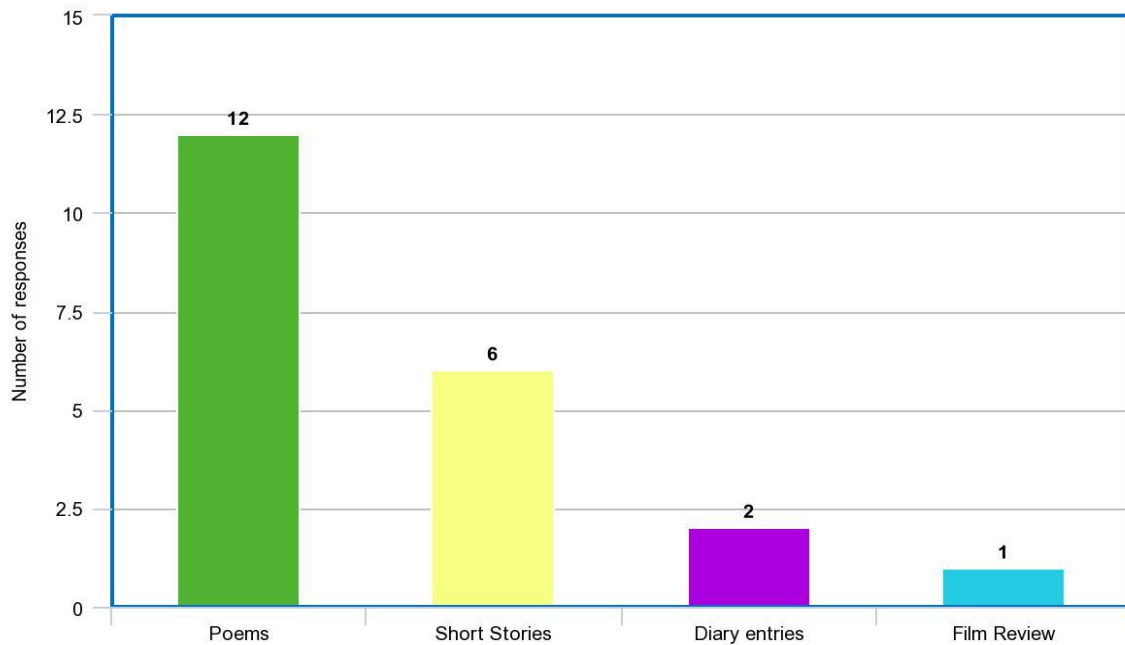


Figure 4: Bar Chart of Creative Response Paper Styles

creative response is that in doing so, they went beyond engaging *with* adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays and became adapters themselves. Gaining first-hand experience with a concept is often regarded as the best method of learning something, so in becoming adapters of Shakespeare, they pushed beyond the theoretical ideas behind the adaptation-based teaching interventions and tangibly showed their understanding of both the method and the source material.

End of Semester Survey

One of the most important methods this study used to measure the effectiveness of the interventions was the End of Semester Survey.⁵³ Unfortunately, only 7 out of 20

⁵³ See Appendix D.

participants submitted responses to the End of Semester Survey,^{xliv} which, admittedly, might affect the overall credibility of the findings, but all participants were represented in the observations and class takeaways.

The End of Semester Survey was designed to determine how the participants themselves felt about their level of engagement and the different teaching methods applied throughout the course. The first two questions students were asked were focused on whether their opinion of Shakespeare's plays had changed (either positively or negatively) and, if so, whether any particular events caused that change. Of the seven students who responded, all of them reported that they left the class feeling more positive about Shakespeare and his works—either because they felt negatively before or because they just developed an even deeper appreciation. One student reported a specific play that caused them to change their opinion about Shakespeare (*The Merchant of Venice*), but the rest of the participants expressed that it was either a gradual change that they noticed at the end of the semester or after viewing the first film adaptation.^{xlv} One of the participants, Student R, noted, “I thought it was really cool when we started getting into some of the adaptations or other things in conversation with Shakespeare, I think seeing things relative to the present gave me a bit more of an appreciation for Shakespeare” (Appendix D). This response perfectly encapsulates how transpositional adaptations can greatly benefit students' understanding of Shakespeare.

The phenomenon Student R saw in herself was also observed in the rest of the participants during class meetings and in the class takeaway posts. Following the film viewings, class discussions were electric. For example, after watching *O*, the students were so invested in their discussion of the film and the relationship it had with the

original play they did not even realize class time had ended. It is typical for students to begin packing up minutes before class is over, but in this case, as well as with the other films, the discussion had to be halted by either myself or Dr. Hoegberg so as to not keep them well over time. Similarly, the students' discussion posts on Canvas following film classes were noticeably more active. They were asking questions, expanding on thoughts they had during the class meeting, and engaging with one another beyond the superficial.

The fifth question of the End of Semester Survey is perhaps the most important in determining which methods of studying Shakespeare the participants felt were most effective. This question asked,

If [you have studied Shakespeare prior to this course], were there any methods of reading/studying Shakespeare in this course that you enjoyed that you have not used previously? Or were there any methods you wish had been used? If you have not studied Shakespeare previously, were the methods used good/helpful for first time readers? What stands out to you?

[Some methods include: independently reading the plays, viewing filmed stage productions or movie productions of the plays, reading books or poems based on the plays, viewing film adaptations (*O, A Thousand Acres*), open class discussion, lectures on play history and context, etc.] (Appendix C)

The responses were particularly interesting, as most of the students reported that multiple different methods were necessary for their understanding. Student C claimed that

The biggest importance was having read Shakespeare first on my own, then coming together as a class to have the professor point out key parts of the plot and then discuss as a group. As a first time reader for almost all of the plays, this

helped me tremendously understand. The adaptations were also essential for understanding Shakespeare, because most of them provided a modern take which made it easier to understand. (Appendix D)

Whereas Student O stated,

The methods were very helpful. The texts can be very overwhelming, so at first, independently reading them seems like a lot. However, I enjoyed the readings after getting a little more used to the language. I really enjoyed the viewing the stage/film productions as well. Personally, open discussion is the best way for me to understand a concept, so this method was great, the play history lectures helped me understand some of the references and context of the play as well, which helped majorly with my comprehension of the texts. (Appendix D)

Both of these students acknowledge that they are new to Shakespeare, and they each list independent reading, discussion, and adaptations as necessary elements contributing to their understanding of the plays. Student O also highlights a contextual method as being particularly helpful. These two students represent the responses that covered the most methods, but all of the others also touched on at least one listed here.

Of the seven students who submitted a response to the End of Semester Survey, none made any indication that they wished there was a student-led performance-based method in this course. I mention this because 12 of 18 students noted at the Beginning of Semester Survey that they read lines aloud during class in their previous experience(s) studying Shakespeare.^{xlvi} In that survey, one student *did* comment specifically on this topic, saying, “We read lines aloud as a class, which I always disliked because it only accounted for the selected people chosen for those parts. It was easy to zone out when

you were not reading” (Student N, Appendix B). I found this sentiment particularly interesting because it seems to contradict the vast amount of scholarship I came across espousing performance-based pedagogy as the best method for developing understanding and engagement in students.

The final question of the End of Semester Survey was less concerned with measuring anything to do with the methods of teaching Shakespeare but was instead entirely focused on gauging student engagement. The question asked, “Overall, is there any text or class moment that stands out to you? A play you didn't think you would enjoy but actually did or a discussion that was particularly exciting or helpful?” The responses were incredibly personal to each person, but they all showed different areas of the course that engaged, delighted, or even altered the students.

Conclusions

If we, as an educational community, believe there is value and necessity in continuing teaching Shakespeare, we absolutely must try to make our teaching methods as relevant to our students as we argue Shakespeare's stories are. Educators would benefit from finding the method that works best for their unique students, but as it is not possible to conduct a full research study for every class one teaches, I will provide some suggestions based on the findings of this study.

Based on the results of the various data collection methods, multiple conclusions can be drawn to respond to the three research questions posed by this study. The conclusions drawn for the first question—How much is a student's level of engagement and understanding affected by previous experiences with Shakespeare? (high school, college, or even independent exposure)—were not particularly surprising. Based on my observations and the self-reports of the participants, it is clear that prior experience significantly positively impacts engagement and understanding. I was initially worried with this study that prior negative experiences with Shakespeare and his plays would negatively impact the participants' perception of the work to be conducted in this course, but it seemed that with the employment of useful and engaging methods in this study, the student's previous experiences worked as just that: prior experience that gave them a bit more confidence when it came to tackling new works.

