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A READERS THEATRE ADAPTATION OF
THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

THESIS

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By

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After an extensive survey of available literature in Readers Theatre and Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor, the purpose for this thesis was to cut and convert The Merry Wives into twentieth century idiom from the authorized version found in the 1623 folio. A survey of English and drama teachers revealed a need to help students overcome language barrier problems with regard to Shakespeare. The script was produced on a high school stage with students for actors/interpreters. The responses indicate that the converted version is effective and useable as an instructional tool for teaching Shakespeare to high school students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of Readers Theatre solidly support the importance of the text. Joanna Maclay says, "Almost since its inception Readers Theatre has been committed to the principle of featuring, with a special kind of clarity, literary texts. . . . By featuring the text I mean that the purpose of the production is to clarify, illuminate, extend, or provide insights into the literary text being presented."¹ She wants the literature to be featured over any other dramatic device.

Beverly Whitaker Long, Lee Hudson and Phyllis Jeffrey reinforce this concept by saying that the "stated focus (of Readers Theatre) places the premium on the myriad potentials of the literature rather than on what have sometimes seemed arbitrary sets of conventions."²

Marion L. Kleinau and Janet Larsen McHughes encase all of literature in their justification for Readers Theatre. "The entire world of literature--nondramatic as well as dramatic--has an inner vitality that begs to be embodied in the theatre; Interpreters Theatre has become the vehicle for making that embodiment possible while retaining the literary structure of the work."³

They further assert the goal of Interpreters Theatre becomes the "actualizing of presentational form in literature."⁴

Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White define Readers Theatre with strong emphasis on the importance of the text as a literary experience. "Basically, Readers Theatre is a medium in which two or more oral interpreters employ vivid vocal and physical clues to cause the audience to see and hear characters expressing their attitudes toward an action so vitally that the literature becomes a living experience . . . both for the readers and for their audience. In other words the readers share the attitudes, viewpoints and actions of a literary piece with the audience, causing the audience to experience the literature."⁵

Jerry V. Pickering states in Readers Theatre that Readers Theatre "attempts to bring the author's creation alive in the mind of the audience."⁶

If Readers Theatre performs its function, then it will, according to Brooks, "stimulate and enable an audience to fulfill the potential of the literary experience in their own minds."⁷ Readers Theatre then is obligated to share the author's intent. The performance causes the audience to "experience" the literature to its fullest potential.⁸

One of the unique contributions of Readers Theatre is the sharing of its art, the sharing of the literature with its audience. Kleinau and McHughes state, "It should be remembered that one of the unique contributions of Readers Theatre is the sharing of the literature not usually treated by actors on stage. This is not to suggest that drama should be avoided, but it should not be the only source of material."⁹ The readers and the audience share the experience; that is to say that in some ways the audience is just as much a participant in the production as the actors. There is no "fourth wall" barrier; the audience is invited to share and expected to participate in the experience.

As the authorities cited above have shown, the purpose of Readers Theatre is to illuminate the literature. If the avowed purpose of Readers Theatre is to illuminate the literature, then that purpose could serve a particularly valuable function if the focused literature is to be William Shakespeare.

No other writer in all history has been more lauded, perused, dissected or studied than William Shakespeare. Yet for all the acclaim, it is the writer's opinion that his wealth of human study is beyond the reach of the average high school student. Beginning with the ninth grade, Texas high school students are often obliged to sit

through tedious recordings of Shakespearean plays performed by actors whose British dialects tend to obscure already unfamiliar words. Indeed, the author has found through experience that sometimes those students feel that they are listening to a foreign tongue. It is foreign to the untrained high school student since it is a language spoken in another land in another century. While the high school student may recognize many of the words he or she is forced to follow on the printed page, the unfamiliar syntax coupled with archaic idioms render the words virtually senseless. How can this young reader believe Shakespeare's characters are alive today as they were on the Globe stage almost four hundred years ago? When the young student cannot understand the language, he will never know the universal truths embodied in the bard's words. If the barriers are not relieved, he or she may never be able to personally understand any of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's characters must live for the reader if that reader is to grasp the greatness, the fiendishness, the callousness, the mischievousness, the liveliness of the personalities who fill the pages of one man's great gifts to the world of literature.

While Shakespeare wrote plays expressly to be acted on stage, his stage was more symbolical than literal. There are no records of great masses of scenery used. It

seems that painted scenery never became a part of Shakespeare's productions. Battles were not fought on a "real-mock" field; great houses were not constructed for one play, only to be replaced by another in the succeeding production; actors dressed themselves in finery, but not to accurately depict the time and mode of dress relevant to the period of the play; no special lights were focused for each change of productions; make-up was not all-important to success. Shakespeare seemed to have deliberately left all the aforementioned theatrical trappings to the virile imaginations of his audiences, who laughed, wept, booed and rejoiced with his heroes and heroines. One of the most notable aspects of all this seems to be that the audience, masses of unlearned, unclean, untutored people both understood and enjoyed Shakespeare's plays.¹⁰ As he is considered by eminent authorities to be one of the greatest, most universal writers of all times, how could these unlearned peasants actually penetrate the richness of his works, when scholars for three hundred plus years have sought to extract from every scene all the nuances of meaning? The answer is so simple that one often looks for more complicated answers. An illiterate man living in England in 1592 could comprehend a moving play on Shakespeare's stage because that play was written in "street language" of his

day. No idiomatic expression left him wondering, for they were common ones he may have used himself. No arrangement of words left him bereft of understanding, for those words were built into sentences, scenes and acts with the man-off-the street in mind, as well as such learned men as Ben Jonson, Spenser, Lord Cecil Jones I, and, of course, Queen Elizabeth I. It is no wonder that Shakespeare enjoyed both fame and prosperity while he lived. 11

If this simple answer to deciphering Shakespeare's literature which made the populace a knowledgeable audience is accurate, it stands to reason that budding intellects could benefit from hearing and seeing Shakespeare interpreted in speech syntax they understand with idioms common to his time era. If the text suffers somewhat from translation, it may still be valuable as a tool for teaching Shakespeare's plays to average high school students. If the student understands the play, then comprehension and appreciation may be enhanced.

To understand why Readers Theatre is so well suited to the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays, one may look at the similarities between the theatre Shakespeare himself built and the accommodations common in Readers Theatre.

- a. There is no backdrop scenery.
- b. Costumes are representational.
- c. Narrators speak directly to the audience.

- d. Soliloquies are often used to directly approach the audience.
- e. Symbolic scenes are used for vast numbers embroiled in battle.
- f. "Representative" setting and props are common.
- g. Narrators often double as other characters.
- h. Lighting effects are seldom used.
- i. Limited make-up is used to represent character, mood, etc.
- j. References are made to great physical or traumatic scenes which take place off-stage.
- k. Understanding of material is not necessarily dependent upon the hearer's literacy. 12

Though Shakespeare mounted his plays in full scale productions, it is obvious from the list of similarities that an adaptation of numbers of his plays will not suffer greatly from the change of genre.

Traditional Theatre as well as Interpreters Theatre has embraced the Readers Theatre genre. It is more a question now of nomenclature rather than style of acting/interpreting. Is Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain acting or interpreting? An honest answer must be that he is doing both. Both musicals and plays have been written within the Readers Theatre style, yet they are claimed by legitimate theatre. George M, a musical about George M. Cohen,

has a narrator as a central character and is played on a nearly-bare stage with representational props. Perhaps the best known of the Readers Theatre style plays is Thornton Wilder's Our Town. It has the dubious fame of being the most produced play on high school stages, yet it gleans its popularity more than likely from the fact that it is an easy play to mount, because it is in the Readers Theatre format.¹³ True, it is excellent literature, but so is Romeo and Juliet and Camelot, and they seldom are chosen as material for high school students to produce. An adaptation could possibly be a solution if the high school teacher wishes his or her students to experience an excellent play when time and space and money are very real hindrances. Albert and Bertha Johnson successfully adapted Macbeth in Plays for Readers Theatre.¹⁴ This adaptation may be possible for high schools to produce when the cost of a full scale production would be prohibitive. There are numerous other plays written and successfully produced which follow the Interpreters Theatre mode. John Van Druten's I Remember Mama uses one of the major characters, Katrin, as a narrator.¹⁵ Peter Weiss's Marat Sade is infused with symbolic actions and there is no scenery.¹⁶ Celeste Raspanti, in I Never Saw Another Butterfly, uses the major character as narrator and goes further by placing

the action of the play in the past.¹⁷ P.W. Turner's "Christ in the Concrete City" calls for symbolic costumes and representational stage props.¹⁸ A young Texas playwright Jerrome McDonnough stages two of his one-act creations in such a way as to leave no doubt that they are in Readers Theatre style: Asylum uses two narrators at first, but eventually all twelve characters are assigned narration roles; "Filliation" follows much the same pattern and achieves similar results.¹⁹ By virtue of production style, these plays can be produced in nearly any high school because they do not require elaborate costumes; they ask for only backdrop curtains or bare-wall effect; the stage properties are not difficult to construct if necessary. If established theatre recognizes the value of Readers Theatre and noted playwrights follow its format, it is logical to assume that older plays, i.e. Shakespeare, will be compatible with the same mode.

If, instead of working on a full scale production of Shakespeare, the students could work in Readers Theatre mode, they would be able to spend more time on the play, studying and analyzing the plot and characters, rather than spending tedious hours constructing scenery and backdrops. Readers Theatre focuses on the text, as has been previously stated. Its focus on the literature, not the production, will leave the minds of the audience freer

to "experience" with the actors that section of literature. The object becomes, then, to free the literature from the constraints of difficult and archaic language so the high school student can more easily understand Shakespeare.

From personal observations in twenty-one years as a teacher of English, Speech and Drama, the writer has found that the size of the production or the minutia of details which make up a full scale production do not insure its success; it has been the quality of the script and the understanding of the character by the student actor which determines how much of the play the audience, in general, will understand and enjoy. A comparison of the possible costs for producing The Merry Wives of Windsor could provide some insight into how dollars or lack of adequate sums could influence a director to choose a Readers Theatre production. From this writer's viewpoint, the following table is a cost analysis for producing the above-mentioned play as a fully staged production and as a Readers Theatre production. It is obvious that reduction of costs as shown would make Readers Theatre a better choice financially. Time wise, more student hours would be spent on the literature if produced in Readers Theatre genre.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF COST FOR A FULLY STAGED AND A
 READERS THEATRE PRODUCTION OF THE MERRY
WIVES OF WINDSOR

Materials	Fully Staged Production	Readers Theatre Production
Lumber (2 platforms 8' X 16' X 3')	\$325.00	. . .
Backdrop	175.00	. . .
Paint	220.00	. . .
Costumes	800.00	250.00
Scripts (duplication)	30.00	25.00
Publicity	300.00	200.00
Tickets and Programs	100.00	. . .
Stage props (basket and swords)	275.00	275.00
Total	\$1900.00	\$550.00
Time spent in construction rehearsal, production	12 weeks	8 weeks

It has been shown that Readers Theatre is prevalent in legitimate theatre, that a Readers Theatre production is far less expensive, that use of this genre enables the student to focus on the text, that playwrights have faith in this medium, and that proponents of Readers Theatre themselves have established the effectiveness of it for dramatic works.

Kleinau and McHughes point out that, "Working in the medium of Readers Theatre, you're free to consider all literary forms--plays, novels, short stories. . . ."20

They are suggesting that all literature is acceptable for Readers Theatre; it should meet certain criteria of rich, evocative language, conflict, physical and psychological action, and universality.²¹ Earlier Readers Theatre script adapters depended almost entirely on existing plays. Albert and Bertha Johnson's Plays for Readers Theatre is a collection of six classics adapted for reading.²² Brooks, Bahn and Okey state that Readers Theatre can provide "an opportunity for experiencing the literature through visual and aural involvement in the dynamics of literature."²³ Joanna Maclay states that, "This clarity (of the text) is sometimes obscured in the conventional theatrical productions."²⁴ She further suggests that, "A Readers Theatre treatment of certain plays could provide new insights into the structure of the texture of plays that conventional staging might tend to obscure."²⁵ Again Maclay makes her stand clear:

From time to time in the preceding chapters we have spoken of "aesthetic integrity," a condition that the contemporary theatre finds hard to achieve or maintain. Among the reasons for this situation is the absence of any clear "decorum" for the actor. If we are to believe the historians, the Elizabethan actor was trained in the decorum of the orator; the laws of rhetoric were fairly clear at that time. Furthermore, the Elizabethan theatre was fundamentally literary; the laws of literature, controlled as they were by rhetorical decorum, were less amorphous than the conglomeration of dialects in our contemporary theatre.²⁶

The analogy is obvious. If the Elizabethan actor was basically rhetorical, then Elizabethan plays will fare well in Readers Theatre which is also basically rhetorical.

According to Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, "Plays are often the easiest words to adapt because they are written expressly for oral presentation."²⁷ They give lists of dramas which were done in a Readers Theatre version; some of which are: The Madwoman of Chaillot, The Matchmaker, The Barrets of Wimpole Street, Julius Caesar, As You Like It, Taming of the Shrew, and Mousetrap. Coger and White make it quite clear that Shakespeare is very suitable for the medium, "It should be added that most plays written by Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, James Baldwin, Thornton Wilder and, of course, Shakespeare can be performed readily in Readers Theatre style, often with little or no changes in the writing."²⁸ Shakespeare's characters can introduce themselves or others, and can set up the situation for the audience to perceive the mood and setting. Coger and White suggest that, "In the famous scene from The Taming of the Shrew, both Katherine and Petruchio could talk in character to the audience, giving them the necessary information that would allow them to understand and visualize the scene."²⁹

In summary, Wallace Bacon points out why Shakespeare works so well in Readers Theatre, "Everything depends on the nature and quality of the text itself. Shakespeare's plays make dependence on scenery relatively slight; the orchard in Romeo and Juliet is given to us in all its essentials in the text itself, and the castle of Macbeth is far better in Shakespeare's own words than it often appears in a fully staged production (where it is likely to deny Shakespeare's description of it)."³⁰ So we can see that Shakespeare is a viable choice for selection as a Readers Theatre production.

