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The Necessity for the Reconfiguration of Shakespeare Education in Secondary Schools:
The Introduction of the Use of Adaptations

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HONORS PROJECT

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The Necessity for the Reconfiguration of Shakespeare Education in Secondary Schools:
The Introduction of the Use of Adaptations

Since Charles van Cleve first wrote his article for the *Peabody Journal of Education* in 1938, the methodology of teaching Shakespeare in secondary schools has been an issue and topic of discussion. Despite the fact that van Cleve's article was published in 1938, his outlining of the history of Shakespeare's position in the educational canon, as well as his commentary on the issues in the methodology of teaching Shakespeare remain relevant in today's educational setting. According to van Cleve, the appearance of *As You Like It* and *Macbeth* in the 1877 curriculum of the Boston High School is the earliest documented use of Shakespeare in an American secondary school (van Cleve 334). Since then, Shakespeare has become the most frequently taught author in American high schools (Hamilton 1). His position in the educational canon has not only contributed to his reputation as one of the world's most known authors, but the reverse is also true. His reputation as the world's most known author has influenced his place in the educational canon. Despite this, the changing nature and needs of the students imply that it is time to revamp the educational canon of the secondary schools in order to reconfigure the methodology of Shakespeare education. Such a reconfiguration would open the possibility for the addition of modern Shakespeare adaptations for literary study, promoting understanding, engagement, and educational value for twenty first century students.

In what follows, I plan to discuss the history of Shakespeare's position in both the academic canon as well as the secondary school setting, touch upon the educational value and lessons for which his works are most used, argue for the use of adaptations in combination with the original text to further explain and create understanding for students, as well as hypothesize

how the canon could be reformed. I hope to assert that offering an adaptation in combination with an original Shakespearean text will prove useful for both pragmatic and educational purposes. The value of the conversation that will result through the introduction of an adaptation to the secondary school curricula will prompt students to explore the same ideas and concepts that are outlined in the original text in a more engaging manner. After offering a field experience from a secondary school in Columbus, Ohio, I will be able to cement my assertions that adaptations are both worthy literary works that can engage and explore meanings that sometimes escape students through the current study of Shakespeare, as well as support my position with research and experiences of many other secondary educators. First, the history of the predicament must be outlined.

The History of Shakespeare's Role in the Academic Canon

According to Charles van Cleve, Shakespeare's role in the educational canon was largely impacted by the Harvard entrance exam of 1874 (334). These entrance exams contained one essay concerning one of three widely known Shakespearean dramas, *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice*, or *Julius Caesar* (van Cleve 334). Following this change in the literature requirements for college acceptance, schools began to tailor their curriculum to help students gain a better chance of acceptance. When the Boston schools first included Shakespeare in curriculum, the educators were reacting to new college standards because some students intended to pursue their education following the completion of secondary school. As explained by van Cleve, the inclusion of Shakespeare study in to the secondary school curriculum, as well as the methods taken to teach Shakespeare to students was directly related to the Harvard entrance exams of 1874 (van Cleve 335). Shakespeare's early purpose in the educational canon, then, was to

prepare students to deal with classic, or difficult, literature through methodologies similar to those that they might encounter in college (van Cleve 335).

Though van Cleve's writings were first published in 1938, his basic concepts about Shakespeare's purpose in the educational canon are still true today. Just as Shakespeare was taught to prepare students for the Harvard entrance exams of 1874, today's secondary school students are exposed to Shakespeare to prepare them for the college curriculum and career ready skills of the modern times. This statement is supported by the Ohio Department of Education's Academic Content Standards. These standards, commonly referred to as the Core, or the Grade Level Standards, states that the purpose of the secondary school curriculum should be to prepare students to retain college and career ready skills (Ohio Department of Education, "Common Core State Standards").

Not only is there value in the study of literature, such as Shakespeare, because of the college standards which relate to such knowledge, but the basic skills learned through the study of literature are worthy for all students. According to a ten year study completed by Anne Cunningham and Keith Stanovich, the amount of literature practice a student receives has a great impact on the cognitive capabilities of the student (137). This study, which spanned a ten year period of monitoring the cognitive capabilities of students and the relationship between these capabilities and the student's reading habits, allowed Cunningham and Stanovich an opportunity to see how reading literature affects the mind of a student. After concluding the study, Cunningham and Stanovich published their findings in an article titled "What Reading Does for the Mind." Their study determined that positive cognitive capabilities such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, general knowledge, and verbal skills were directly influenced by the amount of reading practice students received (Cunningham and Stanovich 143, 145-146).

Because of the positive affect that literature study and reading practice have on important cognitive capabilities which are important for a student to retain, the study of literature is incredibly important to continue.

Though the study of Cunningham and Stanovich did not focus their research on Shakespeare, exclusively, their findings still relate to the value of Shakespeare education. While Cunningham and Stanovich determined that the study of literature, in general, is important for the development of positive cognitive capabilities, their study also supports the argument for continued Shakespeare education. This connection can be made by examining the type of literature that is Shakespeare. Because of the challenging syntax, vocabulary, themes and complex literary devices, Shakespeare is considered to be one of the more difficult authors for study (Porteus 17). If the study of the general literature as was used in the Cunningham and Stanovich experiment provided positive influences on the cognitive capabilities of the students, then the study of literature as advanced and complex as Shakespeare would also have a positive impact on such skills.