Because participants who reported more prior experience with Shakespeare and his works seemed to be more confident engaging with and understanding the plays and adaptations covered in this course, I believe that scholars who argue against teaching Shakespeare in high school and leaving his works for college-level courses are incorrect.

While many students reported that their experiences in high school were lackluster, or even bad, it is clear that prior exposure to Shakespeare does, in fact, prove beneficial for the future. However, the methods students are exposed to can greatly increase the chances a student has a positive experience studying Shakespeare, making them more likely to continue studying his works in the future.

The second and third questions posed by this study were focused on the different teaching methods, both past and current, that resonate the most with modern students and which one is the best for increasing student engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's plays. The design of both the course and study allowed for the opportunity to employ multiple methods in conjunction with one another—close reading, historical context, adaptations, full-class discussion, small-group discussion, etc.—in an effort to discover which one the participants resonated with most. However, upon concluding observations and reading through the End of Semester Survey responses, it is clear that there is no *one* best method. In fact, students seem to respond best when there are multiple methods employed simultaneously. This surprised me because I began this study expecting that the participants would overwhelmingly prefer the method of using film adaptations to study Shakespeare as they tend to be the most entertaining and still provide great material for analysis and discussion. Students did appear to most enjoy exploring adaptations of the plays, but without the prior experience of reading and thoroughly discussing the original works, that enjoyment likely would not have been nearly so strong. Based on the responses of the final survey, it was exploring the relationship between the adaptation and original that heightened their experience with Shakespeare rather than the adaptation alone. Similarly, many participants reported that exploring

“Shakespeare the Man” and employing New Historicist methods in their study greatly increased their understanding of the plays and the context surrounding them. It is clear from these results that educators should do away with the idea that one method of studying Shakespeare is better than the others, and should, instead, employ multiple to best meet the needs of their students.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Research

As I am in the process of learning how to be an educator, and because action research is designed specifically to study different effects in one’s own classroom, I feel it is necessary to reflect on my experience conducting this study and to provide any possible recommendations for other educators.

If I were to go back to the first stages of developing this study, I would ensure that I was responsible for employing every intervention myself at least once. As I was not the primary instructor in the class, and because I lacked teaching experience, it was agreed that I would only lead three class meetings and would leave the Shakespearean texts to Dr. Hoegberg. While I do believe it might have been a challenge for me to take on more of a teaching role, I believe the findings of this study would have been much stronger if the majority of my observations were participatory.

For future research, it may be beneficial to narrow the focus of the study from the entire course to just one play and its adaptations. Because this study covered so much material over so much time, it became difficult to wade through all of the collected data and give every piece of it the attention it deserved. Instead, it may be valuable to employ

all of the main interventions in one module. This would, of course, lessen the number of interventions able to be applied, but it might make for less diluted data.

After conducting this study and seeing all of these different methods of teaching Shakespeare at work, I was left wondering which ones I would be most likely to use in a classroom of my own. This answer is, of course, complicated by the findings of this study that most of these methods work best when used alongside multiple others. However, I can say for certain that no Shakespearean class of mine would be complete without full-group discussion and some degree of historical context. I would also prefer to include at least one or two examples of Shakespearean adaptations. It is clear from this study that these three methods are what students respond to most, and a combination of the three made for incredibly engaged students.

Notes

ⁱ The scholarship I found making this argument is largely made in relation to high school curriculums by high school educators, but it stands to reason that those who believe Shakespeare is not relevant for their high school seniors would also believe his works are not relevant for college freshmen, as only a short amount of time separates them.

Therefore, the argument against teaching Shakespeare in high school is just a step away from an argument against teaching Shakespeare *at all*.

ⁱⁱ Film versions and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays can be found as early as the 1890s. According to the database maintained by the British Universities Film and Video Council, there are currently 1,346 films in existence.

ⁱⁱⁱ The arguments I make here for the continued study of Shakespeare are ones that I came up with independently, but, while conducting the research presented in the following

Review of Literature chapter, I discovered these arguments are not new ones. Scholars have felt this way about teaching and studying Shakespeare since he was first introduced into the American curriculum. I wholeheartedly believe these sentiments because of my personal experiences studying Shakespeare, and it is clear by the sheer number of scholars who have echoed these beliefs over the last century that there is truth in them, either by virtue of being true fact or simply being so ingrained in our society it has become fact.

^{iv} This claim was/is not universally agreed on by historians of the study of Shakespeare in America. Some scholars, like van Cleve, assign significant power to the Harvard entrance requirement, while others, like Charles Frey, argue that Shakespeare had already made his way into high schools as evidenced by the works of Henry Norman Hudson, William J. Rolfe, and others. Granted, the articles by van Cleve and Frey were published 46 years apart, and Frey may have simply had access to more/different information than van Cleve had in 1938.

^v The Harvard entrance requirement “called for a composition, ‘the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time. The subject for 1874 will be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Merchant of Venice*; Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield*; Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and *Lay of the Last Minstrel*” (van Cleve 334).

^{vi} Critical schools such as Marxism, feminism, post-colonial studies, and New Historicism often argue that literature can, and even should, be studied with the intention of better understanding societies and humanity.

^{vii} I want to preface this sub-section with the acknowledgment that any attempt to trace the history of teaching Shakespeare in America is going to be messy, confusing, and at times contradictory. There are rarely clean demarcations between pedagogical practices and/or ideologies of different eras; some people were ahead of their time, others seemingly held tightly onto the past, and oftentimes multiple methodologies overlapped coming into and leaving prominence. I apologize if any of the timeline presented seems confusing/confused, but that is simply because it is.

^{viii} This is a similar strategy that led to the creation of New Criticism. Literary scholars wanted to strengthen the respectability and public perception of their discipline, so they developed a method of studying and critiquing literature aligned with scientific methodologies of the time.

^{ix} Renz also argues that Shakespeare's plays taught and acted out in classrooms should be cut dramatically for time, which was (and remains to be) a very controversial opinion. Even those who acknowledge that Shakespeare should be experienced via performance find issue with Renz's proposition.

^x While this is the typical position, some performance-based pedagogues are fine with, and even encourage, the use of film or stage versions of Shakespeare's plays; they simply caution against passive viewing, as it defeats the purpose of performance-based pedagogy, which is active in nature.

^{xi} On pages 604-606 of "Shakespeare Through Performance," Miriam Gilbert details multiple performance exercises she employs in her classroom. Her sound-and-movement exercise tasks a small group of students with "preparing a short scene for which they will present the central emotional story with movement, gesture, and sound, but not with

language.” Another is the exercise of telegraphing a speech, or “reducing it to the smallest number of words that will convey the message.” She also advocates for different groups of students to present versions of the same scene, which opens up opportunities for discussion surrounding differences between their interpretations.

^{xii} Enjoyment and engagement for Shoemaker’s study were determined through journal responses.

^{xiii} With the sole use of close reading, students in Shoemaker’s study averaged 75% on the test to determine comprehension for Act I. This differs drastically from the 89% average when students viewed a film adaptation of Act IV. I do want to note, as Shoemaker also does, that all five methods were sequentially tested on different acts of the same play, which means the results might not be as accurate as they would be if a single method was tested on a single play. The two lowest test scores were from the methods used in Act I and II, but Act V did have the third lowest test score, so it is difficult to determine definitively whether more time and experience with the play have an impact on comprehension rather than the methodology.

^{xiv} Michael D. Friedman distinguishes the difference between “versions,” “adaptations,” and “citations,” on page 3 of “‘To think o’th’ teen that I have turned you to’: The Scholarly Consideration of Teen Shakespeare Films”.

^{xv} See “Research for the Classroom: To Read or Not to Read: Five Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare” by Brandon Shoemaker; “‘To think o’th’ teen that I have turned you to’: The Scholarly Consideration of Teen Shakespeare Films” by Michael D. Friedman; “Using Film to Increase Literacy Skills” by Michael Vetrie; and “Teaching Shakespeare with YouTube” by Christy Desmet.

^{xvi} To combat the possibility of passive viewing, Dr. Hoegberg and I created viewing guides for the film adaptations we were each responsible for teaching. See Appendix G for an example.

^{xvii} I want to note that IUPUI does not require a course on the major theoretical schools and methods of criticism for English majors, so prior knowledge of New Historicism/adaptation studies was not expected or required. While there was a reading assignment and lecture dedicated to the relevant concepts of adaptation studies, there was no such attention given to New Historicism. There was, instead, a far more informal approach; the elements of New Historicism were interwoven into the design of the course and were discussed in full-class and small group discussions as they came up.