In the process of selection of a possible script, the rationale, it would seem, includes the following things.

- a. It must not be a play normally found in high school textbooks. Students tend to reject learning when they have a preconceived barrier to that material.
- b. It must have vibrant characters high school students can relate to, though the characters need not be adolescents.
- c. The actions must be rapid with changes of place not being dependent on scenery.
- d. It must have enough "spice" to keep interest while not offending anyone in the audience or cast.

- e. It must be within the acting range of students available to play the roles.
- f. It must be suitable for cutting without harming the main plot or major sub-plots.
- g. The adapter must enjoy the story well enough to be exposed to it for many months.
- h. The idiomatic expressions and author's language must not suffer unduly from transposing.

After careful consideration of the criteria which this writer set up as a standard, The Merry Wives of Windsor was chosen as the best possible choice for this project.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to adapt the play The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare into a Readers Theatre Script. The adapted script was performed by high school students at Lancaster (Texas) High School. The adaptation includes revision of the original language into contemporary idiom, as well as cutting of the play to a length which will be acceptable to high school audiences and manageable by the students.

PROCEDURE

The script was prepared for group presentation following the guidelines in Interpreters Theatre.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is transposed into syntax common to twentieth century American language using idioms familiar to high school students of the last ten years. Careful attention is paid to retain Shakespeare's meaning and intent with relation to both the plot and the characterization. Only a small portion of The Merry Wives of Windsor is written in blank verse, and some of that is retained in the revised script to enhance the over-all effect of the production. The script is cut to an acceptable length (about forty-five minutes) and standard stage terminology is used to denote performance directions

A full-scale Interpreters Theatre production was mounted using Lancaster High School students. This production was performed at Lancaster High School in the spring of 1982 for high school students of varying ages, grade levels, and achievement. It was later performed for Lancaster Middle School students.

Evaluation was taken in three stages. Short answer evaluations were distributed to the teachers prior to the production asking for information about understanding problems with relation to Shakespeare. (See Appendix A, parts 1 and 2.) Evaluation forms were distributed to the students prior to their seeing the production, (See

Appendix B); then they were collected shortly following the performance. The student evaluation forms took less than three minutes to complete. The teacher forms took about five minutes. Following the performances a subjective evaluation form was given to the actor/interpreters who performed, (see Appendix C). The students were asked to write about all facets of the production, elaborating as much as possible, both on the positive aspects and the negative aspects. Both objective responses and subjective surveys are compiled in Chapter Five and suggestions are made for future similar research.

NOTES

¹ Joanna Hawkins Maclay, Readers Theatre: Toward a Grammar of Practice (New York: Random House, 1971), p.3.

² Beverly Whitaker Long, Lee Hudson and Phyllis Rienstra Jeffrey, Group Performance of Literature (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 4.

³ Marion L. Kleinau and Janet Larsen McHughes, Theatres for Literature (Sherman Oaks, California: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), p. 3.

⁴ Kleinau and McHughes, p. 5.

⁵ Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook, 3rd. ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982), pp. 6-7.

⁶ Jerry Pickering, Readers Theatre (Encino, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p. 2.

⁷ Keith Brooks, "Readers Theatre: Some Questions and Answers," Dramatics, 34 (December, 1962), p. 14.

⁸ Brooks, p. 27.

⁹ Kleinau and McHughes, p. 193.

¹⁰ Katharine Anne Ommanney and Harry H. Schanker, The Stage and the School (St. Louis: Webster Division, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972), pp. 310-311.

¹¹ Ommanney and Schanker, p. 312.

¹² Pickering, p. 176.

¹³ James E. Miller, Jr., Roesann Duenas Gonzales and Nancy C. Millet, Question and Form in Literature (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979), p. 220.

14 Albert and Bertha Johnson, Plays for Readers' Theatre (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1972), pp, 13-42.

15 John Van Druten, I Remember Mama (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1952), p. 7.

16 Peter Weiss, Marat Sade (Chicago: Dramatic Publishing Co., 1965), p. 7-8.

17 P. W. Turner, Christ in the Concrete City (Boston: Baker's Plays, 1971), p. v.

18 Jerrome McDonnough, Asylum (Schulenburg, Texas: Stage Magic Plays, 1973), p. iv.

19 Kleinau and McHughes, p. 19.

20 Kleinau and McHughes, p. 10.

21 Johnson, p. 3.

22 Keith Brooks, Eugene Bahn, and L. LaMont Okey, The Communicative Art of Oral Interpretation (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1967) p. 394.

23 Maclay, p. 3.

24 Maclay, p. 8.

25 Maclay, p. 66.

26 Coger and White, p. 48.

27 Coger and White, p. 49.

28 Coger and White, p. 49.

29 Wallace Bacon, The Art of Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1979), p. 412.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERIZATION

The characters who live in The Merry Wives of Windsor may be extensions of those personalities which Shakespeare created in other plays. Some scholars declare the Falstaff of Merry Wives to be a perversion of the comic character of the same name in Henry IV; some scholars would have the date of Merry Wives at a more recent time than Henry IV; some will refuse to allow Falstaff of Merry Wives to be the same gallant who won by his wit in other Shakespearean plays. Tradition tells us that Queen Elizabeth, delighted with Falstaff in Henry IV, commanded Shakespeare to write another play in which Falstaff would be in love. Each of these theories or traditions are best left to the scholars of Shakespearean history. No attempt will be made in this thesis to clarify any of the previous assertions, nor will any direct references be made to the characters "previous lives" in other plays by Shakespeare. If any enlightenment of the personalities is to come, it will come from the script itself. The characters give excellent portrayals, both of themselves and of those other personalities with whom they have contact as the play progresses.

Sir John Falstaff makes excellent use of his wit early in Act One with the conflict over a deer he has illegally shot on Shallow's land, but he finds only a few spots in the remainder of the story for his excellent command of words to help his case. He is not the least frightened when Shallow proclaims that he will expose Falstaff to the king; neither does he try to deny his wrongs, but brazenly says, "I will answer it straight. I have done all this. That is now answered." (I, i, 104). He then reminds Shallow's nephew Slender of a lost fight. Sir John stands secure in his place because he has no fear of Shallow's power. He is very quick to point out to Shallow that the only person who stands to lose face is Shallow himself.

The plot itself revolves around the fact that Falstaff has an inflated opinion of himself. Not being able to make money as a knight, he looks for other means. He is such an egotist that he thinks Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, who are only politely civil to him, have given him the "leer of invitation," (I, iii, 41), and "examined my parts with most judicious oeilades (amorous glances). Sometimes the beam of her view guilded my foot, sometimes my portly belly." (I, iii, 53-55). Falstaff not only thinks highly of himself, but appears to accept puns about his size as a backhanded compliment. A

character eliminated from this script tells Sir John Falstaff that he was, "two yards and more (around the waist," (I, iii, 35). Falstaff's reply is only that he is talking about "waste" or saving, not about the subject of his size. He even later calls himself a buck and the "fattest in the forest," (IV, iii, 12). He obviously revels in his size and expects others to do the same.

Falstaff further proves his ego in scenes with Mistress Quickly where he states, "Not I, I assure thee. Setting the attraction of my good parts aside, I have no other charms," (II, ii, 97-98), when Mrs. Quickly asks him if he doesn't have special charms. He again voices his ego in the scene with Mistress Ford when he says, "But I love thee, none but thee; and thou deserves it," (III, iii, 64), as though he were bestowing a great gift. A further proof of Falstaff's great self-inflation is shown in the scenes with Master Ford, alias Master Brook. Falstaff is so sure that he will cuckold Ford, that he leaves no doubt in Master Brook's mind that Ford's wife is unfaithful.

The scenes with Ford are rife with triple irony. Falstaff is unaware that he is telling a jealous husband how he will cuckold him, and he does not know that Mistress Ford is setting him up. Ford also does not know his wife

is innocent and he must pretend to like the plan that Falstaff has devised to "help" him.¹

The "fat old fellow full of wit" in the first scenes is really so over-inflated that all can gull him. He even recognizes the change after a double duping by the wives. He says, "I would all the world might be cozened, for I have been cozened and beaten too. If it should come to the ear of the court how I have been transformed and how my transformation hath been washed and cudgelled, they would melt me out of my fat drop by drop, and liquor fishermen's boots with me. I warrant they would whip me with their fine wits till I were as crestfallen as a dried pear. Well, if my wind were but long enough to say my prayers, I would repent." (IV, v, 80-89). Though Falstaff sees a change, he is powerless to change it. He is beset with afflictions, his genius to make money is gone, he carries his wine like a Flemish drunkard, but the most debilitating affliction of all is fear. The swaggering knight of the first act who baldly confesses to a crime and dares anyone to force retribution degenerates to a ball of quaking fright.² This degeneration comes to light the first time the wives trick him. When Mistress Page comes in to tell Mistress Ford that her husband is coming, the gallant knight is willing to be squashed in a buck-basket with stinking laundry thrown over his bulk

to hide him, (III, iii). In relating the happenings to Master Brook, Falstaff confesses, "I quaked with fear lest the lunatic knave would have searched it (buck-basket)," (III, v, 91). In the same scene he also confesses that he is afraid of drowning.

In the second scene with the wives, Falstaff again makes clear that he is a coward. When Mistress Page again sounds the alarm, Falstaff says, "Good hearts, devise something. Any extremity rather than mischief," (IV, ii, 61). He is so full of fear that he allows himself to be so degraded as to leave in women's clothing, and the fat witch of Brainsford's clothing at that. His ego obviously deserts him in time of stress.

Falstaff's wits are so dulled that he actually allows the wives a third chance to make sport of him. Encouraged by the thought that Mistress Ford will meet him in the forest instead of at her home, Falstaff dresses himself like Herne the hunter (with horns) to meet her at Herne's oak at midnight. The wives play on his superstitious nature and have the children dressed as elves and fairies. Falstaff falls prostrate in front of the oak when he perceives the children as fairies, and buries his head ostrich-like while they pinch and kick and burn him. Such self-degradation is only possible when we realize that Falstaff's pride is gone.

According to Alfred Harbage, Falstaff, "Whose wit and effrontery on his first appearance enable him to beat down the threats of Shallow and Slender, becomes a dupe to a most barefaced gulling action, in which his ego and his greed quite submerge his realistic knowledge of the world . . . his wit is merely exhibitionist after the opening scene. It reveals his love of words and their ways . . ."3 His love of words does not help him, nor does his greed and ego solve his problems, but the audience feels no harm done in the final scene when Page invites him home to supper to laugh over his supposed crimes.

Shakespeare undoubtedly created The Merry Wives of Windsor with the Italian farce as a model.⁴ The structure and plot follow similar lines. Being a pure farce, the characters have no necessity to be three-dimensional. Indeed, Falstaff seems to be the only character with more than one or two personality traits. Another more carefully drawn part is that of Mistress Quickly. She is dull but sharp enough to deceive her master Dr. Caius, Slender and Fenton who pay her to influence Anne Page for each of them, and Falstaff who lets her talk him into being duped three times. Some of Falstaff's cronies call her a punk (crude name for a prostitute), but she appears to be only interested in making money by being paid to carry

messages. She gains financially many times in the story. Every message sent is paid and every message received is paid, especially by Falstaff. With so many suitors for Anne Page, and so many messages to take to and receive from the wives and Falstaff, it is no wonder that she tries to help everyone regardless of the outcome.

Quickly's innate dullness, which seems to be a comic device, is revealed when she states, "No, I know Anne's mind for that. Never a woman in Windsor knows more of Anne's mind than I do, nor can do more than I can do with her, I thank heaven." (I, iv, 114-117), yet she knows nothing of Anne's real love for Fenton and is as surprised as the rest when Anne runs away to marry Fenton.

As a bawd, Quickly delivers bawdry knowingly or not. "She does so take on with her men, they mistook their erection." "So did I mine," says Falstaff bitterly (III, v, 34-36). Her misdirected words add to the character as a bawd, but one who is very close to the respectability line. Quickly thinks of herself as respectable and feels that the wives use of her as their messenger gives her more proof that she is a respectable housewife, though a husband is never mentioned. Muir states that she tries to be genteel through conversation and imitation of those higher than she.⁵

Though the original plan is to have Anne Page as the Queen of the Fairies, it is the unlikely Quickly who plays the part. She carries the spoof off well, despite her basic lack of breeding and education. Possibly being no less superstitious than Falstaff, she would know how frightened he would feel to find himself in a dark wood with a band of fairies, who could wreak havoc in any way they choose. She seems to relish burning him to prove his guilt.

When asked how she is employed, Quickly relates that she, "keeps his house (Dr. Caius'), wash, wring, brew, bake, scrub, dress meat and drink, make beds and do it all myself," (I, iv, 85-86); all of which is told in the attitude that she truly is the mistress of the house. She keeps Dr. Caius' other servants in line which gives vent to further airs of being genteel.

Mistress Quickly is the ideal narrator, for she is often in control of the situation. If the messages are not delivered correctly, the story will take on an entirely different aspect. Shakespeare often provides for her lines to be directed to the audience, which, true to farce, allows the audience to be privy to knowledge of which the actors are ignorant. It is these bits of information from Quickly that quicken the pace and keep the farcical theme alive.