Shakespeare's role in the educational canon, then, directly affects all students. Not only is the study of Shakespeare important for the purpose of gaining acceptance in to a college, as Charles van Cleve argued was the early purpose of Shakespeare study, but there is also value in literature study for those students who do not decide to attend college. Regardless of the plans of a student after completion of a secondary school, the value of literature study, such as Shakespeare study, is found in the positive relationship that exists between literature study and cognitive capabilities as studied by Cunningham and Stanovich. For this reason, the study of Shakespeare and other literature should continue to be an important aspect of secondary school curriculum. The methodology for this study, however, is in need of a change which will both

positively affect the students' understanding and pragmatically address the need for the study of Shakespeare.

Argument for the Inclusion of Adaptation

While Shakespeare's position in the educational canon has been cemented since the late eighteenth hundreds, one must ask if it is not time to add more modern adaptations of Shakespeare to the same canon. Modern adaptations of Shakespeare's works are numerous. They include, but are not limited to: Matt Haig's *Dead Father's Club*, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Lisa Fiedler's *Dating Hamlet: Ophelia's Story*, Sharon Draper's *Romiette and Julio*, and *Enter Three Witches* by Caroline B. Cooney (Porteus 17). These works are adaptations with specific alterations to plot, characterization, or settings which can open a new pathway to extend and enrich Shakespeare education in an engaging manner.

In order to support the inclusion of adaptations to the educational canon and secondary school curriculum, Shakespeare's role as an adaptor, himself, should be considered. James McKinnon states that referring to Shakespeare as an adaptor, himself, will "put him in to perspective" while opening a new venue for discussion (55). The discussion, which could result from considering different adaptations by both Shakespeare and other authors, is directly encouraged by the Core Content Standard anchor 9.9. This anchor mandates that different versions of a text should be studied in order for students to compare and analyze similarities, differences, and meaning (ODE, "New Learning Standards"). By considering the fact that Shakespeare, himself, is an adaptor, the venue for the discussion of adaptations is available for exploration.

Many of Shakespeare's stories were not actually unique to him. He wrote about tragedies, politics, and historical situations that happened both before and during his life time. One example of Shakespeare's role as an adaptor can be found by studying the history of one of his most famous dramas, *Hamlet*. Margareta de Grazia explains the history behind the story of *Hamlet* in her article, "*Hamlet* Before its Time." According to de Grazia, the drama referred to as *Ur-Hamlet* is the logical predecessor of Shakespeare's adaptation.¹ While the differences in the plot are not important for the consideration of this study, it is important to note that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a modern version of *Ur-Hamlet*, written in the late fifteen hundreds (de Grazia 356). Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is considered modern for the way that the central character of Hamlet is explored and developed in order to relate to the England of Shakespeare's day, as well as presenting the story in a more modern timeframe to satisfy the need for relevancy in Shakespeare's audience (de Grazia 357 – 358).

Ironically, the modernity of *Hamlet* was not long lasting. By November 1661, critics began remarking on the fact that *Hamlet* was no longer relevant to their age. As quoted by Margareta de Grazia in her article, John Evelyn noted that he, "saw *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* played, but now the old plays begin to disgust this refined age" (358). Relevancy, as it is explored in the article "'Shakespeare' –an Endangered Species?" by Brian Lighthill, is extremely important when canonizing a work. Though *Hamlet* may not have always been considered relevant, the play is certainly argued as relevant for the use in today's classrooms (Lighthill 40). Regardless of whether one agrees that *Hamlet* can or cannot be made relevant for today's students, the use of adaptations would certainly satisfy this requirement.

Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation*² does well to explain the meaning and purpose of adaptation. According to Hutcheon, the purpose of adaptation is not only to retell a story that was

originated by another author, but to do so while adding personal interpretation and analysis (Hutcheon Introduction). The adaptations are not meant to be compared to the primary text in terms of fidelity, but are to be accepted, according to Hutcheon, as "aesthetic objects in their own right" (Introduction). The adaptations of Shakespeare's works, then, must not be treated with the stigma of the term "adaptation" but should be considered as an equally original work in comparison with Shakespeare's. Linda Hutcheon specifically mentions the genre of Shakespeare adaptation, exploring the notion that that these adaptations, "in particular, may be intended as tributes or as a way to supplant canonical cultural authority... [or, they] be used to engage in a larger social or cultural critique" (Hutcheon Chapter 3, "Personal and Political Motives"). If this is accepted as true, then the genre of Shakespeare adaptation is not meant to uproot the canonical position of Shakespeare, but this genre is able to offer a critique upon another issue which the authors of the adaptations deem important. The genre of adaptation accomplishes this critique when presented in a methodology that not only engages students, but forces them to grapple with the texts; both the adaptation and the original.