^{xviii} Emphasis in original.

^{xix} Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, Ian Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye, Robert Stam, Robert B. Ray, Sarah Cardwell, and Thomas Leitch are some such scholars; Elliott 577.

^{xx} The divide between formal-cultural and textual-contextual theories within adaptation studies represents a much larger matter than can be discussed in this report. See Elliott's "Rethinking Formal-Cultural and Textual-Contextual Divides in Adaptation Studies" 576-81 for a thorough history of the rifts within the discipline.

^{xxi} At the beginning of the course, Dr. Hoegberg established that, while some of the texts might technically be appropriations, adaptation was an acceptable catch-all term and students were not required to distinguish between the two for ease and clarity.

^{xxii} These films are appropriations of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, as well as a film adaptation of the novel by the same name, which is an appropriation of *King Lear*.

^{xxiii} A more thorough explanation of intermediality than I can touch on in this study can be found in Pires de Figueiredo, “Introduction: Some Theoretical Models for Adaptation Studies” 10-12. Texts of note in her explanation are Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality” and Elleström, *Media Transformation*.

^{xxiv} The distinction between genre and medium is a murky one, especially regarding adaptation studies, where the two words are often used interchangeably. In my understanding, medial transposition focuses on the abilities of the different mediums involved (visual, auditory, textual, etc. abilities within the mediums of film or written text) and transpositions of genre focus more specifically on the artistic conventions that are transformed. Medial transposition is more technical and genre transposition is more artistic.

^{xxv} The schools of criticism include deconstructionism (1966), feminism (1960s), reader response (1960s), gender/queer studies (1970s), critical race theory (1970s), New Historicism/cultural studies (1980s), and post-colonial studies (1990s).

^{xxvi} One of the strongest illustrations of the way those at the bottom of the power hierarchy have helped to maintain power structures is mothers. Women have historically had very little power (politically, socially, financially, etc.), but mothers were always largely responsible for raising their children. This means that mothers were responsible for teaching their children the ways of the world, which, in most cases, worked to carry on societal norms and maintain structures of power, even if those same norms and power structures negatively impacted women.

^{xxvii} List of poems included in *Conversations with Shakespeare*: Cavafy, “King Claudius;” Herbert, “Elegy of Fortinbras;” Holub, “Polonius;” Tsvetaeva, “Ophelia: in Defence of the Queen;” Nathan, “Shylock in New York;” Pitt-Kethley, “Shylock;” Shapiro, “Shylock;” Sillitoe, “Shylock the Writer;” Smith, “Shylock;” Walcott, “Goats and Monkeys;” Cisneros, “King Lear;” Lauinger, “Three Songs for *King Leir*;” Raymond, “The Ordeal of Love.”

^{xxviii} When Dr. Hoegberg led class meetings, full-class discussions were generally student-led, with regular prompting or redirecting from him to keep the discussion flowing and on-topic.

^{xxix} When I led post-film discussions, I tended to allow students to lead where the conversation went, only taking lead and guiding back towards the study notes when there was a clear lull, and Dr. Hoegberg tended to guide discussion more closely in line with the study notes.

^{xxx} The majority of *Conversations with Shakespeare* followed this pattern: read Shakespeare’s play, lecture over context and history and discussion (full-class and small group), read (out of class) or watch (in class) the related text/film, discuss the related text as an independent text *and* its connection to/conversation with the Shakespearean play (full-class and small group).

^{xxxii} It is important to note, as we did for our students, that while these texts have kernels of historical fact, they are almost entirely fiction. As important as Shakespeare is in academia, there is *relatively* little known about the man because of when he lived. What we do know is largely based on legal records (birth and death records, marriage records, land and property titles, business transactions, etc.).

^{xxxii} Dr. Hoegberg and I agreed each survey would be worth 10 extra credit participation points to incentivize participation without negatively affecting students who did not wish to opt into the study.

^{xxxiii} I led the class meetings for *O* (2001), *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), and *Hamnet*.

^{xxxiv} Although only 18 participants reported what methods they had used in prior experiences studying Shakespeare (2 reported no prior experience), most of them listed multiple methods each, which resulted in 43 total responses. The percentages listed here represent the number of students out of 18 that reported using that method. See Appendix B for all responses.

^{xxxv} These rankings are the results of a poll conducted by Esther French of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

^{xxxvi} This fact was discovered through observation during class discussions. Only 5 of the 18 students (28%) who answered Question 4 of the Beginning of Semester Survey (Appendix B) said they were told to independently close read in their previous classes, but this contradicted what the participants expressed during classroom discussion for the first assigned play.

^{xxxvii} Only 7 participants reported using discussion in previous experiences, and, as it is such a useful and widely used method, I felt it necessary to include multiple forms of discussion as interventions in this study.

^{xxxviii} Students were provided with Study Notes for each of the plays and adaptations covered to help guide their preparation for class and class discussion. See Appendix G and H for examples.

^{xxxix} This is the assignment description students were given for class takeaways can be found on pages 34-35 of this document. If students accomplished all that was asked of them, they could earn up to 12 participation points.

^{xi} I want to note that the majority of students provided multiple reasons within their answers, so there are 32 responses recorded between the 20 participants.

^{xli} 6 and 4 students respectfully.

^{xlii} 11 students reported this.

^{xliii} I do want to note here that we had no real way of ensuring that any of the participants were actually consuming the assigned materials outside of the film versions they viewed during class time, which complicates the results of the study. This means that the students who reported that they used the close reading method and showed less understanding/engagement with the plays may, in fact, have been lying; they may not have done the assigned reading at all. Because we have no way of knowing for certain, all conclusions drawn from this observation may be taken with a healthy amount of skepticism. However, because of my continual presence in the course and the relationships I built with the participants, I conducted this study under the belief that the participants were being as truthful as possible, and the conclusions discussed in the next chapter will reflect that.

^{xliv} As I mentioned above in note xxxii, both surveys were assigned as extra credit points, so as not to pressure students into participating in my study if they were not comfortable doing so for the sake of their grade. This did backfire, however, as there was not a requirement in place for the participants to fill out the End of Semester survey. This is the likely reason for the low number of responses, as students during that time in the

semester are generally stressed and busy with final exams, essays, and projects and might not be as concerned with earning 10 extra credit points.

^{xlv} Three students answered that it was a gradual change and three others answered that it was after viewing the first film. See Question 2 of Appendix D.

^{xlvi} There were 20 participants in this study, but this question only had 18 responses because 2 students had never studied Shakespeare in an academic setting before this course.

Appendices

Appendix A

Beginning of Semester Survey Questions

1. *Why are you taking this course? What was your level of interest in Shakespeare prior to taking this course?*
2. *In your opinion, why do we still study Shakespeare centuries later?*
3. *Have you studied Shakespeare in high school or prior college courses? If yes, what grade(s) were you in and what play(s) did you study?*
4. *If you have studied Shakespeare before, what methods did your teacher/professor use? For example, did you watch recorded stage productions, read lines aloud as a class, etc.? What methods did you like or not like? Why?*
5. *Have you read or watched Shakespeare's plays outside of a classroom setting? If yes, what plays and why?*

Appendix B

Beginning of Semester Survey Responses

Question 1: Why are you taking this course? What was your level of interest in Shakespeare prior to taking this course?

Student A: I am taking this course primarily to finally get myself to read more of Shakespeare's work. The school workload typically prevents much if not all pleasure reading. Furthermore, I find the plays are better experienced with other people/a learn'd scholar to bounce ideas off of.

Student B: I am required by the English Education program to take this course. I joked that my only experience with Shakespeare was having seen 2011 animated film *Gnomeo and Juliet*, but that's pretty much the truth. I never really retained any information about Shakespeare's work when I was in school because I hated reading it, but now having read some of his work more intensely for this class, I actually like it.

Student C: Honestly, I am taking this class because it completes my Capstone requirement for graduating, if I didn't take this I would have to wait until Spring to graduate. However, I did want to take the Introduction to Shakespeare class and was never able to so I'm glad to have this opportunity. Prior to this course, I have had a limited comprehension of Shakespeare, but what I had read I enjoyed. My class in high school covered Romeo & Juliet freshman year, which I liked and we covered Hamlet briefly my senior year, which really got me into Shakespeare.