As a bearer of messages, Mistress Quickly is alert to any possible way of swaying her victim to do what she wishes. While she is trying to convince Falstaff of how much Mistress Ford would like to see him, she plays on his sympathy. "Alas, the sweet woman leads an ill life with him; he's a very jealousy man; she leads a very frampold life with him, good heart." (II, ii, 82-84). If a disagreeable, quarrelsome life is what Mistress Ford has, then surely Falstaff can give her some hours of happiness, is Mistress Quickly's contextual message, and Falstaff comprehends completely.

On the third encounter with Falstaff to convince him to come to the wives, Quickly relies on repetition until she wears Falstaff down. He has been beaten enough that even the enjoyment of Ford's wife as well as Brook's money is not sufficient motivation. Quickly talks and talks and talks, until Falstaff in desperation says, "Prithee no more prattling. Go: I'll hold. This is the third time; and I hope good luck lies in odd numbers." (V, i, 1-3).

Quickly's two-dimensional character is a necessary ingredient in the farce. As both stupid and intelligent, alert and dull, she follows the expected character lines which adds many dimensions to the basic humor of the play. Mistress Quickly must be identifiable as a slightly

genteel bawd who is willing to be used by others for her own advantage.

Other than Falstaff, Ford is the most vulnerable character in the play. He must have the capacity to feel pain. Ford, as the jealous husband, must feel the anguish and pain of thinking he is being made a cuckold, made so by an unfaithful wife who makes appointments with fat knights. Ford's character is laughable because he is only one-sided. While the audience can see how innocent his wife truly is, he fumes and plots vainly to catch her in the act of being unfaithful. His character, according to Ralph Berry in Shakespeare's Comedies, is laughable, but it is the laughter of rejection. Therefore he is more two-dimensional than most in the story.⁶

Muir proclaims Ford to be a masterly study of comic jealousy. He is willing to see the bad side of his wife, insecure enough to check up on her, and hides his insecurity behind brash actions.⁷ He thinks he, "will be praised for this than mocked." (III, ii, 42).

The other characters in the story think he has very little control of his senses. His friend Page tries to calm him. "Good Master Ford, be contented, you wrong yourself too much." (II, iii, 145). Later in the same scene Page again urges Ford to curb his emotions.

"What spirit, what devil suggests this imagination? I

would not ha' your distemper in this kind for the wealth of Windsor Castle." (III, iii, 189-190). Even Dr. Caius informs him that he suffers from bad information. Evans concludes that he suffers from a bad conscience, because Ford's wife is ". . . as honest a 'omans as I will desires among five thousand." (III, iii, 194).

Ford gives the best account of himself when he discovers that the buck-basket carried Falstaff away from his house. "Though what I am I cannot avoid, yet to be What I would not, shall not make me tame. If I have horns to make one mad, let the proverb go with me - I'll be horn-mad." (III, v, 132-135). Ford was willing to be made sport of to prove that he was justified in his jealousy of his wife. If she had given him cause to be jealous before the story, the townspeople must be ignorant of it, for even the parson is sure of her virtue. Finding no proof of her infidelity only seems to feed his anger and jealousy. True to a stereotyped character, Ford is convinced just as much of his wife's honor after explanations as he was of her infidelity before. He enjoys seeing Falstaff put down in the final scene and proclaims that he will never mistrust his wife again.

Of the two wives, the character of Mistress Page is more colorful because of the intrigue surrounding the marriage of her daughter Anne. Mistress Quickly gives a

revealing account of Mistress Page. "Never a wife in Windsor leads a better life than she does: - do what she will, say what she will, take all, pay all; go to bed when she list, rise when she list, all is as she will; and truly she deserves it, for if there be a kind woman in Windsor, she is one." (II, ii, 107-110). Mistress Quickly also told Falstaff that Mistress Page was ". . . a fartuous civil modest wife, and one, I tell you who will not miss you morning nor evening prayer . . ." (II, ii, 90-91). Page feels secure in his wife's love, so secure that when he is told that Falstaff means to chase her he says, "If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him; and what he gets of her more than sharp words, let it lie on my head." (II, i, 163-165).

Mistress is secure in her love and wishes no flaw to mar her marriage. She says, "He's as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause; and that, I hope is an unmeasurable distance." (II, i, 93-94). She is the one who becomes the teller of tales while Mrs. Ford, whose husband has a jealous streak, becomes the hunted. She plays the part well, asking for Mistress Ford's direction if she doesn't sound convincing.

Charles Cowden Clarke in Shakespeare - Characters argues that Mistress Page is not a foolish wife, but a wise

wife who has a ready wit. When Ford alludes to the strong friendship between the women, "'I think, if your husbands were dead, you two would marry,' she replies, 'Be sure of that - two other husbands.' This is no slight to her own lord and master; but only a smart rap on the knuckles for her friend's jealous-pated one. There is anything but 'foolishness' in the brisk way with which she carries on the jest, in concert with her gossip, Mrs. Ford, against the 'greasy knight'."8

Mistress Page, alert to each situation, except the one in which her husband dupes her by sending Anne off to marry Slender, takes revenge on Falstaff for assuming that she would be willing to be a party to cuckolding her husband. As a part of the revengers comedy, she is an integral plot-maker. Yet her character is more positively identified when she tells the audience, "Hang him (Falstaff), the dishonest varlet, we cannot misuse him enough. We'll leave a proof, but that which we will do, Wives may be merry, and yet honest too. We do not act that often jest and laugh; 'Tis old but true, 'Still swine eats all the draff'." (IV, ii, 88-93).

The character of Mistress Ford is not as two-dimensional as that of Mistress Page, but the text gives definite clues as to what stereotyped pattern she follows. Again Mistress Quickly relates things about Mistress Ford to

reveal much of what causes her to react against Falstaff. Obviously she comes from a line of nobility and the idea of being unfaithful to her husband is foreign to her basic nature. "Yet there has been knight, and lords, and gentlemen, with their coaches. - I warrant you, coach after coach, letter after letter, gift after gift; smelling so sweetly - all musk - and so rushling, I warrant you, in silk and gold; and in such alligant terms; and in such wine and sugar of the best and the fairest that would have won any woman's heart; and I warrant you they could never get an eye-wink of her." (II, ii, 60-67). Mistress Ford is so upset at the love letter she received that she expresses a desire to, ". . . go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted." (II, i, 44). She is thinking revenge, and it is very hard for a woman to be revenged on a man, and a knight at that. Mrs. Page's reaction, unlike what one would expect from a genteel lady of the sixteenth century, says, "These knights will hack; and so thou shouldst not alter the article of thy gentry." (II, i, 47). Mistress Page was aware of Ford's "blue-blood" and knew that so many knights had been sworn in during the first years of the king's reign, that not to be dubbed a knight was the real honor.⁹

Mistress Alice Ford had evidently been a beauty in her youth and is still a handsome woman. Falstaff refers

to her beautifully arched brow and to her sturdy step which makes her farthingale sway nicely when she walks. It stands to reason that she must still be a worthy catch to have so jealous a husband.

Modesty, virtue and a good name are all adjectives ascribed to Mrs. Ford by other personalities in the play such as Dr. Caius and the parson Sir Hugh Evans. If there were any blotch on her character, she would not fit the necessary profile for this farcical kind of play.

According to Clarke, Sir Thomas Page is a thoroughly kind-hearted man. Page says he "had rather down all unkindness." There is nothing artificial about him. He can be gulled because, like a true Englishman, he will be gulled with eyes wide open, yet he will be the one to gull his wife. "The commentators have called Page 'uxorious;' which in plain-spun English, means that he is in love with his wife: it is a term of contempt, . . ."10 Page mistakes his need to decide who will get his daughter Anne as a loving father's job, but he readily forgives when "there is no remedy." Page's wisdom is that of "non-malice-bearing, and a cheerful acquiescence with things that have been done when they cannot be undone, in his prompt forgiveness of his child's young husband, when he finds they have stolen a match."11

Page trusts his wife, as has been noted previously. His trust is based on years of trustworthy behavior and a desire on his wife's part to give him no cause to be jealous. Page, then, is a portrait of a genuine, indigenous Englishman.¹²

The Pages' offspring Anne, Harbage points out, is a sweet and wholesome young lady who wishes to obey her parents, but is left with no choice but to disobey one or both. Their plots leave her with a young imbecile from the father and an ancient foreign doctor from the mother. True to character, she cannot choose either, but follows her heart and marries young Fenton, who loves her for herself. She is spoken of by several as a "pretty virginity." Slender says, "She has brown hair and speaks small like a woman." (I, i, 39-40). Sir Hugh Evans sees only what she can bring to a marriage. "Seven hundred pounds and possibilities is good gifts." (I, ii, 56). Anne is a single dimensional character, following the type of sweet young thing who must fall for the handsome young man. Farce depends on stock characters and Anne is typical of "the young lovely." Though she is not drawn comically, she does provoke comic sequences from other characters

Sir Shallow, Esquire, county justice of the peace, makes much noise when he has been wronged, but later he is

reluctant to mention a matter where a member of his family was a thief, too. When Falstaff kills a stag on his land, he wants to, "make a star chamber matter of it." (I, i, 2). He is willing to have Falstaff put away for killing his deer. Yet the dirty-old-man facet of his personality comes out when he tells Anne Page, "Would I were young for your sake . . ." (I, i, 232). Other old-man characteristics show up as he relates his love of swords. His memory tells him that he was once a great fighter. "I would have made four tall fellows skip like rats." (II, i, 204). But it is his base nature which shows up when he tries to marry off his nephew Slender to Anne Page. He is not concerned so much with Slender's desires, (can you love her, coz), as he is to make a profitable match. His saving personality trait is his country English gentlemanly ways. He follows the standards of social graces to the letter.

Slender has been described as a delightful portrait of engaging imbecility.¹³ He is the father's choice for Anne Page. The script does not reveal why the father wants this simpleton, so the character must stand on his own lack of wit. Falstaff challenges him in the first act when he recounts the time when, "I broke your head," (I, i, 152), when Falstaff's cronies robbed Slender and beat him up. Slender blames his lack of self defense on

his inability to hold his wine. He vows to never drink with rogues again. Slender's misuse of the language gives rise to stock jokes. When he tells his uncle that he will try to love Anne, he says that contact will breed more "contempt" and he is "That freely dissolved and dissolutely," so what he means is the opposite of what he says. Slender appears to know what is going on around him, but he is powerless to do anything about it. He must depend on others to make his decisions for him.

Master Fenton is another single-dimensional character necessary to the plot structure. He is the lovely young lad who must fall in love with the lovely young lady. Page's chief complaint against Fenton is that he wants Anne for her money, which, ironically enough, is exactly why Page's own choice, Slender, is asking for Anne. Fenton evidently led a disolute life, or at least a wild life prior to the story, because it is said that, "He kept company with the Wild Prince of Pains," (III, ii, 62), which makes him comically drawn to Anne. He appears to be sincere when he tells Anne that he did look at her because of her money at first, but now he wants to marry her for herself. He is so in love that he will bribe Mistress Quickly to put a good word for him with Anne. In Act Three the description of him says, "He capers, he dances, he has eyes of youth, he writes verses, he speaks

holiday, he smells April and May. He will carry't, he will carry't; 'tis in his buttons, he will carry't." (III, ii, 56-62).

Fenton says of himself, "He doth object I am too great of birth, and that my state being galled with my expense, I seek to heal it only by his wealth. Besides these, other bars he lays before, my riots past, my wild societies; and tells me 'tis a thing impossible I should love thee but as property." (III, iii, 3-10). But Mistress Quickly accurately assesses his personality when she says, "A kind heart he hath. A woman would run through fire and water for such a kind heart." (III, iv, 99-100).

Two other characters add spice to the farce and help to fuse stock underground jokes into the script. Both men are foreigners. Sir Hugh Evans is a Welsh parson who speaks with a deep Welsh accent. He is a pious man, naturally so, which makes it easier for stock jokes to be made from his character. Harbage says that Evans takes over the story line, though his role is at best pherical.¹⁴ He is Shakespeare's pure creation who is both noble and pathetic in his unquenchable humanity.¹⁵ He is intelligent enough to see through Slender and Shallow's verbage and help them to accomplish their task of getting Anne to marry Slender, because he sees it as a good match. He is also

meticulous in detail. In the first act when the argument with Falstaff and Shallow breaks out, he helps to organize a way around a fight. He says, "I will make a prief of it in a notebook and we will afterwards 'ork upon the cause with as great discreetly as we can," (I, i, 127-129). He is also good at scrambling words, for his background demands that he have a perilous command of English.

Dr. Caius is old and fat and rich and demanding and hot-headed. He plans a duel with pious Hugh Evans just because he is helping his friend Slender in his cause with Anne Page. He roars and shouts in imperfect English, but he is duped in the end by Anne herself as well as Fenton.

The conclusion of the play sends the audience away contented. Falstaff is punished, Ford is cured, Page and wife are foiled, Anne is reconciled and all are friends again. It is no wonder that this has been such a popular production down through the years.

