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Runner up entry for 2019

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Connecticut College

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Respondent: **Isabelle Smith** Submitted on: Monday, February 25, 2019, 4:57 PM

Library Research Prize 2019: Application Form

During which semester was your research undertaken?

- Fall 2018

At approximately what level were you in your undergraduate studies when you completed this research? For example: Sophomore

- Senior

List or create a name for your paper/project/work. For example: Toward a Critique of New Technology: Rethinking Virilio and Haraway.

- Ophelia and the Queen: Women's Botanical Knowledge Leads to Murder

List the name/department and number of the course for which your research was completed. For example: Freshman Seminar: The Net Generation (FYS 145H)

- ENG 350: Sickness and Health in Renaissance Literature

List the name(s) of the faculty member(s) for whom your research was undertaken. For example: Professor Jane Doe.

- Professor Lina Wilder

List your major/minor fields of study or interest. For example: Film & Philosophy double-major, French minor

- Botany Major, English and Architectural Studies double-minor

Which citation style are you using for your bibliography?

- MLA

Describe how you came to choose your topic, specifically noting any pre-research that you did. What sources did you use in this pre-research? To what extent did you

consult with librarians, faculty, or others? How did this pre-research lead you to your topic?

The original assignment was to write an essay about Hamlet from the perspective of the course topic – Sickness and Health in Renaissance Literature. In class discussions, the group talked about the differences in mental health and physical health. In Hamlet, after Ophelia's father is killed, Ophelia suddenly starts spewing seemingly nonsensical statements about plants. The Court thinks she is mad. Being one of the only women in the play, I couldn't believe she would be dismissed so easily. From previous exposure to botanical history, I knew about the language of flowers, a Victorian era custom of associating different flowers with feelings. This time period was too late to have influenced Hamlet's work, but through consideration and a conversation with Carrie Kent (she was filling in at the research desk), I realized the plants might still have a deeper meaning. Herbals were very popular in the Elizabethan era. Because so many Herbals were published around the time Shakespeare was writing Hamlet, it is very possible the texts influenced his work. Next, I visited Rose Oliveira and Benjamin Panciera in the Linda Lear Special Collections. I checked out John Gerard's Herbal from 1590. I wanted to see if there were any natural cures or remedies that might be of relevance to the plot of Hamlet. If there was, I could make a case that Ophelia was not mad. Unsurprisingly, the possibilities of Ophelia's intended meaning for the plants she lists was extensive. I wrote my first paper just using these two sources: the herbal and the text. For my final project, I expanded proof for the Queen killing Ophelia based on the plants Ophelia sings, but focused more on the culture around women and how such a scandalous idea could have been missed by the Court. Lina Wilder, my course professor, suggested this change in direction.

Describe your process of finding information for your project. Note specifically the tools you used to undertake your research, as well as the specific search strategies you used within these tools. (Note: "Ebsco," being an umbrella vendor, is not a specific enough response when identifying tools; listing the "library database" is also an unacceptably vague answer. Specific tools include JSTOR, America: History & Life, Web of Science, etc., along with OneSearch, the new library system.)

To start my research for the final project, I started with One Search, on the college website. I found a number of articles on JSTOR. There were a couple articles that I wanted to look at, but I didn't have complete access, so Ashley Hanson suggested I check out Google Scholar. Lina Wilder also provided scanned copies of a primary text from 1673. After I started researching, I realized the span of research I had completed in Gerard's herbal was not enough for this revised topic, so I went back to the Linda Lear room for more entries in the archived herbal.

Describe your process of evaluating the resources you found. How did you make decisions about which resources you would use, and which you wouldn't? What kinds of questions did you ask yourself about resources in order to determine whether they were worthy of inclusion?

I knew going into this paper that I wanted to talk about women's knowledge regarding health and how that related to herbals and menstruation. I was looking for articles with key words: Ophelia, women's knowledge, menstruation, birth control, and herbals. Some articles about men's understanding about women's knowledge that I stumbled across were not in my original plans, but ended up being helpful in making my case. It turns out, many people like to talk about Hamlet's Ophelia. I found creative poems, novels about her side of the story, and historical queries about her role, or lack there of, in the play. I only included academic articles about her role. I was also looking for context on women's culture in 1590's England. I had to weed through a lot of sources about women in New England and English women in Victorian times. There were also a great number of texts about women's health and healing remedies across the globe. While some articles about women's culture were interesting, I only cited them in my paper if they were related to women's health between 1450-1650AD England. I read a number of primary texts written for women in the late 1500s and into the 1600s, but I only included one text about herbal remedies. The selected text was written for women, by a woman, assuming women had the ability to learn. Compared to many other texts of the time period, this text was far more detailed regarding the recommended herbs in both selection and explanation. The most interesting component of this text was the justification of women's knowledge. This is the main reason why this text was referenced. I read many sources, and after discerning a thesis statement, I decided whether the article added to argument.