Student D: To fulfill my capstone. I've had some interest in Shakespeare before, but not anything actually serious.

Student E: I am a fan of Shakespeare. My mother was an English teacher so I grew up discussing the readings on her syllabi including several of Shakespeare's plays. I also did theatre so I was familiar with some of the plays through performance too.

Student F: It is my capstone, but I was a little interested in Shakespeare before taking this course.

Student G: Need it for capstone/always wanted to get into shakespeare

Student H: I am taking this course because it was the only Capstone offered in the fall. I have had prior interest in Shakespeare mainly just understanding all the references to his different works. Plus, I wanted to see some original plays after seeing the modern movies.

Student I: I am taking this course to deepen my understanding of Shakespeare and intertextuality within the Shakespeare literally cannon.

Student J: I've taken some film and screenwriting classes prior to this course so I do have some interests in script reading, but I didn't have any experience with Shakespeare in particular. I took this course mostly for the capstone credit, honestly.

Student K: I am taking this as apart of my degree. I have always seen some interest of myself in Shakespeare but not too big of an interest. The work has been fun to get to learn, but, I am excited for this class to learn more about the work and language used during the plays and poems.

Student L: I was told it could probably fill a prerequisite for a certificate I was interested in. I enjoy Shakespeare and renaissance lit., although I wouldn't say they're my favorite era. The adaptations focus of the course also sounded interesting.

Student M: I am taking this course partly because I need it for my capstone, but also because I have always been intrigued and entertained by Shakespeare's works.

Student N: I had very limited interest and experience before this course. I had to take it for a capstone credit.

Student O: It was one of my required courses in order to reach for a bachelor's degree, but I've always loved anything literature so I knew I was going to enjoy it.

Student P: I am taking this course mainly because I need the credits, but I am interested in learning more about the works of Shakespeare. I knew a small amount about his works before coming to this class, so I'm excited to expand my knowledge on it.

Student Q: I mentioned this on the first day of class, but I have no interest in Shakespeare whatsoever. The reason I took this course was mainly to get a capstone course done for my major, and I didn't want to wait a semester to get the class that would've probably been the better fit for my major.

Student R: I'm taking it 1. Because I need it to finish college and 2. Hamlet and some Macbeth are all I really knew about Shakespeare and I thought it would be cool to learn more.

Student S: I'm taking this course not only for my major/capstone but also because I enjoy Shakespeare. Prior to this course, I have read some of Shakespeare's works for my own enjoyment as well as having some of his works read to me as a child.

Student T: I'm taking this course as it was the only capstone offered this semester, and I didn't want to wait any longer to graduate. I've never really had that much interest in Shakespeare. I respect his contributions to the linguistic arts but due to the "language"

barrier of old modern English and how verbose his work can be, I've never really been a fan.

Question 2: In your opinion, why do we still study Shakespeare centuries later?

Student A: Well, one can't underplay the role bardolatry played in this, but ultimately Shakespeare is fundamentally an excellent writer. His work showcases a number of facts of life during the transition from the classical to modern periods of storytelling.

Student B: Because as it's one of the content rich collection of works that a single person has ever created, the stories are still relevant today, and it's challenging (and therefore rewarding) to read.

Student C: I think we study Shakespeare for many different reasons. I think partly because there are so many plays of his, he is more likely to be included in classes. He has enough plays in many genres and age range that High Schools to College age can study them. I also think we study Shakespeare because his plays often cover human nature and we are fascinated with it. I also think that since his plays are so long and poetic with a lot of metaphors, the plays have a lot that we can dissect and analyze making it great to study and interpret.

Student D: Partially out of tradition, but also because of his fame and influence.

Student E: Shakespeare was a groundbreaking story teller and many subsequent works are based off or around his original plays. So I guess understanding the original concepts are equally, if not more, important than The Lion King (maybe).

Student F: Because it's still relevant.

Student G: It is still relevant

Student H: I think mostly because he makes interesting plot lines that can still relate to readers of any generations.

Student I: We study Shakespeare now for the same reasons we study Homer or Chaucer or read Beowulf. Because the work has been influential throughout our history. We study Shakespeare to understand our foundations, to see how individuals from history tackled issues we deal with today, and how they responded to those issues. We study him because the work is a master class in subverting expectations and societal beliefs of the time to challenge and bring about change.

Student J: A lot of the themes and moral lessons seem like they would still be relevant today.

Student K: I believe we still study Shakespeare because there are still many lessons and stories that are still relevant today. Also, a lot of references made in either television or music goes back into Shakespeare. So, with that I believe that it is important to learn to know where these references are coming from and to have better knowledge.

Student L: I think it's because he's still so influential and culturally relevant. There's also a lot of humanity in his plays that people can still relate to. They're just well-written in general.

Student M: I think part of the reason we still study Shakespeare is because his plots and characters are so ingenious, so detailed, that we are still discovering new layers and new interpretations even still. And even though they were written centuries ago, his characters are so well rounded, so human that we can still relate to them, still see reflections of ourselves in them.

Student N: I think he has become so famous and well known that it has just become an expectation to study his work.

Student O: I personally see it as a way to see how much literature has evolved. Two classes that I've always remembered going back in time is English and History. So much has changed and evolved through those two subjects that it's worth showing it and the different people who have influenced these works.

Student P: I think that Shakespeare not only uses important literary devices in his work, but he also writes about topics that are still relevant today. I think that is why his works are so classic.

Student Q: Again, having no real background in the topic itself, my guess is that Shakespeare is probably studied centuries later because he wrote a lot of good stories that are clearly the inspiration for a lot of works that are done today.

Student R: Because he's like the focus of the era. We still study ancient myths and hymns and stuff because they represented an era, he's the same. Not only that but his writing has significantly affected developments in literature, drama especially.

Student S: I think it's mostly because his works were "far beyond his time". Many of his works still have relevance today as well as giving insight into popular topics and ideologies of his own time. I feel that in a classroom setting his works are valuable to showcase how writing has not only evolved but how many of his actual works set the precedent and inspired many other writers who are popular today.

Student T: I am of the opinion that Shakespeare was a gifted linguist that made many contributions to the English language, even including the formations of new words.

Question 3: Have you studied Shakespeare in high school or prior college courses? If yes, what grade(s) were you in and what play(s) did you study?

Student A: I did indeed. 8th Grade - *Midsummer Night's Dream*; 9th Grade - *Romeo & Juliet*; 10th Grade – *MacBeth*; 11th Grade – *Hamlet*; Freshman Year - *The Tempest*

Student B: I wouldn't call it studying. I skimmed *Romeo and Juliet* briefly Freshman year in high school, but I actually just gave up and watched the movie from the 90s set in modern times with Leonardo DiCaprio in it

Student C: Yes, I studied Shakespeare in high school. My freshman English class studied *Romeo & Juliet*. My senior year, Honors English, class studied *Hamlet*. Although I have taken several English courses for my Creative Writing major at IUPUI, I have not had a prior college course cover Shakespeare.

Student D: In 8th grade we read *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet* in 9th, *Julius Caesar* in 10th, and *Macbeth* in 12th.

Student E: Studied Shakespeare a few times throughout high school, mostly just the mainstream ones: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Midsummer*.

Student F: Yes, I took British Literature and we talked about Shakespeare in there. We read the *Merchant of Venice*.

Student G: I read a few Shakespeare plays in grade 9 & 10 English class

Student H: I have taken some other Shakespeare classes mostly in college including an introduction to Shakespeare class. I was a freshman for that class. We studied *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *the Tempest*, and some of his sonnets including *My Mistress eyes are Nothing Like the Sun*.

Student I: Yes I have. I have taken a few Shakespeare classes.

Freshman year of highschool we studied Romeo & Juliet. Though I don't really count this as my teacher didn't understand the play either so there was not much learning that occurred.

My third year in Undergrad I took a major plays of Shakespeare class. In this class we read a handful of his plays and learned them. We read: Hamlet, As you like it, Merchant of Venice, Othello, Measure for Measure, and Richard III.

My senior year of undergrad I took conversations with Shakespeare. We read: Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Winter's Tale, and King Lear.

Student J: I did not study Shakespeare in High School.

Student K: I definitely studies Shakespeare in high school and a few times over in college. This is probably my third time touching into Shakespeare again. We did Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and Othello.

Student L: In high school, I read Julius Caesar in my junior year and Macbeth in my senior year.