NOTES

- 1 Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare's Comic Sequence (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979), p. 84.
- 2 Henry Buckley Charlton, Shakespearean Comedy (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1937), p. 193.
- 3 Alfred Harbage, Gen. ed., Fredson Bowers, ed., The Merry Wives of Windsor (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 119.
- 4 Harbage, pp. 19-20.
- 5 Muir, p. 83.
- 6 Ralph Berry, Shakespeare's Comedies - Expectations in Form (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 148.
- 7 Muir, p. 85.
- 8 Charles Cowden Clarke, Shakespeare - Characters, Chiefly Those Subordinate (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1863), p. 147.
- 9 Reverend H. N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life Art and Characters (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1872), p. 299.
- 10 Clarke, p. 145.
- 11 Clarke, p. 146.
- 12 Clarke, p. 144.
- 13 Muir, p. 82.
- 14 Leo Salinger, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 230.
- 15 William Owen, Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 8.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSPOSING INFORMATION AND PRODUCTION NOTES

In transposing of The Merry Wives of Windsor, several objectives were foremost: first, to preserve the flavor of Elizabethan language while rearranging its syntax; second, to remove any characters not necessary to the main and secondary plots, so the reduction of the script to approximately one hour would not be complicated by too many characters; third, to simplify scenes and episodes making them more compatible with Readers Theatre form; fourth, to intensify those scenes remaining by insertion of a narrator who relates those missing scenes and episodes which are necessary to the ongoing of the plot; and fifth, to simplify the language enough so the wording will be understandable to the average high school student. A by-product of this simplification of the language must be to interpret idiomatic expressions common to sixteenth century England so they are understandable today. Inclusion of many of the "underground" jokes and inuendos will heighten that Elizabethan flavor, while aiding in the enlightenment of the characters remaining in the play. In most cases, it is possible to leave the insinuations in

simple language without making an obviously lewd joke. The rationale for the lewd eliminations is simple. Students of high school age have difficulty paying attention to the true nature of bawdy words, because peer pressure demands violent reactions to anything overtly sexual. Second, the plot is not dependent on the bawdy asides Shakespeare most effectively used. His insinuations were aimed at basically an adult audience who knew and understood those allusions. If a script is to be successful for high school audiences, it should take into account the psyche of the students and how they react as a group.

The transposing of the script into simpler English is accomplished by utilizing various sources which are listed in the bibliography, then choosing the wording which will give the denotative and connotative meaning as close to the original as possible while being as clear as possible. Because the play is a farce, no attempt is made to make the Readers Theatre script scholarly in any way. The major thrust is to remain true to the context of the original from the 1623 Folio.

An example of transposing could be taken from The Works of Shakespeare, edited by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson. Shakespeare's words: Mrs. Page: "Thou'rt a good boy. This secrecy of thine shall be a tailor to thee and shall make thee a new doublet and hose.

I'll go hide me."¹ By changing the syntax of the sentences and using words tailored to the Twentieth Century, the same lines could say, "You are a good lad. You have kept our secret and for this you will get a new suit of clothes. Now I will hide."² Another example from the same source, (III, iii, 67-68), "Thou mightest as well say I love to walk by the Counter-gate, which is as hateful to me as the reek of a limekiln." Another source says the same lines differently: ". . . I love a cur dog which is as hateful to me as the reek of sewage."³ Quiller-Couch and Wilson's footnote explains the "Counter-gate" as being the debtor's prison.⁴ As the debtor's prison is not a part of our society today, the latter mention of the cur dog is much more understandable. So, in answer to Mistress Ford's statement, "I fear you love Mistress Page," could be translated as, "You might have as well said I love a cur dog, which is as hateful to me as that reeking sewage."⁵ In each case no specific source is used entirely for the line transposing, nor are any lines merely lifted from a source to form part of the script. Tradition, eminent scholars, a working knowledge of twentieth century English, and a simple revision of the words were the deciding devices in the transposing to modern English. Those works which were

consulted most often in the translation are included in the Bibliography.

The omissions in the script were purely designed to further the plot and subplot. Some scenes were eliminated as a result of conflict among scholars who could not agree which scenes were a part of the original text. For example, the horse stealing scene is supposed to have been added after the first script was written. Because this play is unique in Shakespeare's works; it is his one entirely farcical play; it is his only bourgeois play; it is the only one of his plays written predominately in prose; and it is perhaps the only one which depends on topical satire, scenes which are a part of the farce-projecting image and do not further the wife--Falstaff plot, or the Anne Page--marriage plot, can be eliminated without undue suffering to the basic script.

An example of elimination can be the character of Dr. Caius. He is important to the script for he is one of Anne Page's three loves, but he does not need a large part to establish his character. Mrs. Quickly can explain his nature easily when she gives her lopsided version of what he is like. Scenes which star Dr. Caius then, can be omitted and the main plot will continue, while Mrs. Quickly keeps his character intact in the subplot. As a character who "don't talk so good," Dr. Caius

should have an accent. He is French, living in a foreign country. Without an accent, he appears too much like the natives, which in turn, makes his character weaker than it needs to be for us to believe that he would challenge anyone to a duel just for helping a friend with his suit to Anne Page.

Another scene elimination is the one in which Sir Hugh Evans is the principle character. He is foreign, like Dr. Caius, and needs an accent for his character to have integrity. Others speak of him as being honest and pious. He shows himself to be conscientious and a good friend, so what is said of him by others is probably sufficient to make him believable.

Characters deemed not necessary to keeping the story line intact were: the Host of the Garter Inn; Falstaff's three rascals - Bardolph, Nym and Pistol; William Page, son of Sir Thomas Page; and servants of the various characters who have little to say. The only servants necessary to the story line are Robin, the young lad who is Falstaff's messenger and the servants who carry out the buck-basket with Falstaff inside. It is Robin who carries the messages to and from both parties, and it is Robin who shows us how low Falstaff has sunk by his action of aiding the wives to dupe his master. He could be one of the two servants who must carry off the basket,

thus eliminating another servant. While there is no intention of erasing characters, those parties aforementioned who round out the script to a full-scale production, could become stumbling blocks in a shorter, simpler version of the same work. Therefore, characters and scenes were eliminated for the sake of clarity.

According to Coger and White, staging or arranging for a Readers Theatre performance can be as elaborate as a fully staged play or as simple as stools with readers doing nothing more than interpreting the lines on the script in front of them.⁶ The Merry Wives of Windsor, by being in the Elizabethan era, could possibly suffer from too simple a performance. Some of the humor is entirely dependent on physical maneuvers, and a cast merely sitting on stools could not accomplish the same kind of humor. This does not mean the stage or performance area should have backdrops or elaborate scenery. Indeed, Shakespeare did not utilize what we put on stage today. Simple three-dimensional pieces could enhance the story without detracting from the presentational nature of the script. Representational pieces were obviously utilized in the very first production of this script. As a further desire to make the pieces represent several places and things, all of the pieces are painted a neutral grey. No attempt is made whatsoever to show any piece literally.

So, in a sense, the scenes have simultaneous settings. The picture in Appendix D shows basically how the pieces could be set for the performance with the exception of the final scene. There is so much action in the final section that the entire performance area should be utilized, so a modification of those same set pieces is shown in Appendix E. Each three-dimensional piece then forms another background for the last episode which takes place in the wood at Herne's Oak. Eight foot pylons could easily "be" trees, while ramps and platforms could form the uneven ground in a forest. Smaller pylons could form the ditch to hide Mr. Page and Slender, while platforms or step units could become boulders to hide Dr. Caius, the wives and the fairies. The limitation of the set pieces should only be in the minds of the audience, who will possibly "see" a real forest with live and dead trees and ditches and boulders.

A concession to performing on a stage could be the lighting plot plan. Because this was originally a play script, the change of episodes could be enhanced by lighting the various performing areas separately, as well as creating "night lighting" for the final scene. The lighting is not necessary to the story line and the performance should not be dependent on change of lighting at all. If, however, the specialized lighting is available,

perhaps the script could be enhanced by lighting changes for episode changes.

As a backdrop for the set pieces, a blank wall, neutral curtains, or a black cyclorama could be utilized. It could be distracting to have any form of obvious design backing the performers, which could give rise to unclear meanings,

William Shakespeare did not see a necessity for making his characters wear clothing depicting the time and place of his plays. His concession to costuming was representational: a sword and helmet for a warrior; a crown and robe for a king; a swathe of cloth to make the actor colorful; but no effort was made to literally dress the actors. Shakespeare's actors wore their finest garments which made them colorful, and perhaps even identified them to the audience, but the audience must have "seen" them as the characters they were for history tells us that the theatres were full. While a full scale production of a Shakespearean play is usually enhanced by full scale costuming, a Readers Theatre production usually does not need such elaborateness. This Readers Theatre script has been produced with representational clothing, and with reasonably accurate period costumes. Though more of the results will be concentrated in the final chapter, from the viewpoint of the high school

student, the addition of costumes helped to put the play in the right time frame, but it did not necessarily add to the understanding of the story line. If simple costuming is to be utilized, the characters might be denoted by color scheming. The wives could be in golds and purples or reds, while the men could be in varying shades of blues and bright browns. Mrs. Quickly needs to be in grey with flecks of white, while Falstaff should have bold colors or clashing colors, possibly with some yellow in the costume. The priest should be in black or dark blue; the servants should wear dull browns. If the play is to be timeless, it is necessary to remove time frame markings from the costumes. For instance, any seams which are topstitched or shown as machine made forces the play into the last two centuries. Certain kinds of materials (double knits, metallics, overlays, etc.) limit the costume and therefore the play to modern times. If all the costumes were made of simple cotton with seams sewn to be worn inside only, then some of the time frame could be erased. If the men wore pants with no pockets or plackets and shirts with plain long sleeves and collarless necks, more of the time frame could be removed. The women likewise could be dressed in plain cotton dresses with gathers at the waist, skirts to the floor, collarless necklines and long, loosely fitting sleeves. In utilizing

this type of costuming, we found the only problems were with the wives whose movements seemed to be more graceful when they were wearing the farthingale, and Falstaff was much more convincing when he was "fat." Of course, if Falstaff could be padded, regardless of the actor's exterior clothing, and the wives could be taught to walk with the swaying movement of the farthingale, then the slip could be removed after the graceful sway was attained.

The necessary clothing extras are hats for the men who use them as hand props; swords for Falstaff and Ford; money bags for Falstaff, Ford, Fenton and Mrs. Quickly; the buck-basket, which can be a laundry cart, making transport of Falstaff much easier on the carriers; the letters which are sent and received; Falstaff's ale glass; the whip which beats the witch of Brainsford; coverings for the "fairies" to hide their faces in the final scene; dirty clothes for the laundry basket; and a long dress with a scarf to cover Falstaff in his second duping. One last prop which should enlighten the final scene is the helmet with horns which Falstaff is instructed to wear so the wives will be able to identify him.

Music sets the mood, creates aural space and acts as an introduction into the work. Though the music is not necessary, it is most helpful. The use of fifteen to

thirty seconds of medieval dance music, or lively chamber music would be most beneficial to the performance, establishing a theme and making a bridge later in the episodes when there is a need to let the audience know one entire night has elapsed. It could also make the finale which allows the performers to leave gracefully in parade form to Mr. Page's house. The inclusion of the clock chiming twelve times allows for the re-arrangement of the set pieces to represent Herne's wood, and allows each of the conspirators to get in position without narration becoming necessary there.

As a production concept, this play could benefit from the memorization of the lines by the performers and the narrator. So much of the farce is dependent on physical action, that scripts in the hands of those performers could prove a real hindrance to the understanding of the story line. Perhaps the only performer who could justifiably carry a script is Mistress Quickly, but if she is to show the rationale that happens in her mind while she counts money given her by the schemers, whether wives or Falstaff or the lovers, she probably would communicate better with hands free to count money and gesture as the lines dictate. Experience with high school performers has shown a definite improvement in the performance when lines are memorized by all of the actors

regardless of the addition or subtraction of a script or scripts on stage.

Choice of performers is limited, of course, to available talent. In this script it would probably be unwise to use males for female parts or vice-versa with the possible exception of Robin, the young servant who could be represented equally well by a small teenage boy or girl. Falstaff need not be fat, but a large-boned teenage boy could aid in the fattening process. Perhaps the most viable criteria should be the ability of the performer to project the character he will portray to his potential audience. It is further suggested that one actor perform one part instead of several. The exception to that could be the roles of Evans and Dr. Caius. Dr. Caius has few lines early in the story, while he is necessary to the final scene; so Evans could take Caius' lines in the early scenes, while Shallow could say Evans' three lines in the forest scene.

In conclusion, though suggested set arrangements and light plots are included, it is not the intention to limit the script to what has been outlined. No specific moves have been included in the script except entrances and exits and those were inserted to aid in establishing time and place. Each director should be free to "see" the performance and whatever business is important to

understanding the story in the light of his own ability
and the abilities of those chosen to perform.

NOTES

1 Sir Authur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, editors, The Merry Wives of Windsor (New York: McMillan Co., 1921), p. 73.

2 Chapter IV, p.

3 Quiller-Couch and Wilson, p. 73.

4 Quiller-Couch and Wilson, p. 74.

5 Chapter IV, p.

6 Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature Rev. ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1973), p. 9.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ADAPTED SCRIPT FOR
THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Abbreviations for Cast of Characters and Stage Directions

Evans. . . . .	.EVANS	Mrs. Page	MRS.P.
Slender . . . . .	.SLEND	Mrs. Ford	MRS.F.
Shallow . . . . .	.SHALL	Mrs. Quickly	QUICK
Falstaff . . . . .	.FALST	Mr. Ford	FORD
Page . . . . .	.PAGE	Robin	ROBIN
Anne . . . . .	.ANNE	Fenton	FENT
Servant . . . . .	.SERV	Dr. Caius	CAIUS
Downstage Right			D.R.
Downstage Left			D.L.
Downstage Center			D.C.
Upstage Right			U.R.
Upstage Center			U.C.
Upstage Left			U.L.
Center stage Center			C.C.

ENTER SIR HUGH EVANS, MASTER SHALLOW, MR. ABRAHAM SLENDER,
C.C.

EVANS: Let's think of Anne Page, whom you wish your nephew
to marry.

SLEND: Mistress Anne Page? She has brown hair and speaks

in a small voice.