During my junior year of undergrad, I took a course where we read a play by Shakespeare and then read a similar play by one of his contemporaries. I believe we read Richard IV, King Lear, and The Merchant of Venice. We also read several sonnets.

Student M: In high school, I studied The Merchant of Venice as a freshman, as well as Macbeth and A Midsummer Night's Dream as a senior. Here at IUPUI, I took Major Plays of Shakespeare as a junior and we studied Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, and Measure for Measure.

Student N: A Midsummer Night's Dream (8th grade)
Romeo and Juliet (junior year of high school)

Student O: The only thing of Shakespeare's that I've read is Romeo and Juliet, but that was required in high school. I believe it was freshman year.

Student P: I studied Hamlet a little bit last semester for a theater class, but I struggled with it then as well and didn't get as much of an understanding as I did this time.

Student Q: No.

Student R: I have, I think I was a sophomore in high school when I read Macbeth and a Junior when I read Hamlet.

Student S: I studied some basic Shakespeare in high school. We had a unit over him in which we read Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet. In a different class, I also read Julius Caesar.

Student T: I can't really recall farther back than high school but pretty much every general English class we would always at least touch on Shakespeare.

Question 4: If you have studied Shakespeare before, what methods did your teacher/professor use? For example, did you watch recorded stage productions, read lines aloud as a class, etc.? What methods did you like or not like? Why?

Student A: We typically read by ourselves, and watched a few scenes of various performances. We did go over some lines in class.

I suppose the most helpful parts to me were explanations of motivation/being able to see the lines performed? I have something of an understanding of language, but sometimes the iambic pentameter can make the meaning a bit murky, and hearing the actors inflection can carry some of the meaning.

Student B: I sadly do not remember much of anything from semester 1 of my Freshman year of high school. I had a severe concussion from hockey that lasted around two months. I actually had to quit playing. It also made reading difficult and I downright refused to read Shakespeare because it hurt so bad to even try. We didn't cover Shakespeare Sophomore, Junior or senior year

Student C: I can't remember too much specifically on how we studied Shakespeare in High School. I know that we watched *10 Things I Hate About You*, as well as an adaptation of *Romeo & Juliet*. We also read lines aloud as a class and had study guides to go along with the plays. On my own to better understand Shakespeare, I listened to a movie adaptation of *Hamlet* starring David Tennant, which I found the most beneficial. I did not enjoy reading lines aloud in class, because it was usually too slow for my reading.

Student D: We read the lines out loud in class mostly, for Romeo and Juliet we watched the movie with Leonardo DiCaprio, and for Macbeth we watched clips of a movie. I think that adding the movie helped with understanding the plays, for Macbeth we actually watched the parts of the movie as we read the scenes from the book which I thought was nice for confirming our understandings of the scenes before we needed to move on.

Student E: We would discuss the text and occasionally watch a film adaptation of the play. I would have liked to do more reading aloud with Shakespeare because I think the flow and iambic pentameter help a great deal in understanding the lines.

Student F: It was an online class, so we didn't do any read out louds. We didn't watch any productions either. It was mostly us reading on our own and then posting to discussion boards about it and replying to each other.

Student G: We read it aloud in class and watched the plays.

Student H: We mainly were charged to read ahead of class and then have a class discussion. We would read some parts that the professor wanted to highlight aloud. For the sonnets, we mostly started class by rereading them out loud.

Student I: They had us watch recorded stage productions, assigned readings that provided insight into the play or the history of the play that would enhance our understanding of the play. But I think what worked the best was just breaking down the scenes and the important passages of each scene so that we understood what was happening.

Student J: N/A

Student K: I'm not sure on what methods were being used, but I will say we would watch Othello and Henry V. We had to read lines aloud in my theater classes as it was important for us to know the language used and how to say it.

Student L: It was mostly read-aloud and discussion based. I think recordings could have added to the understanding but the classroom we were in didn't support that super well. Plus, since it was a comparison course with Shakespeare's contemporaries, it would have skewed things in his favor since the other writers didn't always have readily accessible productions.

Student M: One method that stuck out to me from high school was that our teacher split us into smaller groups and had us each interpret our own scene from Macbeth, and not only did that help us with comprehension of the play - as they are meant to be watched and heard rather than read - it demonstrated how versatile Shakespeare's plays can be.

Student N: We read lines aloud as a class, which I always disliked because it only accounted for the selected people chosen for those parts. It was easy to zone out when you were not reading.

Student O: I don't really remember the way we studied Shakespeare. I know we had those huge literature books and read the play with the whole class, but that is about as much as I can remember.

Student P: We did not really use any methods. We discussed certain theatrical aspects of the play, and one group did a project on the work.

Student Q: N/A

Student R: I don't remember much specifically, for Macbeth we just read it out loud in class for a week or two, and Hamlet I think was more of an assigned reading and watching clips from the movies, I think the entirety of the Branagh version, and a project, I think a character study on Hamlet. We didn't really discuss much, and I really like that about this class, and the clips from the movies are fun. The other readings will probably be helpful, too, like the ones in conversation with Shakespeare.

Student S: When studying him in high school we learned about his background as well as some important historical points that would influence his works. When it came to the actual plays we would read around in class with different students being assigned different characters for an act or scene. I can say that I didn't really like this method as many students had difficulty reading the lines or saying certain words and interrupt the scene, making it harder to understand what was going on. We would also watch a film adaptation of the work either alongside where we were reading or after we had finished

reading the work in its entirety. I liked this method as it helped to give visual to what was happening during certain scenes and really help to make things click.

Student T: From my recollections when we would go over Shakespeare in K-12 we would read lines as a class. I really only ever had a vague idea of what was being said, but I enjoyed it more because I was a more confident public speaker.

Question 5: *Have you read or watched Shakespeare's plays outside of a classroom setting? If yes, what plays and why?*

Student A: Kind of, but not any plays I haven't studied in class. I meant to read Merchant of Venice in High School, but as I mentioned earlier, if I'm not reading for school or doing work for school, or thinking for school, I tend to be too mentally and emotionally exhausted to do anything for my own benefit.

Student B: No.

Student C: Outside of a classroom setting, I have not read or watched any Shakespeare's plays, because I never felt like taking the time to do so. Reading Shakespeare takes a lot for me to comprehend, so I knew that if I tried to read a play on my own, I would have to also do a lot of research and listen to audiobooks to fully understand the literature. As for why I have not watched a Shakespeare play, I don't usually use my freetime to watch movies and I did not know of a good adaptation to watch.

Student D: Other than popular movie adaptations, I have not.

Student E: Yes, but am mostly just exposed to various and fairly sporadic scenes from Shakespeare's plays. Also I liked Denzel Washington in Macbeth.

Student F: No. I only read and watched Shakespeare for class.

Student G: I watched the Leonardo DiCaprio version of Romeo and Juliet because of Leo.

Student H: I have seen Hamlet outside of class. I have also watched some different remakes of his plays into modern movies such as As You Like It, She's the Man, Gnome and Juliet, and 10 Things I Hate About You.

Student I: Yes, I have watched Shakespeare's plays outside an academic setting. Specifically just *Midsummer*. I have seen it as a ballet, as a regular staged production, and then I stage managed a production.

Student J: I have not.

Student K: I have always enjoyed watching *Othello*. That is one of my favorite plays as to me it had the best storyline and script used. I absolutely love it to this day and always will watch it for my own enjoyment.

Student L: I played Cobweb in a high school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That wasn't my first experience with that play, however. I'd read it twice for fun a few years earlier. A friend had recommended it to me and it was free on my Kindle.

Student M: Yes, I have, partly because my mother is an English teacher and she would both read and watch a lot of them with me when I was growing up, and then also just for my own enjoyment. I've been to see *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* live in the theatre, and in high school I was in a production of both *Midsummer* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. And as an avid reader I made it a personal goal to eventually read all of his plays on my own (I'll admit I'm not as far along on that list as I would like to be).

Student N: No, but I have rewatched *Romeo and Juliet* after I first watched it in class.

Student O: I've watched a lot of Romeo and Juliet spin-offs. There's The Lion King 1 and 2, Gnomeo and Juliet, Romeo and Juliet: Sealed with a Kiss and Warm Bodies. Apparently, High School Musical was inspired by the play! I think I mostly watched these due to being a kid and it being on at the time.

Student P: No, I have not.

Student Q: No.

Student R: I actually re watched the Branagh Hamlet over the summer for this class because I knew we'd have to talk about Hamlet and I just think that movie is very well done.