EVANS: Her grandfather left her seven hundred pounds which she gets on her seventeenth birthday. It were a goot motion if we leave pribbles and prabbles and 'ork out a marriage between Mr. Abraham Slender and Anne Page.

SHALL: I know the gentle lady. She has good gifts.

EVANS: Seven hundred pounds and possibilities is good gifts.

SHALL: Well, let us see Mr. Page. Is Falstaff there?

ENTER PAGE AND FALSTAFF FROM U.L.

PAGE: I am glad to see you, Master Slender. Anne is inside.

SHALL: Sir John Falstaff, you have done me great wrong.

FALST: Now, Master Shallow, you'll complain of me to the king?

SHALL: Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer and broke into my lodge, but worse, you have abused my nephew.

FALST: True, true.

SHALL: Yes, the king shall hear of this and the court, too.

FALST: It would be better in private. You'll be the laughingstock of the court.

EVANS: Goot worts, Sir John, goot worts.

FALST: Good warts. Good cabbage. Slender, I broke your head. What have you against me?

SLEND: I have a matter on my head against you.

PAGE: We will hear this argument and settle this dispute later.

EVANS: Very goot. I make a prief of it in my notebook, so we can discuss it afterwards.

ANNE ENTERS WITH MISTRESS PAGE AND MISTRESS FORD U.L.

PAGE: Daughter, we will take our wine inside.

FALST: Mistress Ford, how lovely you look. (KISSES HER CHEEK)

PAGE: Wife, bring the gentlemen in. Let us toast to forgiving and giving of kindness.

ALL EXIT U.L. EXCEPT SHALLOW, SLENDER AND EVANS

SHALL: Cousin, what do you think of Evans idea? Sir Hugh thinks you and Anne Page would make a fine pair.

EVANS: Listen to his idea, Master Slender. I will description it to you.

SLEND: I will do as my cousin asks. After all, he is the justice of the peace in this county. I'll marry her upon any reasonable demands.

EVANS: To be more precise, can you have any affection for her. Can you marry your goot will to the maid?

SLEND: I will marry her, sir, at your request. If there be no great love at the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance. I hope familiarity will breed more contempt. But if you

say marry her, I will marry her. I am that freely dissolved and disolutely.

SHALL: I think my cousin meant well. Here comes Mistress Anne. Would I were young for your sake, Mistress Anne!

ENTER ANNE U.L.

ANNE: The dinner is on the table. My father waits.

EVANS: Got's plessed will. I will not miss grace.

EXIT SHALLOW AND EVANS U.L.

ANNE Will you please come, sir.

SLEND: No, thank you. I'm not hungry.

ANNE: I may not go in without you. They will not begin until you come.

SLEND: Mistress Anne. Yourself shall go first.

EXIT ANNE AND SLENDER: U.L. SPOT UP ON FALSTAFF D.L.

FALST: As I am short of money, I have written a letter to Mistress Ford and another to Page's wife who both looked on me to lust. Since I am out of pockets and there is no money in being a knight, I must look for greener pastures. Ford's wife keeps the purse, and so must Mistress Page. I will be cheaters to them both and they will repay with checks. They shall be my East and West Indies. To them I will trade with both. Robin, Take this to Mistress Ford and this to Mistress Page.

ENTER ROBIN, D.L. TAKES LETTERS: EXIT FALSTAFF AND ROBIN

ENTER MISTRESS QUICKLY, D.R. SPOT UP ON QUICKLY

QUICK: If me name weren't Mistress Quickly, I'd be sure there would be a mess from all the messages. First, Master Slender sent his man to me to get me to speak a good word to Mistress Anne for him. Why Anne talks to me more than anyone else. If there is anyone in this town who knows Anne Page's mind, it's me. Well, my master is the good Doctor Caius. He's French and don't talk so good. He thinks he's in love with Anne Page too and runs after her like some silly school boy. Dr. Caius is so hot-headed that he threatens to cut off head and limbs of anyone who challenges his right to Anne. Right? He ain't got no right yet anyway. I have to tell him that Anne loves him to keep the peace. But Master Slender is a lovely lad, such a sweet face and such a tiny beard. And then there's Master Fenton who is truly an honest gentleman, but Anne does not love him, for I know Anne's mind as well as I know my own. Oh, oh, the Mistresses Page and Ford have received their letters.

EXIT QUICKLY D.R.: ENTER MISTRESSES PAGE AND FORD U.R.

MRS.P.: What has upset you so?

MRS.F.: Here, read, see why I would like to be a man for

just one hour. He praises the honesty of women and their good behavior; then the whale with so many tons of oil in his belly has the gall to proposition me. How can I be revenged on him. Maybe the best way is to lead him on with the hope that the wicked fire of lust will melt him in his own grease. Did you ever hear the like?

MRS.P.: Letter for letter. Only the name Page is in the place of Ford. My letter is the identical twin of yours. I would swear that he has a thousand of them. Well, I could find you twenty lascivious turtles before I could find you one faithful man.

MRS.F.: What does he think we are?

MRS.P.: I don't know. I have thought through every move and every word, and I cannot find anything which might have led him on. Let's be revenged on him. I know. Let's make an appointment with him, give him some measure of confidence, flatter him a little until he shows...

MRS.F.: No, I will not do any act which will place any question on my good name. But if my husband could see this letter, I know it would feed his jealous streak.

MRS.P.: My husband is as far from jealousy as I am from giving him reason to be jealous and I want to keep

it that way. Let's go and make a plan against this greasy knight.

EXIT LADIES U.R., ENTER QUICKLY D.R., SPOT UP

QUICK: The ladies are not the only ones who have messages. Falstaff's old cronies have gotten word to the husbands that Sir John means to seduce their wives. Ford is such a jealous man, that he will believe anything. Page has more faith in his wife.

EXIST QUICKLY D.R., ENTER FORD D.C.

FORD: I do not doubt my wife. But I would not want to put her in such an uncivil position. A man may be too confident. Though Page is a secure fool about his wife, I'll not be so stupid. She was in his company at Page's house. Well, I will need a disguise. Yes, the fat knight doesn't know who I am... .. Brook. That will do... Brook the rich man who wants another's wife. I will sound out this knight and find out if she is unfaithful to me. If I find her true, I have lost nothing; if it is otherwise, the effort is well spent.

EXIT FORD U. L., ENTER FALSTAFF AND ROBIN D.L.

ROBIN: Sir, I delivered the letters. Here's a woman to speak to you.

ENTER QUICKLY U.L.

QUICK: Good morning, you worship.

FALST: Good morning, good wife.

QUICK: I would a word with you privately. There is one
Mistress Ford. I myself dwell with Dr. Caius.

FALST: Well, what of Mistress Ford.

QUICK: Why sir, she's a good woman. Lord, lord, your
worship's a wanton. Heaven forgive you and all
us I pray.

FALST: Mistres Ford, come, what about Mistress Ford?

QUICK: Well, now you have brought her to such a state.
When she was at court, the knights and lords never
brought her to such a state, and they all courted
her with flowers, and gold and silks. But the lady
was so honest that no bribes or sweet words could
make her unfaithful... and there were earls and
knights and wealthy men.

FALST: But what does she say about me?

QUICK: She received your letter and she thanks you a thou-
sand times and she says to tell you that her husband
will be absent from the house between ten and eleven.

FALST: Ten and eleven!

QUICK: And you may come and see, alas, the sweet woman
leads an ill life with him; he's a very jealous
man.

FALST: Ten and eleven. Woman, tell her I will not fail her.

QUICK: But I have another message to your worship. Mistress

Page has sent her welcome, too, and let me tell you that she's a civil modest wife and one who will never miss the morning and evening prayer. But she said to tell you that her husband is seldom away from home, but she hopes there will come a time. I never knew women to dote so on a man. Surely you have charms.

FALST: No, I assure you. Besides my physical attraction, I have no other charms. But tell me, do Ford's wife and Page's wife know that they both love me?

QUICK: Oh, but that would be some joke. But Mistress Page wants you to send your little servant boy. Then he can come between you with messages, and the boy need never know; for it is not good that children know the adult's wickedness, (he,he,he).

FALST: Fare you well, give them both my greetings. Here is your money. I am debtor to yet another. This news distracts me.

EXIT QUICKLY D.L., ENTER ROBIN U.L.

ROBIN: Sir John, there is a Mr. Brook to see you.

FALST: Call him in.

ENTER FORD U.L

FORD: Sir, I hear you are a scholar. I will be brief. I have ample gold to repay you. But what I wish to learn is not of the usual stuff in books. It is

difficult for me to speak of it.

FALST: Very well, sir, proceed.

FORD: There is a gentlewoman in town; her husband's name is Ford. I have long loved her, but she will not be unfaithful to her husband.

FALST: And you have received no promise from her?

FORD: Never.

FALST: Have you ever asked her?

FORD: Never.

FALST: Why do you tell me all this?

FORD: Because some tell me I do not see all. Though she appears honest, some say that she has been very discreet and kept her philanderings from the public view and from her husband. Now, Sir John, here is the heart of my purpose. You are a gentleman of excellent breeding, fluent in speech and considered to be learned in both war and courting.

FALST: Oh, sir.

FORD: I believe you know it. Here is money. Spend it. Spend it all. Only give me so much of your time in exchange of it so we may lay a crafty siege on the honesty of Ford's wife. Use your art to win her consent. Be a very fox. If any man can do it, you will as soon as any.

FALST: Wait, now, if I should win her, what do you get out of it?

FORD: She is so secure in her station as an honest woman that I dare not attempt to pierce that honor. But if I could come to her with proof of her stained purity, her reputation, her marriage vow, and a thousand other defenses will be broken down. What do you say, Sir John?

FALST: Master Brook, I will first make bold with your money, next give me your hand; and last, as I am a gentleman, you shall, if you will, enjoy Ford's wife. Mr. Brook, it all falls out well. I will be with her between ten and eleven for at that time her husband will be out of the house. Come back here tonight and I will tell you how I fared.

FORD: I am fortunate to have made your acquaintance. Do you know Ford?

FALST: Poor misguided man, no, but they say that he is insanely jealous, has masses of money, and he spends lavishly on his wife. I will use her as the key of the rogue's bank account and there is my real harvest.

FORD: I would that you knew Ford, sir, that you could avoid him.

FALST: Hang him, the imbecile. I will scare him out of his wits. I will threaten him with my cudgel. Master Brook, be assured that he will fall before me and

you will have access to his wife. Come back as soon as it is dark. Ford's an idiot and I will see that you know him for an idiot and a madman.

EXIT FALSTAFF U.L.

FORD: Hang him the mechanical salt-butter rogue. My heart is ready to crack with impatience. My wife sent to him; the hour is fixed. See what comes of having a false woman. I do not think I can stand it until I can be avenged of this worm. Terms, names; Amaimon, Lucifer, Hades, all names of fiends, but cuckold; the devil himself owns not such a name. Page is a secure ass. He will trust his wife; he will not be jealous. I would rather trust a horse thief to walk my best gelding than my wife with herself. God be praised for my jealousy. I will go spy on my wife and be revenged on Falstaff and laugh at Page. I must hurry; better three hours early than one minute late.

EXIT FORD U.L., ENTER QUICKLY D.R., SPOT UP

QUICK: Master Ford has gone to gather the great ones of the city to come make sport of his wife. His jealousy is making him mad. But the wives have plots of their own. They plan to shame Falstaff for his treacherous ways.

EXIT QUICKLY D.R., ENTER ROBIN, MRS. FORD AND MRS. PAGE U.R.

ROBIN: My master, Sir John is come in at your back door,
Mistress Ford, and requests your company.

MRS.P.: You little jack-a-lent, have you been true to us?

ROBIN: Yes, mam, my master knows nothing of your being
here and has threatened to put me into everlasting
liberty if I tell you he is here.

MRS.P.: You are a good boy. This secret will get you a
new suit of clothes.

MRS.F.: Go tell him I am alone.

EXIT ROBIN D.R.

MRS.P.: If I do not act well, whistle at me.

MRS.F.: We'll teach this unwholesome, gross watery pumpkin
to know turtles from jays.

ENTER FALSTAFF D.R.

FALST: Have I caught you my heavenly jewel? Why let me die
for I have lived long enough. This is the culmi-
nation of my ambition.

MRS.F.: O, sweet, Sir John.

FALST: Mistress Ford, no, shall I sin in my wish? I would
your husband were dead. I'll speak it before the
greatest lords. I would make you my lady.

MRS.F.: I your lady, Sir John? I would be a pitiful lady.

FALST: The court of France could not show me such anther.

MRS.F.: A plain handkerchief, Sir John.

FALST: You are a true beauty. Come, you cannot hide it.

But I love you, no one but you, and you deserve it.

MRS.F.: Do not betray me, Sir; I fear you love Mistress Page.

FALST: You might have as well said I love a cur dog, which is as hateful to me as that reeking sewage.

MRS.F.: Well, heaven knows how I love you and you shall one day find out.

FALST: Keep that in mind. I'll deserve it.

ENTER ROBIN U.L.

ROBIN: Mistress Ford, Mistress Ford! Mistress Page is at the door sweating and blowing and looking wildly and would speak with you.

FALST: She cannot see me; I will hide.

MRS.P.: Oh, Mistress Ford, what have you done. You're shamed; you're undone forever.

MRS.F.: Surely not.

MRS.P.: I hope you don't have a man here, for your husband will be here soon with the whole town.

MRS.F.: What shall I do, dear friend? And I fear not for my own shame so much as his peril. How do I get him out of the house?

MRS.P.: For shame! Oh, how you have deceived me. Look, here is a basket. If he be of any reasonable size, he can creep in there and we will throw dirty linen on him to send out to be washed.