Student S: I've both read and been to plays outside of the classroom. As for which plays I've read it was The Comedy of Errors which I read simply for fun and it seemed interesting. I've watched live productions of Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, and The Comedy of Errors. My hometown puts on a Shakespeare fest every summer in which the college students along with professional stage actors will put on plays of different Shakespeare works. My and my grandfather go not only as a sort of bonding thing but also to support the local community and college students.

Student T: No.

Appendix C

End of Semester Survey Questions

1. *Have your feelings about Shakespeare changed over the course of the semester (either positively or negatively)? How did you feel at the beginning versus now?*
2. *Based on your answer to the previous question, if your feelings changed, at what point did you notice the change? Was there a specific class meeting or text that stands out to you?*
3. *In the first survey, I asked why you feel we still study Shakespeare centuries later. I would like you to answer this question again based simply on how you feel now. It's okay if your answer is different or if you don't remember how you answered before...

Is Shakespeare still relevant? Why or why not?*
4. *Had you ever studied Shakespeare prior to this course?*
5. *If yes, were there any methods of reading/studying Shakespeare in this course that you enjoyed that you have not used previously? Or were there any methods you wish had been used? If you have not studied Shakespeare previously, were the methods used good/helpful for first time readers? What stands out to you?

[Some methods include: independently reading the plays, viewing filmed stage productions or movie productions of the plays, reading books or poems based on the plays, viewing film adaptations (O, A Thousand Acres), open class discussion, lectures on play history and context, etc.]*

6. *Overall, is there any work or class moment that stands out to you? A play you didn't think you would enjoy but actually did or a discussion that was particularly exciting or helpful?*

Appendix D

End of Semester Survey Responses

Question 1: Have your feelings about Shakespeare changed over the course of the semester (either positively or negatively)? How did you feel at the beginning versus now?

Student C: Over the course of this semester my views on Shakespeare (the person) and Shakespeare (the plays) changed. At the beginning of the course, my understanding with Shakespeare as a person was non-existence, I did not think deeply about him, I only considered his works of literature as poetic but hard to understand. As a person, several adaptations shaped my view of him as a little bit negative. Hamnet, the novel, really changed my perspective of him as a person. As we researched his life, I found myself annoyed at who he might have been, but at the same time I acknowledged the fictional re-countings as fictional. I also learned from this course how many of his plays were actually lengthened versions of true stories, which dampened my view of his creative mind slightly. However, I have gained a deep appreciation for his plays. I may still struggle to understand his plays, because of the language used, but I recognize the depth to the plots. I do have a strongly opposed opinion to many of Shakespeare's depictions of love though. Before, I saw his plays such as Romeo and Juliet as a great depiction of passionate love. Now as being a college age student revisiting his depictions of love, I am much more critical and see his great "love" stories as more so "lust" stories. Overall, yes my feelings have change both negatively and positively, but I have a greater understanding about Shakespeare now.

Student H: I had always seen Shakespeare as a classic figure in literature that should be at least once in a person's lifetime through I recommend any other play then Romeo and Juliet. As a individual, I never really thought about him just the capital S Shakespeare.

Student O: Yes, they have changed for the better! Before taking the course, I thought Shakespeare was practically irrelevant and too hard to understand. Now, with a little decoding, I understand the topics of the plays can still be relevant and interesting.

Student P: Due to only having a small section dedicated to only one of his works, Romeo and Juliet, I didn't know much about him. I always viewed him as the man who brought in true drama to theater and literature and that was about it. Of course, I took the course to get the credit that I needed, but I never imagined actually loving Shakespeare. I still see him as a dramatic man, but that's the beauty of literature and having the open world to write in it.

Student Q: Yes, my feelings have actually changed about Shakespeare since the beginning of the course. I was mostly neutral of Shakespeare, and now, at the end of the course, I legitimately enjoy Shakespeare's stories and the impact that they have on society as a whole.

Student R: I don't feel as though my feelings have changed all that much, I always at least had a slight appreciation for Shakespeare, now it's just a bit more than it was before.

Student T: Positively.

My main takeaway from the course was a greater appreciation for the historical contexts in which Shakespeare's works were written.

Question 2: Based on your answer to the previous question, if your feelings changed, at what point did you notice the change? Was there a specific class meeting or text that stands out to you?

Student C: It was a slow change that I can't exactly pinpoint the exact shift. I think everything in the class from the first discussion, the readings, to my final project shifted my feelings. The first class meeting discussing how Shakespeare himself adapted stories into his plays were the first shift. It made me start researching the real stories behind each play and gave me a deeper understanding of what he created. The novel Hamnet and the movie Shakespeare in Love shaped my feelings towards Shakespeare the person, as I understood the possible grief he went through losing his son, while also made me look towards him negatively as I thought about his wife and family he left behind.

Student H: The later end of the semester is really when I started to think in a more positive light towards Will the man.

Student O: There wasn't a specific text or meeting, but reading a text and then watching the movie adaptations really helped me understand that a lot of these texts are still very relevant.

Student P: I noticed my change when I decided to buy Shakespeare's plays after the class (I also asked for them as Christmas presents). I loved Othello, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, and Hamnet. What really stood out to me was how much people were inspired by Shakespeare and how many made adaptations of his work and ideas.

Student Q: Honestly? I wasn't thinking about it, but it's possibly when we watched the first movie. That's when I feel like I could really connect with his stories, and I think that

has more to do with me than anything else, because I'm not huge on reading, but I love visual entertainment.

Student R: I thought it was really cool when we started getting into some of the adaptations or other things in conversation with Shakespeare, I think seeing things relative to the present gave me a bit more of an appreciation for Shakespeare.

Student T: I would say it started with Merchant of Venice.

Question 3: In the first survey, I asked why you feel we still study Shakespeare centuries later. I would like you to answer this question again based simply on how you feel now. It's okay if your answer is different or if you don't remember how you answered before... Is Shakespeare still relevant? Why or why not?

Student C: I believe we study Shakespeare centuries later because of the universal themes in his plays. The novel *The Nature in Blood* does a great job providing commentary on this and highlighting the universal themes in Shakespeare. I also think there is a fascination in the idea of "one man writes hundreds of plays that are still captivating today" which causes people to continue re-visiting Shakespeare. I also think Shakespeare has so many plays that there is a play that can fit anyone.

I believe Shakespeare is still relevant and will always be relevant, because we can adapt his plays to be modernized and still be relevant and keep his original themes. Love, vengeance, grief, are all themes present in different Shakespeare plays and are always affecting us as humans.

Student H: I think he is still relevant because he is a classic figure in literature. He also shows that literature to be untraditional does have to be in your face but more subtle.

Student O: I do think Shakespeare is still relevant. He still discusses topics of love, war, death, etc.. which are topics that have been relevant since the beginning of time. The language is definitely outdated, but the themes still shine through pretty clearly.

Student P: I will always believe that certain aspects of history will always be important to learn, and Shakespeare is one of them. As someone who loves literature and wants to pursue a side career of writing, I see Shakespeare as an inspiration. His detail to certain words and the way characters interact can help writers find their own style of writing and how to build characters.

Student Q: It's a good thing I don't remember how I answered before, because I think this will be what you're looking for, but I think it's extremely obvious Shakespeare is relevant. He may have written his plays for issues during his time, but seeing the adaptations that are being made and continuously changed nowadays shows that we can still use his writing to talk about issues we have in our own society today, and I think that's extremely important.

Student R: Shakespeare is definitely still relevant, I'm sure I said something similar at the start of class but Shakespearean tropes have been used thousands of times, his work spans so far and so wide, it's probably the richest source material for adaptive or intertextual work.

Student T: I actually mentioned this in my own final essay. Shakespeare is worth studying because his work encapsulates the thoughts, feelings, and culture of a span of history.

Question 4: Had you ever studied Shakespeare prior to this course?

Student C: Yes.

Student H: Yes.

Student O: Not really. I don't know how I managed to graduate high school without reading Shakespeare, but I did.

Student P: Yes. The only time I learned about him was during my freshman year of high school. We didn't actually get to learn about him though, we just read Romeo and Juliet and the teacher would try to explain why this play was so important.

Student Q: No.

Student R: Yes.

Student T: Yes.

Question 5: If yes, were there any methods of reading/studying Shakespeare in this course that you enjoyed that you have not used previously? Or were there any methods you wish had been used? If you have not studied Shakespeare previously, were the methods used good/helpful for first time readers? What stands out to you?
[Some methods include: independently reading the plays, viewing filmed stage productions or movie productions of the plays, reading books or poems based on the plays, viewing film adaptations (O, A Thousand Acres), open class discussion, lectures on play history and context, etc.]

Student C: The most useful method of studying Shakespeare was Professor Hoegberg's module outline. I saw this as a blueprint on studying Shakespeare, which I had not noticed my previous teacher utilizing. I found the lesson plan outline to be so beneficial I

even used it for my final project. It is probably a commonly used way to teach Shakespeare, but I found Professor Hoegberg lined it out in a way that it was accessible for me to apply on my own.

This format was: Week 1: Read Shakespeare Play on own, breakdown play in class by discussing structure and themes

Week 2: Read Adaptation on own, breakdown adaption, compare and contrast in class
Then create a response on own from what you have learned.

This plan alongside the adaptations, helped me greatly in studying Shakespeare. I wish when I first learned Shakespeare, my teacher would have utilized something similar. The biggest importance was having read Shakespeare first on my own, then coming together as a class to have the professor point out key parts of the plot and then discuss as a group. As a first time reader for almost all of the plays, this helped me tremendously understand. The adaptations were also essential for understanding Shakespeare, because most of them provided a modern take which made it easier to understand.

As for reading Shakespeare, on my own I utilized a method I had previously used, I listened to straight audio adaptations.

Student H: I enjoyed watching the adaptation of the plays and thought that the most helpful aspect was the group discussion.

Student O: The methods were very helpful. The texts can be very overwhelming, so at first, independently reading them seems like a lot. However, I enjoyed the readings after getting a little more used to the language. I really enjoyed the viewing the stage/film productions as well. Personally, open discussion is the best way for me to understand a concept, so this method was great, the play history lectures helped me understand some

of the references and context of the play as well, which helped majorly with my comprehension of the texts.

Student P: I believe that I learned a lot about Shakespeare and I was glad that I got to look more into his other plays instead his most famous one. One thing I do wish that we opened up more was about his life. I learned about his marriage, his children, etc... But, I don't recall learning about why he wanted to write and why he perused the career of writing (I might be spacing on it if we did talk about it).

Student Q: N/A

Student R: I've only studied the plays, so looking at the work comparatively with some of the new stuff was really useful, we mainly did like character studies back in highschool, we sort of did that at times in this class, but mainly focused on the plot and it's broader implications, both original and new work. I thought all that stuff was helpful.

Student T: Viewing stage productions and movie productions as well as adaptations were what I enjoyed beyond the reading.

Question 6: Overall, is there any work or class moment that stands out to you? A play you didn't think you would enjoy but actually did or a discussion that was particularly exciting or helpful?

Student C: This class set me up to be able to learn Shakespeare on my own. As previously explained, Professor Hoegberg's outline and lectures taught me how to study Shakespeare. I then was able to apply this method to my final project and study a play we did not cover in this class for my final project. The final project aspect of this class was very beneficial to me, because it proved I could apply the tools I have learned and built

my self-confidence on Shakespeare. It also made Shakespeare fun, because I got to decide what play and adaptation to study, as well as the final project outcome. I believe in order to do a final project on this scale though, it is essential to first study multiple plays, to understand common Shakespeare (the person)'s tools. Overall, this class did a great job making Shakespeare understandable and fun.

Student H: For a prior class I had read *A Thousand Acres* and really disliked it. Like really disliked it. Yet watching the movie and then discussing it made me appreciate it more. I still dislike it but if I have to read/watch it for another class, I won't think it's the end of the world.

Student O: I enjoyed the viewings the most. However, I went into the course, not expecting to enjoy it as much as I did. I liked talking to my classmates about our thoughts and even the things we didn't quite understand.

Student P: Some of my favorite memories of that class was when we would read something strange or weird in one of the plays and we were all just taken aback by it.

Student Q: It's honestly kind of hard to think about this, because the most recent classes stick to my mind. Talking about how Shakespeare wanted to immortalize his son through *Hamlet*, *Hamnet* was a really strong book.

But again, there were lots of stories we touched on that I wasn't expecting to get so involved with, *King Lear* / *A Thousand Acres* being another play/adaptation that sticks in my mind too.

Student R: The discussions on *Hamnet* and *The Nature of Blood* were probably the best in my opinion, those were pretty complicated texts so they helped a lot.

Student T: Learning the legacy of *King Lear* is what stood out to me the most.

Appendix E
Consent Form

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I agree to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records.

Participant's Printed Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:**

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ **Date:**

[If the study involves children whose parents will provide consent for their child's participation, include the following:]

Printed Name of Parent: _____

Signature of Parent: _____ **Date:**

[If the study involves children who will be providing their assent on this consent document rather than on an assent document, include the following:]

Printed Name of Child Participant: _____

Signature of Child Participant: _____ **Date:**

Appendix F

Collaborative Worksheet for Small Group Discussion

Worksheet for 8-31-22

Instructions:

Each small group discussion topic has been given a separate page below for note-taking and sharing ideas. Use your group's page in this document to jot down notes (bullet points are fine).

In your small group, discuss the topic among yourselves and come up with your best answers to the discussion questions. Please make sure you find and reference at least three passages in Shakespeare's play as evidence for your ideas.

1. Do a character study of the main character, Hamlet. What are his main values, desires, and fears and how do these change as the play progresses? How do his relationships with the other characters in the play shed light on his character and on Shakespeare's messages? What overall messages does Shakespeare use Hamlet's character to send?
2. *Hamlet* depicts a kingdom in crisis and so explores the question of what constitutes good and bad government. In this case, the parallel between Fortinbras and Hamlet focuses the play more specifically on questions of revenge and justice. What in the play are the main obstacles to justice and good government, where are they shown, and why are they obstacles? What

solutions to the problems of government and justice does the play suggest or depict?

3. Many of the characters in this play are looking for people and information they can trust or be certain of, yet face the problem of not knowing how to interpret what they see and hear. Where are the main examples of pretending, deception, and interpretation in the play and what do they tell you about Shakespeare's messages? Are some kinds of deception better than others, and if so, why? Are some ways of interpreting better, and if so, why? What overall messages does the play seem to be sending about pretending, interpretation, trust, and faith
4. In what ways does this play contain commentary on gender roles? What are the main points of conflict or tension between the male and female characters and what causes them? What solutions to these problems does the play depict or imply? What overall messages about gender roles does Shakespeare seem to be sending in this play?
5. Like the other plays, *Hamlet* contains several motifs (i.e. objects or images used repeatedly in different scenes) that can be seen as a kind of running commentary on important issues and themes. Examine the motif of disease, illness, infection, decay, corruption and their bodily opposites, health, cure, and growth; notice also the ways in which the human body is used as a metaphor for the kingdom of Denmark, which is also diseased and in need of a cure. Find and discuss at least three examples of this motif to see what kinds

of conclusions and messages can be drawn from them. How does the motif comment on the main events, characters, and issues? How does it change as the play progresses and why? How does it help to send or emphasize the play's main social or moral messages?

Appendix G

Study Notes for *O* (2001)

Study Notes for the film *O* (2001, Tim Blake Nelson, director)

Prof. Hoegberg

Study notes are meant to be brief, tantalizing, perhaps even cryptic, to challenge you to read carefully and look for connections. Keep the following issues and patterns in mind as you read and watch for places in the text where they appear in different forms. Write down your observations, hunches, and questions to bring to class discussion.

Please Note: Class time will allow only one viewing of the film, so plan to take notes while you watch so you can recall things for later discussion and writing.

Issues

The social issues of race and gender that are prominent in Shakespeare's play are also central in this modern retelling of the story, but because of the changes that have been made they are not handled in exactly the same ways. In order to see how this film functions intertextually, you need to be able to explain which parts of the film make changes to Shakespeare's play that affect the issues and messages regarding race and gender. Keep the following questions in mind as you watch the film and jot down ideas and observations to prepare for class discussion.

How does the change of language and setting affect the themes and messages of the work?

What has been added to and subtracted from the plot and the idea-structure of Shakespeare's play?

What are the effects of these changes on:

--the play's critique of racial prejudice and its effects on various characters?

--the play's critique of gender prejudice and its effects on the characters?

Do these changes tend to strengthen Shakespeare's social critiques, to weaken them, or do they stay the same?

Patterns

Bird imagery

Light and dark imagery

Music on the soundtrack: what kinds of cultural meanings do the musical selections carry and how do these relate to the characters, plot, and social messages?