MRS.F.: He's too big to get in there.

FALST: Let me see't! Let me see't. Follow your friend's counsel.

MRS.P.: Call your men, Mistress Ford. You devious devil.

MRS.F.: John, take these clothes quickly. Carry them to the laundress in Datched Mead, quickly!

EXIT SERVANTS WITH BASKET ACROSS STAGE TO LEFT

ENTER FORD, PAGE, CAIUS AND EVANS U.L.

FORD: Please come in. If I suspect her without cause, then make sport of me. What is this? Where do you take this basket?

SERV: To the laundress.

FORD: Gentlemen, I'll tell you what. Go all over the house; search, seek out, find. I'll swear we'll unkennel the fox. I'll look in here first.

PAGE: Let us follow him and help him search.

EXIT MEN D.R.

MRS.P.: Can you believe the double duping!

MRS.F.: I do not know which makes me happier; that my husband is deceived or that Sir John is.

MRS.P.: He must have been afraid out of his wits when your husband asked what was in the basket. He surely needs washing now.

MRS.F.: I think my husband has been given some information if he suspects that Falstaff was here; he has never been this jealous before.

MRS.P.: Perhaps we can lay a plot to find out. And we still need to pull more tricks on Falstaff before he gets our message.

MRS.F.: Should we send that foolish Quickly to him and excuse his being thrown into the ditch as a mistake and give him another seed of hope? That way we can give him a better punishment than this.

MRS.P.: We will do it. Send for him tomorrow at eight o'clock.

EXIT MISTRESS FORD AND MISTRESS PAGE U.R. ENTER FORD, PAGE EVANS AND CAIUS D.R.

EVANS: Your wife is an honest 'omans as I will desires among five thousand.

FORD: Well, I promised you a dinner. Come, walk with me in the garden and I will tell you why I have done this.

MEN EXIT U.R., ENTER FENTON AND ANNE PAGE C.C.

FENT: I see that I cannot get your father's permission; therefore, we must no longer hope, sweet Nan.

ANNE: What can we do, Sir Fenton?

FENT: I do not know. Your father says that I was born too high over you, and I only want to get hold of his money to pay for my reckless spending. He says I only love your money.

ANNE: Maybe he tells the truth.

FENT: No, true, your father's wealth was the reason I asked for you, but in finding you, I found gold of much more value. It is the richness of yourself that I want.

ANNE: Gentle sir, try to think of a way to convince him. We must keep asking.

ENTER SHALLOW, SLENDER AND QUICKLY U.R.

SHALL: Break them up, Mistress Quickly. My cousin wants to talk to her.

QUICK: Anne, Master Slender wants to talk to you.

ANNE: One moment. (ASIDE) This is my father's choice. He looks at me like I was a big fat bank account.

SLEND: I am not afraid of her. Mistress Anne....er....tell her, Uncle.

SHALL: Mistress Anne, my cousin loves you.

SLEND: Aye, that I do.

SHALL: He will keep you in the manner that you are accustomed.

SLEND: Aye, that I will.

SHALL: He will give you 150 pounds jointure.

ANNE: Good sir, let him woo for himself.

SHALL: I'll leave you.

ANNE: Now, Master Slender.

SLEND: Now, good Mistress Anne.

ANNE: What is it you want?

SLEND: What I want?

ANNE: What do you want of me?

SLEND: For my own part I want little or nothing of you.

Your father and my uncle have arranged all this.

ENTER MR. AND MRS. PAGE U.L.

PAGE: Master Shallow. Ah, Master Slender; you are to love him, daughter. What? Why is Mr. Fenton here? It is rude of you to keep coming to my house. I told you my daughter is promised.

FENT: Please sir, do not be impatient.

MRS.P.: Mr. Fenton, stay away from my child.

PAGE: She is no match for you.

FENT: Sir, please listen to me.

PAGE: It will do no good. Come Shallow, come son Slender.

EXIT PAGE, SHALLOW AND SLENDER U.L.

QUICK: Speak to Mistress Page.

FENT: Mistress Page, I love your daughter so much that I must speak against all odds. Please do not leave. Let me at least have your good will.

ANNE: Mother, please do not marry me to that fool, Slender.

MRS.P.: Of course, I won't let you marry him. I have better man in mind. Go, Mr. Fenton. I will neither be your friend nor your enemy. I will talk to my daughter and find out how she feels. I will be influenced by whom she loves.

FENT: Then good, Mistress Page, Goodbye, Nan.

EXIT TWO LADIES U.L.

FENT: Mistress Quickly, give my sweet Nan this ring. There,
this is for your effort

EXIT FENTON U.R.

QUICK: Now heaven has sent three good fortunes. I would my
master had Mistress Anne. No, I would Master Slender
had her. No, I would Master Fenton had her. I will
do what I can for them all three, for so I have pro-
mised. Well, I have another errand to Sir John
Falstaff from them two Mistresses Ford and Page.
What a beast I am to be so slow. Ah, Sir John did
not like his last transport!

ENTER FALSTAFF AND ROBIN D.L.

FALST: Robin, I say go fetch me a quart of ale and put
something stiffer in it. Why did I live to be
carried in a dirty clothes basket, and to be thrown
into the Thames. I'll have my brains taken out and
battered before I'll endure another trick. And
I have the gift for sinking. If the bottom were
as deep as hell, I would sink that far. Drowning
is a terrible death for it makes a man swell. And
should I have been drowned, I would have become a
mountain of mummy.

ROBIN: Mistress Quickly is here to speak to you.

FALST: First let me drink my ale, for my belly is as cold as if I had swallowed snowballs for pills to cool my fever.

ROBIN: Come in, woman.

QUICK: I come to your worship from Mistress Ford.

FALST: Mistress Ford! I have had ford enough today. I was thrown into the ford; I have my belly full of ford. What does she want of me?

QUICK: Alas, twas not her fault. Her men misunderstood her direction. Her husband goes to shoot birds in the mornig.

FALST: Well, I will visit her. Tell her to think what man is; let her judge all men's failings; and then judge me.

QUICK: I will tell her. Come at eight, sir.

DIM OUT: SEVEN SECONDS OF MUSIC, EXIT QUICKLY

FALST: I wonder why Mr. Brook did not come last night. I like his money. Oh, here he comes. Mr. Brook, have you come to find out what happened between me and Ford's wife?

ENTER FORD D.L.

FORD: That, Sir John, is my business.

FALST: I was at her house at the appointed time, but her sneaking husband came back as soon as I got there. He brought his whole rabble of companions to search

the house. Before he reached the house, Mrs. Page came to warn us; I was wisked away in a clothes basket. Oh, what I have suffered to bring this woman to evil for your good. Her servants had the nerve to dump the basket of clothes in the river, including me. I suffered the pangs of three deaths. First, an intolerable fright about being detected in his house; second to be compressed in a basket like smoked sardines; and third to be tossed in the river to drown. It is a miracle that I am alive.

FORD: Then you will work for me no more?

FALST: Mr. Brook, I will be thrown to the lions before I'll leave her. Mr. Ford has gone hunting this morning and I am to go to her at eight.

FORD: It is past eight now.

FALST: Then I need to leave. Come back at your leisure and you shall know what happened. You shall have her, Mr. Brook. You will take her away from Ford.

EXIT FALSTAFF D.L.

FORD: I must be dreaming. Dirty clothes basket. He escaped me, but I will take the lecher now. He is going to my house. I will search impossible places. If I had horns to make one mad, let the proverb go with me, I'll be horn-mad.

EXIT FOR U.L., ENTER FALSTAFF AND MISTRESS PAGE AND
MISTRESS PAGE D.R.

FALST: I understand what happened. Do not sorrow your-
self over it any more. I can see that you love
me. But are you sure your husband will not come
home?

MRS.F.: He has gone bird hunting, Sir John.

MRS.P.: Psst...Mrs. Ford.

MRS.F.: Please step into the other room, Sir John.

EXIT FALSTAFF PARTIALLY: ENTER MRS. PAGE COMPLETELY

MRS.P.: Who is at home with you?

MRS.F.: Only the servants. (ASIDE) Speak louder.

MRS.P.: I am so glad you have nobody here because your
jealous husband is at his old tricks again. He
has vowed he will slash to pieces anyone who so
much as looks at you. I am glad that the fat
knight isn't here. Your husband comes.

MRS.F.: I am undone, the knight is here.

MRS.P.: Then he is a dead man. What are you anyway,
woman. Get him out of here. Better your shame
than his murder.

FALST: No more baskets. I'll leave by the back way.

MRS.F.: Do so and you die. He will have both sides of the
house watched...unless you go disguised.

MRS.P.: How? We have nothing large enough for him. If

we did you could put a scarf over his head and he could escape.

FALST: Ladies, please devise something, anything, anything.

MRS.F.: My maid's aunt, the fat woman of Bransford left one of her dresses here.

MRS.P.: On my word it will fit him. She's as big as he is. And I saw her hat and muffler up there too. Run up, Sir John.

MRS.F.: Go up, sweet Sir John; Mistress Page and I will look for a scarf to wrap your head in.

MRS.P.: Quick, we'll come to dress you. But put on the gown immediately.

EXIT FALSTAFF U.R.

MRS.F.: I hope my husband meets him in this disguise, for he cannot stand the old woman and has threatened a beating if she came here again. I'll have my servants carry the basket out front to meet him at the door like the last time.

MRS.P.: We must hurry. They will be here soon. We will make Falstaff look like the witch of Brainsford.

MRS.F.: I'll be up as soon as I instruct the servants.

EXIT MRS. FORD U.R.

MRS.P.: I'd like to hang the lying scum. We cannot misuse him enough.

We'll leave a proof, but that which we will do,

Wives may be merry and yet honest too.

We do not act what we jest and laugh,

Tis old but true, still swine eats all the draff.

EXIT MRS. PAGE D.R., ENTER FORD, PAGE, CAIUS, AND EVANS U.L.

FORD: If this is true, Mr. Page, can you think of any way to make a fool of me again? Here man, set the basket down. Somebody call my wife. Pull out all the linens, hurry, man. Now the devil be shamed. Wife, come here, I say; look what honest clothes you send out to wash.

PAGE: Why, Master Ford, have you taken leave of your senses?

EVANS: This is lunacy; this man is mad!

SHALL: Indeed, Master Ford is not well, indeed.

FORD: Come here, Mistress Ford, the honest woman, the modest wife, the virtuous creature that has a jealous fool for a husband. Am I jealous without cause, wife?

MRS.F.: Heave in my witness, you are a fool if you suspect me of any dishonesty.

FORD: Well said, brazen-face. Come out of there you fat dog.

MRS.F.: Let the clothes alone.

FORD: I will find you. (PULLS OUT LINENS, CRAWLS IN)
Empty, the basket is empty.

MRS.F.: If you find a man in there, he must have died a flea's death.

FORD: Help search the house one more time. If I do not find the lecher, I'll be sport for your jokes forever. Let them say of me as Ford that searched the hollow walnut for his wife's lover.

MRS.F.: Hello, Mistress Page, have you and the old woman finished. My husband wants to come into the house.

FORD: Old woman, what old woman?

MRS.F.: Why it's my maid's aunt of Brainsford.

FORD: That witch, that hussey. Have I not forbidden her here? She came on some errand did she? We men never know what happens under our own roofs. She works her charms and steals our money. Come out you witch, you hag, come out, I say.

MRS.F.: Please, sweet husband, do not strike the old woman. (HANDS HIM A WHIP)

ENTER FALSTAFF IN WOMAN'S CLOTHING AND MRS. PAGE U.R.

MRS.P.: Come, Mother Pratt, come, give me your hand.

FORD: I'll prat her. (BEATS HIM) Out of my house you witch, you hag, you baggage, you polecat, you scum.

FALSTAFF RUNS OFF U.L.

MRS.P.: Aren't you ashamed. I think you have killed the poor woman.

FORD: Hang the witch.

EVANS: (ASIDE) I think the woman is a witch. I do not like it when a woman has a peard; I saw a great peard under her muffler.

FORD: Will you help search, gentlemen. If this is another false alarm, I'll never raise the alarm again.

PAGE: Let us humor him a little further. Come, gentlemen.

EXIT MEN D.R.

MRS.P.: Trust me, he beat him most pitifully.

MRS.F.: No, for the size, he did not beat enough of him.

MRS.P.: I'll have this stick hallowed and hung over the altar at church for it did a meritorious service.

MRS.F.: What do you think? Do you think we should seek any further revenge?

MRS.P.: Surely his lecherous ways are scared out of him. I don't think he will look our way again.

MRS.F.: Should we tell our husbands how we tricked him?

MRS.P.: By all means, if only to scrape the jealous images out of your husband's brain. If they can still find heart to revenge the poor fat knight any more, we will be the ministers.

DIM OUT, ENTER QUICKLY D.R., SPOT UP

QUICK: How smooth is the road when all the facts are revealed. A jealous husband is tamed. The Fords and the Pages have made a plan to publicly dis-

grace Falstaff. They will dress some like elves and fairies and have Falstaff meet them at Herne's Oak. The fairies will run towards him singing, and he is so superstitious that he will believe he is on sacred ground. They will pinch and kick him until he confesses.

ENTER FLASTAFF

FALST: Oh, I have been beaten, smothered, drowned, shamed, Oh, I ache. Mrs. Quickly, what do you want? Oh, I ache.

QUICK: I have come from both your loves.

FALST: The devil take one and his dam the other; and so shall be both off my back. Oh, my back...I have suffered for them and gotten nothing in return.

QUICK: Ah, yes, but they have suffered too; Mrs. Ford is beaten so black and blue that you cannot find a white spot on her.