Appendix H

Study Notes for *Hamnet*

Study Notes for *Hamnet* (Maggie O'Farrell, 2020)

Adrienne Thomas

Study notes are meant to be brief, tantalizing, perhaps even cryptic, to challenge you to read

carefully and look for connections. Keep the following issues and patterns in mind as you read

and watch for places in the text where they appear in different forms. Write down your observations, hunches, and questions to bring to class discussion.

Issues

Family

- How does the novel explore different familial relationships? Parent to child, sibling to sibling, grandparent to grandchild, in-law to in-law, etc.
- What does the novel say about the value of family? Is this meant to be a message imparted on the reader, or simply a study of a single family?
- How do some of the characters navigate familial abuse? Take note that many instances of abuse are not only physical, but mental/verbal/emotional as well.

Grief, Loss, Death

- Take note of the different ways characters grieve. What does this say about their inner character or even about the nature of loss?

- How does death affect those around it? How does it impact the various characters in the novel? How does it affect their relationships with others?

Gender roles/societal values

- How does the novel portray the tension between the social roles women are expected to play and the ones they actually play? In what ways do the women in the novel follow social norms and break from them?
- What kinds of words, actions, and beliefs do the female characters display and how do they compare with each other?

“Shakespeare”

- How does the novel portray Shakespeare? Is this different than or similar to the other interpretation we have seen? How does it relate to your personal interpretation of him based on your own knowledge?
- How does the novel portray his creative process?

Patterns

Birds, flight, flying

Ghosts, spirits, witchcraft, otherworldly phenomenon

Appendix I

Observation Notes from August 31st, 2023

8-31 Hamlet class

Beginning of class

- take roll
- take questions
- give brief outline of what the rest of class will look like
- explanation of upcoming assignments

Discussion of secondary reading

- Ask about initial thoughts/questions
- Explanation of texts) to provide context
 - ↳ Touch on important points
 - ↳ Explain why the text is relevant to our discussion

Discussion of primary reading

1. How was reading this play?

- Student Q: It was really difficult; footnotes aren't always helpful; language is difficult
- Student A: Unsure about Ophelia as a character; why is she important
 - ↳ Student G - answers; Ophelia as a foil

↳ Student R - Ophelia makes the play actually tragic - w/o her death, why would we care?

- Student B - opening to Act II scene I was confusing (Polonius' characterization)
- Student G - relates the play to her own experiences w/ mental health to draw conclusions

2. Questions

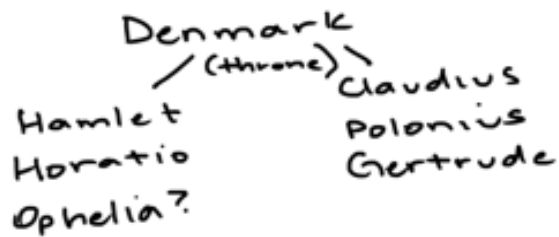
- Student N: did Ophelia & Hamlet actually go mad? Is it mental illness? grief?
- Student S: question of succession; why didn't Hamlet take the throne?
- Student A: is it an actual ghost?
- Student B: Why do the names not match the setting?
- Student N: How old is Hamlet?
- Student H: Who dies when?

3. Explanation of overarching plot & conflict

-Information written on the board to help visualize the plot

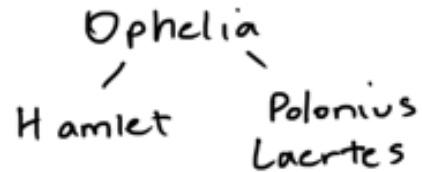
Plot A

Conflict w/ familial
& national dimensions



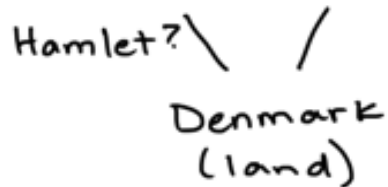
Plot B

Romance opposed
by a father



Plot C

Claudius vs Fortinbras



-Discussion of themes and metaphors

•Ears

4. Small group discussion

1. Character Study of Hamlet
2. What constitutes good government/justice
3. Truth
4. Gender roles
5. Motifs/themes

Talkative students:

Student G

Student A

Student N

Student B

Participatory students:

Student H

Student R

Student D

Student L

Quiet Students:

Student P *

Student E

Student I

Student C

Student M*

Student Q

Student S

Student O*

*Will likely open up more as the class progresses

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Young, Robert G. "Dear Mr. Roberts: Please Teach Shakespeare in Middle School." *The English Journal*, vol. 98, no. 5, 2009, pp. 10–11.

Curriculum Vitae

Adrienne Michele Thomas

EDUCATION

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, IN

English Master of Arts | (expected) August 2023

GPA: 3.92

Hanover College, Hanover, IN

Bachelor of Arts | May 2021

Major: English, Minors: Medieval-Renaissance Studies and History

Cumulative GPA: 3.78 Major GPA: 3.82

Study Abroad

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, England, May 2019

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE AND PUBLICATIONS

MA Thesis, IUPUI, Spring 2023 (In progress)

Bringing the Bard Up-to-Date: Teaching Shakespeare in Our Current Moment

Action research studying best practices of teaching Shakespeare in the college literature classroom.

Research Assistant for *Santayana Edition*, IUPUI, Fall 2021-Spring 2022

Designed and created a digital map of George Santayana's travels

(<https://santayana.iupui.edu/map-of-george-santayanas-travels/> ;

<https://santayana.iupui.edu/2022/05/06/new-interactive-map-of-george-santayana-travels/>), maintained the Santayana Edition Bibliographical

Database, and assisted with current projects (publication of a Critical Text

of *Skepticism and Animal Faith* and an on-going archival project of

Santayana's letters).

Senior Thesis, Hanover College, Fall 2020

Desiring Women: A Study in Early Modern English Drama.

Analyzing four early modern English tragedy plays by Webster, Ford,

Marston, and an Anonymous author regarding the treatment of female

sexuality, specifically female desire.

Independent Research, The Facing Project and Hanover College, Summer 2019
Facing Suicide in Madison, Indiana.

Conducted interviews; gathered narratives and edited entire collection of interviews. Presented research findings to the community.

Junior Editor, *Hanover Historical Review*, Fall 2019-Spring 2021

Historical journal; collects, edits, formats, and publishes student writing dedicated to history.

Richter Research Grant, Summer 2020

Research dedicated to finding and documenting important locations in the life and works of William Shakespeare through archival research and travel photography culminating in a virtual, interactive map (Digital Humanities). Grant was unable to be approved because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Self-published author, Fall 2019 (Under a pseudonym)

Claimed: The Mirotvorsty Chronicles.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Professor, Eng-W131: Reading, Writing, and Inquiry, IUPUI, Spring 2023

Co-Instructor, Eng-L303: Banned Books, IUPUI, Spring 2023

Teaching Assistant (MA thesis research), Eng-L433/625: Conversations with Shakespeare, IUPUI, Fall 2022

Teaching Assistant, Eng-L204: Introduction to Fiction, IUPUI, Spring 2022

Generalist Tutor, Gladish Learning Center, Hanover College, Fall 2019-Spring 2021

Student Success Tutor, Accessibility Services, Hanover College, Spring 2021

Class Tutor, ENG172: The Quest Archetype in Literature, Hanover College, Fall 2020

Class Tutor, HIS171: World Civilizations to 1500, Hanover College, Fall 2020

Class Tutor, HIS173: Africa in World History, Hanover College, Spring 2020

Class Tutor, THR115: Film as Art, Hanover College, Fall 2019

INTERNSHIPS

Intern, Madison Main Street Program, Summer 2019

Responsible for the duties of the Executive Director during the hiring process for a new one: daily office work, running social media accounts, hosting events, attending committee and board meetings, publishing monthly newsletters, fundraising.

COMMITTEE WORK AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Grant Writing Committee, Digital Humanities Center, Hanover College, Fall 2020-Spring 2021

Senior Committee Member, Fall 2020-Spring 2021

Co-Founder, Clarity (mental health organization), Spring 2018-Spring 2021

Member Development Committee Chair, Kappa Alpha Theta, Spring 2018-Spring 2021

Chief Operations Officer, Kappa Alpha Theta, Spring 2019-Fall 2020

HONORS AND AWARDS

Mortar Board Honor Society

Hanover College Dean's List (5 semesters)

Benjamin Templeton Scholar (Full Tuition Social Justice Scholarship)

Completed over 100 hours of service annually