FALST: Black and blue! I have been beaten to all colors of the rainbow. I was nearly arrested for being the witch of Brainsford. That idiot constable was going to put me in jail!

QUICK: Here is a letter that will explain all.

EXIT FALSTAFF MUTTERING, D.L.

QUICK: Sir John knows nothing of his own greedy face. But I was commissioned to help all three of Mistress

Anne Page's loves as well as keeping the fat knight going. I think Master Slender should win; no I think my master, Dr. Caius should win; no maybe Mr. Fenton should win. But poor Mistress Anne must disobey someone, for Mother wants one and Father wants the other. Parents should not do such things to their children.

EXIT QUICK U.R., ENTER FENTON U.L.

FENT: Between twelve and one tonight at Herne's Oak, Anne Page, whom you all know I love and who says she loves me, will pretend to be the fairy queen. They mean to publicly shame Falstaff. But her father has commanded her to slip away with Mr. Slender and to go to Eton to be married. Her mother has forced her to agree to marry Dr. Caius by the same secrecy on the same night. But she will leave with me. The host of the Garter Inn has agreed to get the priest to wait for us at the church between twelve and one and to marry us then.

BLACKOUT: CHANGE TO HERNE'S WOOD: CHIMES TWELVE TIMES

ENTER PAGE AND SLENDER U.R.

PAGE: We will hide in this ditch until we see the fairies; then we will snatch Mistress Anne away. Look for her in a white robe. (HIDES)

ENTER MISTRESS PAGE, MISTRESS FORD, DR. CAIUS U.R.

MRS.P.: Doctor, my daughter is in green. When you see her, take her away to Eton to be married. You must hide now. We will go on. Come, Mrs. Ford. We must get behind the oak before that lecherous Falstaff arrives.

WIVES HIDE BEHIND OAK, ENTER FALSTAFF AS HERNE U.L.

FALST: The town bell has struck twelve; now the hot-blooded gods assist me. Remember, Jove, you were a bull for your Europa. For me, I am a Windsor stag; and the fattest in the forest, I think.

MRS.F.: Sir John? Are you here, my deer, my male deer?

FALST: My doe is here! Let the sky rain potatoes; let it thunder to the tune of Greensleeves. Let there come a tempest of provocation; I will shelter her here

MRS.F.: Sweetheart, Mrs. Page is with me.

FALS: Let's divide me like a prime buck, each a haunch. My shoulders for arms to cover you and my horns I bequeath to your husbands. I speak like Herne the Hunter and like Cupid.... (NOISES)

MRS.P.: What is that?

MRS.F.: Heaven forgive our sins.(THEY RUN OFF)

FALST: I think the devil himself is after me.

ENTER EVANS, QUICKLY, ANNE, FAIRIES

QUICK: You fairies, black, grey, green and white,
Attend your office and make the fairy oeyes.

FALST: They are fairies; he that speaks to them shall die.

(KNEELS DOWN, HEAD ON THE GROUND)

EVANS: Pray you lock hand in hand and round twenty times.

But stay, I smell a man of middle earth.

FALST: Heaven defend me from that Welsh fairy, lest he

transform me into a piece of cheese.

QUICK: With trial fire touch me his finger end. If he be

chaste, the flame will back descend and turn him

to no pain; if he start it is the flesh of a corrupted heart.

FALST: Oh....oh....oh!

QUICK: Corrupt! Corrupt! About him fairies, sing a scorn-

ful rhyme, and as you trip, still pinch him to

your time. Fie on sinful fantasy; fie on lust and

luxury. Lust is but a bloody fire kindled with

unchaste desire. Pinch him fairies, mutually pinch

him for his villany. Pinch him and turn him about

till candles and starlight and moonshine be out.

ENTER PAGE WITH FORD

PAGE: Have you branded Herne the Hunter?

MRS.P.: Hold everyong. Now, good Sir John, how do you like
Windsor wives now?

FORD: Now, sir, who'd the cuckold now? Master Brook,
Falstaff's knave. He has enjoyed nothing of Mrs.
Ford but her dirty laundry, his beating stick and

twenty pounds of his money which must be returned to him.

MRS.F.: Sir John, we have had ill luck. We could never meet but you will still be my deer.

FALST: No, I have been made an ass.

FORD: And an ox too, if you think about it.

SHALL: Sir John Falstaff, serve God and leave off your lecherous ways and the these fairies will no longer pinch and kick you.

FORD: Well said, fairy Shallow.

EVANS: And you leave off your jealousies, too.

FORD: I will never mistrust my wife again.

FALST: I have laid my brain in the sun and dried it. I will be the laughing-stock of Windsor, not to mention all these women.

PAGE: Be cheerful, knight. You will eat tonight at my house and laugh at my wife who laughed at you. Mr. Slender is married tonight to our daughter.

MRS.P.: If Anne is my daughter; she is now the doctor's wife.

ENTER SLENDER U.L.

SLEND: Woa, father Page.

PAGE: Son, why are you running here?

SLEND: I went to Eton to marry Anne and she turned out to be a lubberly boy. He was in her white dress and said our secret words.

MRS.P.: Good George, do not be angry. I knew about your scheme and I sent Anne in green and she and the doctor are being married now.

ENTER DR. CAIUS U.L.

CAIUS: Ver is Mrs. Page? By gar, I am cheated. The green dress turned out to be a lad. I am cheated.

FORD: This is strange. Who got the right Anne?

PAGE: My heart misgives me. Oh, here comes Master Fenton.

ENTER FENTON AND ANNE U.L.

ANNE: Pardon, good Father and good Mother, pardon.

PAGE: Now, Mistress, why did you not go with Master Slender?

MRS.P.: Why did you not go with Dr. Caius, young lady?

FENT: You confused her. But the truth of it is that you both would have married her out of your own selfishness. Neither of you did this foul deed out of love for your daughter. Now you must know the truth. Anne and I have long loved each other. Tonight we were married in the church, and her deceit to you and her disobedience to both of you must be forgiven because we would have cursed you a thousand times for a forced marriage to a man she could not love.

FORD: Don't stand there dumfounded, Page. You should know that money can buy lands, but wives are sold by fate.

FALST: I am glad you spent your time making me the laughingstock of the town and spent no time taking care of your own house. You deserve this.

PAGE: Well, there is no remedy. Master Fenton, heaven grant you and Anne joy. I cannot change this, so I will bless it.

FALST: When night dogs run, all sorts of deer are chased.

MRS.P.: Master Fenton, heaven grant you many happy days. Good husband, let us all go home and laugh over this sport before our own fire. Sir John and all come with us.

FORD: Yes, Sir John, to Master Brook you yet will keep your word; for he tonight will lie with Mistress Ford.

ALL EXIT SLOWLY.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

The specific interest in evaluating this script is to discover just how much the average high school student can comprehend from being exposed to Shakespeare via the Readers Theatre genre. The evaluation forms ask for such information as how the student likes the story-telling mode, and how well he understands the story from the words the actors say. Though the questionnaire does not specifically say, "Do you like the twentieth century English used," the questions are aimed at finding out just that kind of information. Prior to production of the thesis script, teachers whose students would see the performance were asked to fill out a questionnaire which looked for specific problems the teachers felt hinder the student in learning and understanding Shakespeare. Finally, a subjective evaluation from the actor/performers gave insight into their reactions to the script, to Shakespeare, and to the form (Readers Theatre), which is the vehicle for performance of the thesis script.

For want of a clearer word, the use of "play" is incorporated into the questionnaire when referring to the

production. From observation of current productions, this writer has found the term "Readers Theatre" not common knowledge, so inclusion of that term in the questionnaire might have caused confusion. Specific questions concerning the characters and the actions gave enlightenment into just how much the high school student is able to absorb from one viewing of Readers Theatre production of The Merry Wives of Windsor.

The questionnaire (Appendix A), which the teachers filled out, pointed to two distinct problems they felt hinder the student from understanding and, therefore, enjoying Shakespeare. The two greatest concerns appear to be the students' lack of reading ability and, equally, the difficulty with archaic syntax. The survey sheets showed an equal division of concern over these two problems as the most noteworthy hindrances to the students' understanding of any of Shakespeare's works. High on the teachers' list of problems were: unfamiliar words, idiomatic expressions, and recordings in British dialect. Of special interest to this thesis is the problem of Shakespeare being read instead of performed, a problem which tends to obscure the student's understanding of the play. About forty percent of the surveyed teachers list this problem as third. These teachers are, for the most part, teachers of English or reading. Only ten percent are

teachers of speech or drama. Only one survey lists a negative vote for aiding the students learning process via a live visual media, like Readers Theatre. Below is a chart which lists the problems cited and the number who reinforce this area as a problem. The numbers are transposed into percentages for the sake of clarity.

TABLE II
OPINIONS CONCERNING PROBLEMS WITH UNDERSTANDING
OF SHAKESPEARE BY THE AVERAGE HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENT

Problems in Descending Order of Importance	Percentages of Responses Showing Importance of Problem 1 = Very Important 9 = Least Important								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Archaic syntax	60	40	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Reading ability	40	20	..	20	..	..	..	..	..
Unfamiliar words	..	20	20	60	..	..	..	..	..
Play read, not performed	..	40	20	..	..	..	..	..	20
Idiomatic expressions	65	35	..	..	..	..	..
Recordings in British	..	20	..	..	15	..	..	..	..
Complicated plots	45	25	..	..
Students too young	40	40
Obscure characterization	60	..	..
Plots too adult	40	40

The table indicates that the teachers are concerned about understanding and that they follow a pattern of agreement on what the major problems are. Though the last

three problems could be construed as merely a problem of teaching the play, those questions can reveal more difficulties with understanding Shakespeare in its original form as read in class by the high school students. All of the teachers did not respond to all of the problem areas, though the table shows that one-hundred percent of them responded to the first four problem areas.

Table II below focuses on the opinion questions which the teachers were asked to respond with a yes or no answer. Again, as the table shows, they are in general agreement with what the specific needs are.

TABLE III
BENEFITS OF STUDYING SHAKESPEARE
BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Opinion Question	Percentage of Answers	
	Yes	No
Do high school students benefit from Shakespearean study?	100	0
Effectiveness of teaching via other means; i.e., Readers Theatre?	85	15
Use of simplified language beneficial?	100	0
Students should be exposed to live productions?	100	0
Willingness to use class time to see live productions?	100	0

The teachers seem to agree that there is a need for study and that there can be a problem with the students understanding. They also seem to agree that a possible solution to the problem lies in a visual presentation, specifically a live production, which could greatly aid in the students' grasp of the story, plot, structure and characterization, as the questions on Table I may indicate.

The evaluations by the students reveal a pattern quite similar to the teachers' suggested problem areas. Table III will show the average responses to specific questions. Those questions are directed at discovering how much the student knows already and how much he absorbs from seeing a Readers Theatre production. The table shows a blocking of questions depending on the area of knowledge or lack of knowledge revealed. Some questions included in the questionnaire and not on the table were: have you ever seen a production of The Merry Wives of Windsor; and how often do you see a live production? The response to the first question was one-hundred percent negative. Apparently no student had seen a production of any kind of The Merry Wives of Windsor until this production. The latter question shows plainly that high school students at Lancaster High School do not see live productions of any form very often. Fewer than ten percent state that they see productions fairly regularly.

TABLE III

EVALUATION BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
OF THE MERRY WIVES PRODUCTION

Question	Response Percentages						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How well did you like <u>The Merry Wives of Windsor</u> ?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (4.6)		
Could you understand the actors?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (5.2)		
Could you understand the jokes?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (4.6)		
Could you follow the story line?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (4.6)		
Did you like Falstaff?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (4.9)		
Did you like the Wives' tricks?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (6.0)		
Could you tell where the scenes were supposed to be?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (4.8)		
Did you like the costumes?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (5.7)		
Did you like Mrs. Quickly?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (6.3)		
Would you like to see another play done like this one?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (5.3)		
How do you rank this with other plays you have seen?	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX (4.9)		

As the table on the preceding page shows, the response to the production as a whole was overwhelmingly favorable. Because high school students tend to think in concrete ideas, the questions were directly concrete (did you like or did you understand). The questions then show how the student reacts through his reaction to a character or a specific area questioned. Questions like: Could you follow the story line; could you understand the jokes and could you understand the actors, reveal indirectly how well the student understands what he hears and sees. The two questions which receive strongest approval are: "Did you like the tricks the wives played on Falstaff and did you like Mrs. Quickly." These two questions help to determine how the visual appeals are received and how well the narrator/actor, Mrs. Quickly, gets across her story to the audience.

Questions which have all "one's" for answers or all "seven's" were culled out. Of the more than one-hundred responses remaining, most appeared to have been carefully considered before answering. The students who were exposed to the production varied from Plan A students and those with emotional and physical disabilities to the honor students in accelerated classes. Grade level nine through twelve were represented.

Perhaps the most accurate evaluation came from the students who participated in the production. They were exposed to the script for such a long period of time that flaws, problems and other unnecessary moves became extremely clear to them. Their evaluation was purely subjective (see Appendix C). Each student, who was either a part of the cast or a part of the crew, was asked to complete an evaluation anonymously. The questions were grouped together to form a nuclei for special kinds of answers which hopefully revealed how the students really felt about the production. The question, "Would you recommend a play like this one to the students who know nothing about Shakespeare?" was answered affirmatively by sixteen of the seventeen participants. It was interesting to note, in connection with the above answer, most of those students revealed that they themselves did not understand the play from the first reading. Reasons given for ease of understanding were: simplified language, story teller/narrator who tells the audience what is happening, and how one scene melted into the next. Two questionnaires stated that they had some trouble in understanding the beginning of the story, though they did not explain just how it was difficult. A majority of the questionnaires voted affirmatively for the Readers Theatre mode.

One interesting facet of the questions revealed that the first version of the script, which was approximately one hour long, gets more unfavorable responses from the cast and crew than the shorter, forty-five minute script. Since the lines had been previously memorized, lack of desire to memorize more lines cannot be attributed to this attitude. Several cast or crew members stated that the longer script moved too slowly and therefore was not as clear as the shorter one. Some stated that the longer version was more confusing, though just what was confusing was not revealed.

The question, "Would you recommend this play to students who know nothing about Shakespeare " brought some interesting responses. The cast/crew either strongly recommended it, or they thought maybe students should study some Shakespeare before seeing a production of his work. Eighty percent of the cast vigorously approve of performing this script before those who have no background in Shakespeare, like junior high students, for example. Two statements from the students which seem to reveal the attitude of most of the cast are: "Yes, I would recommend it to anybody.", and "I would recommend this Readers Theatre production for students who know nothing of Shakespeare. It would be much easier for them to follow because of its story telling form."

All of those students who responded to the questionnaire did not respond to the question, "What did you like most about the Readers Theatre form? Least?" The ones who did respond, gave some insight into what possible problems could be encountered in future productions. Below is a list of responses which state what most of the cast considered as assets.

- a. "The scenery was neat. It could look like anything you wanted."
- b. "I like the ease of understanding the story."
- c. "It made the story line funnier."
- d. "I like the part where the character connected the parts together, talking to the audience and sharing events."

The following list shows what a majority of the students found to be least enhancing to the understanding:

- a. "Some of the lines weren't too easy to follow."
- b. "Sometimes you couldn't tell for sure if they were talking to themselves or the audience."
- c. "Some characters didn't show if they were in or out of the scene which was partly actor's error."

Discussions of the lines, placement of focus, character analysis, use of scene pieces, and addition of soliloquies did not erase all the problems. During rehearsals, students were asked to share problems and have cast and

director help to solve those problems. These statements reflect some of the earlier difficulties. It is especially interesting to note that difficulty with the language is not a problem mentioned. Evidently the students feel that the translation is close enough to modern language that it does not pose a barrier to understanding.

The original intention concerning production was to use "no-period-type costumes." After careful consideration, and a trial with periodless costumes, the cast, crew, and the director thought that the production could be greatly enhanced by the introduction of representative type costumes which would help the actors and actresses to formulate a clearer understanding of their characters and be able to project the character better by using period costumes common to the Sixteenth Century. The parts of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford showed marked improvement when the students had to move about in a fotheringale and tall collars. The male characters' greatest improvement seemed to come from having to wear sixteenth century hats with feathers. Last, but far from least, Falstaff's character was less than satisfactory without padding to create the illusion of a "fat knight." With no apologies for the original intention, it is the conclusion that The Merry Wives of Windsor, as performed

by the students at Lancaster High School, is best performed in Sixteenth Century costume.

As a result of the favorable response from the high school students, the cast was asked to perform The Merry Wives for junior high students. Their responses closely followed those of the high school. The questions: "Did you like the character of Mrs. Quickly who was telling you what was happening?", and "Did you like the tricks the wives played on Falstaff?" received the greatest number of favorable responses. More than sixty percent of those polled answered those two questions with a "seven." Conversations with teachers of those middle school students confirmed that the majority did understand the story line and could follow it easily. When asked if they saw any problems with the language, none of those asked could find a problem. It should be noted here also that the middle school audience seemed to be more enthusiastically alert to what was happening in the production than those of high school age. Perhaps the differences could be attributed to the fact that the middle schoolers have had no contact with Shakespeare via the printed page, so they would have no built-in barriers against the play.

In conclusion, from the sources cited, the evaluations gleaned and from personal observation, it is the opinion

of this writer that a Readers Theatre Script of The Merry Wives of Windsor, as written in this thesis, can be an aid in teaching Shakespeare to high school students. It is further noted that the student/actor receives the greatest benefit from exposure to the play. Because of its unique form, that of a Shakespearean farce written in prose, it is impossible to determine whether a similar kind of script could be formulated from other Shakespearean plays.

APPENDIX A

Sample Two-part Survey Given to High School
English and Drama Teachers

Please answer the following questionnaire from your own experience.

<u>QUESTION</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
1. Do you think the average high school student benefits from a unit of Shakespeare?	_____	_____
2. Do you think the below-average student benefits from a unit of Shakespeare?	_____	_____
3. Do you teach a unit of Shakespeare each year?	_____	_____
4. Do you teach more than one unit each year directly related to Shakespeare?	_____	_____
5. Do you think all high school students should study Shakespeare?	_____	_____
6. Do you think high school students should be exposed to Shakespeare via some form of live production?	_____	_____
7. Do you personally enjoy Shakespeare's plays as literature?	_____	_____
8. Do you personally enjoy Shakespeare's plays performed as a dramatic experience?	_____	_____

Part II

Survey of High School Teachers of English and Drama

Hindrances to understanding Shakespeare. Below is a list of possible difficulties students may encounter in understanding Shakespeare. Number, in order of importance, those problem areas you think are applicable to high school students.

- | | |
|---|--|
| _____ Archaic syntax | _____ Obscure characterization |
| _____ Unfamiliar words | _____ Students introduced to Shakespeare too young |
| _____ Idiomatic expressions | _____ Student's lack of reading ability |
| _____ Complicated plots | _____ Shakespeare's story lines nebulous |
| _____ Plots too adult for high school students to understand | _____ Shakespeare being read instead of performed |
| _____ Recordings in British dialect too difficult to understand | |

APPENDIX B

Survey - High School Students

Directions: Circle the appropriate spot on the line. Number one means low or poor; number seven means high or excellent. One may also mean no and seven may mean yes.

<u>QUESTION</u>	<u>RESPONSE</u>
1. Have you ever seen a production of <u>The Merry Wives of Windsor</u> before?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. How well do you like Shakespeare?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. How well did you like <u>The Merry Wives of Windsor</u> ?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. How well could you understand the actors?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. How well could you understand Shakespeare's jokes?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Were you able to follow the story line easily?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. Did you like the character of Falstaff?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. How well did you like the tricks the wives played on Falstaff?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Could you tell where the actors were supposed to be in each scene?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Did you like the costumes?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. Did you like the character of Mrs. Quickly who told you what was happening?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. Did you think Mr. Fenton should have gotten Anne Page?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. Would you like to see another play done like this one?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. How would you rank this play with others you have seen: better or worse than the others?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. How often do you see a live production?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

APPENDIX C

Survey - Cast and Crew

Please answer the following questions from your own experience with The Merry Wives of Windsor. Comments and suggestions should be your own, and not reflect what the cast as a whole says. Write on the back if necessary.

1. After being a part of the Merry Wives cast or crew, how do you think you would respond to studying/reading other Shakespearean plays?
2. Did you understand the Merry Wives after the first reading? Were there any parts which you did not understand because of the language? Did you find the story line easy to follow, or hard?
3. Would you recommend a play like this to students who know nothing about Shakespeare? In your opinion could they understand the play after having seen this Readers Theatre production? Why or why not?
4. Do you think this form of performing (like telling a story) makes the play easier to understand? What about the Readers Theatre form did you like best? Least?
5. As definitely as possible, give your emotional response to the production from first rehearsals to performance.

APPENDIX D

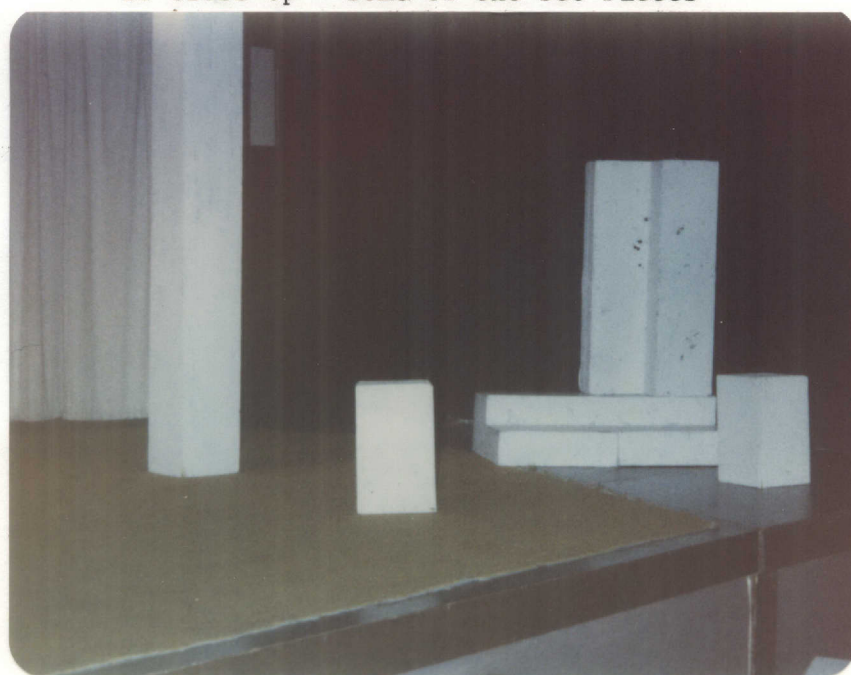
PHOTOGRAPHS OF SETTINGS

First Scenes:

A. Complete View of Set Pieces



B. Close Up - Some of the Set Pieces



Final Scene:

C. Ramps with "Tree"



D. "Ditch with Boulders"



APPENDIX E

COSTUME PHOTOGRAPHS

E. Mr. Brook (Ford) and Sir John Falstaff



F. Mrs. Quickly



G. Shallow, Evans, Page and Ford



H. Robin and Servant with Laundry Basket



I. Mistress Ford and Mistress Page



J. Fenton, Mistress Quickly and Anne Page



K. Servants with Falstaff in Basket, Ford, Page, Shallow, Evans



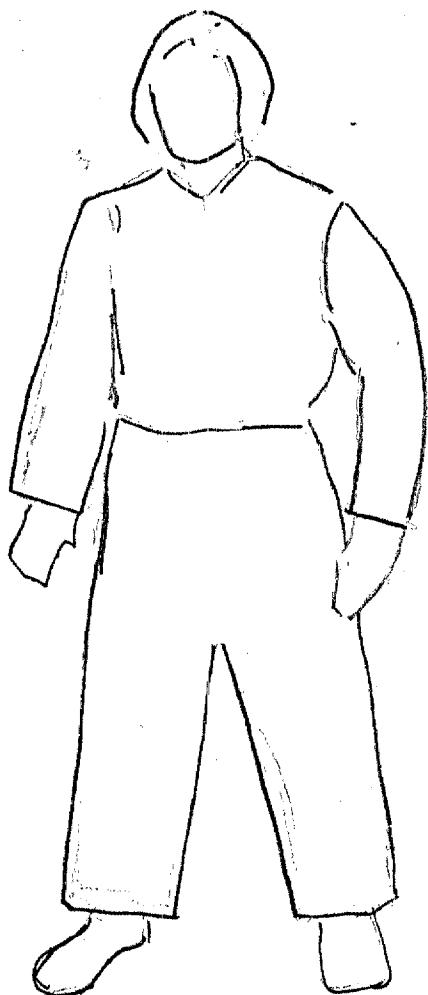
L. Final Scene: Entire cast after Falstaff Shaming



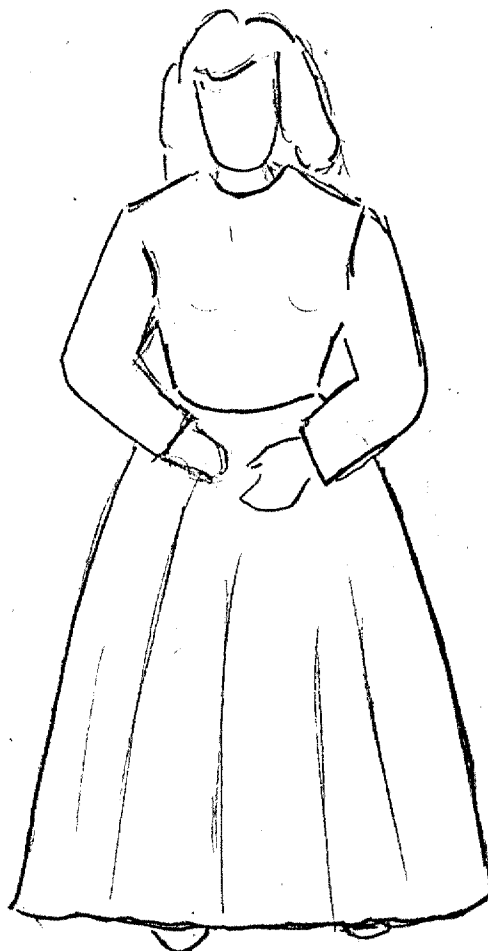
APPENDIX F

ORIGINAL COSTUME DESIGNS

Male: Simple shirt, no markings or outside stitching. Pants fall straight to ankles. There are no buttons, plackets or top stitching.



Female: Simple dress, no markings or outside stitching. Skirt is full to ankles, gathered at the waist. Bodice is long-sleeved and high necked with no collar or cuffs.



APPENDIX G
LIGHT PLOT

<p>General illumination Outside Ford's house Street of Windsor</p>	<p>"Night light" Herne's Oak</p>	<p>General illumination Outside Page's house Street of Windsor</p>
<p>General illumination Inside Ford's house Spotlight: Mrs. Quickly</p>	<p>Spotlight: Mrs. Quickly Lovers Ford Falstaff</p>	<p>General illumination Falstaff's abode Garter Inn</p>

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