The assertions made by Hutcheon concerning the purpose of Shakespeare adaptations directly relates to the methodology for which this study argues. For example, the exploration and critique of the universal issues, both social and cultural (Hutcheon Chapter 3, "Personal and Political Motives") which differ between Shakespeare's works and their companion adaptations is a useful venue of discussion that could be employed, should the adaptations be included in secondary school curriculum. This conversation could be quite enlightening and educational for students, as well as referencing the standards of the Common Core.

The Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature, anchor seven, specifically supports the use of adaptations in the classroom. The seventh anchor for Reading Literature

grades 11-12 reads, “Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text, (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)”(Ohio, “New Learning Standards” 38). According to the Common Core State Standards, there should exist a conversation between educators and students that evaluates and considers multiple versions of a source text. By including adaptations of Shakespeare, not only would this specific anchor be satisfied, but the conversation and consideration would benefit students. Anchor nine of the Common Core State Standards for grades 9-10 also supports the use of adaptation to complete certain goals. This anchor reads, “Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare)” (Ohio, “New Learning Standards” 38). The Ohio Department of Education, then, is a supporter of the use of adaptations for the purpose of furthering and enriching Shakespeare education. Because the Standards are not meant to set a concrete list of important works, nor is it the purpose of the Standards to list restrictions for the use of certain works or methodologies, the use of adaptations is not blatantly stated, but is implied as an acceptable method.

While the language, vocabulary, and syntax of Shakespeare is an excellent lesson which educators employ through the use of his dramas in secondary schools, these lessons are second to the meaning gained through the close reading and consideration of complex text. This meaning, however, can sometimes be lost in the language, based on the methodology which educators choose when focusing on Shakespeare. The language barrier which students, and educators, face through the use of Shakespeare is an issue which could be remedied through the use of a combination of adapted and original text. If one were to include the use of an adaptation

while supplementing with portions of Shakespeare's "original" text, then the students may be more involved. Although the act of reading is never inactive, the combination of adapted and original text may prove to be more engaging, for the venue of discussion is expanded. The study of a combination of texts is an avenue for educators to explore in order to discuss historical contexts of each text, language differences, author style and choice, as well as encouraging the close reading of multiple complex texts while referencing the standards of the Common Core.

In order to teach the students about language and vocabulary, teachers should turn to the small portions of original text and perhaps, use sonnets by Shakespeare. By referring to portions of Shakespeare's plays in conjunction with the adaptations, or using sonnets to expose students to Shakespeare's involved language, meter, and syntax, teachers would allow students to develop an interest for literature. The successful experiences, which may result through the understanding and consideration of both the adaptation and the original, would not only improve the student's overall Shakespeare knowledge, but would show the student that they are capable of understanding the language. Doing so would help the student to feel comfortable to enjoy and practice reading the original text later in life. By offering students the adaptations in a more engaging methodology in combination with a more accessible language, students may connect with the text and form an interest for the study of Shakespeare that could be explored more in depth some time later.

The difference between the adaptations and translations is important to distinguish when arguing for the inclusion of adaptations in the secondary school curriculum. Although it has been noted that the adaptations are usually presented in a vocabulary which is more accessible, and possibly easier to understand, these adaptations should still be written in a way which is both challenging and complex. The more easily understood resources, such as *No Fear Shakespeare*,

which has become a common reference for both educators and students (Perlowski 12 March 2013), are written in a language which is not only easier to understand, but is simplified in a way that the language loses almost all literary devices which are so important for consideration in a language arts setting. The students must grapple with the text and unwrap the words to uncover meaning in order to gain the full experience and reward that is found in literature study. By offering a translation, rather than an adaptation, the students are shown the meaning that they should be searching for on their own.

Katie Porteus, an Ohio teacher of fourteen years, pursuing a master's degree in Library Science through Kent State University, advocates for the use of adaptations in combination with original works. Porteus offers some strategies to make the works more manageable for students in her article, "Easing the Pain of the Classics" (*Young Adult Library Services* 16-18). Not only does Porteus advocate for the use of adaptations to supplement the original texts in place of other tools such as *SparkNotes*, the sponsor of *No Fear Shakespeare*, or other sources which summarize material, but she supports strategies which will engage students and reference their modern ideas of education (Porteus 15). It is the belief of Porteus that the classics, such as Shakespeare, offer a more rigorous and demanding reading that is expected in college, but is not attainable in the short class sessions and reading skills of secondary school students (16). Although the classics and rigorous reading are almost obligatory for the syllabus of an AP course, the secondary school students are still able to expand their vocabulary and cultural literacy through the use of adaptations (16). Porteus, like myself, does not believe that the adaptations should wholly replace the original, but they should be used in conjunction with an original text in order to reference the modern classrooms of today's secondary schools.³

Value of Original Text, Modern Supplement, and Adaptation

In order to explain the differences between the available resource, *No Fear Shakespeare*, the original text, and an adaptation, consider the famous Act Three, Scene One of *Hamlet*. This scene contains one of the most widely known soliloquies, the “To be or Not to be” speech. The first two excerpts were accessed on the *No Fear Shakespeare* website, while the final excerpt is from Matt Haig’s *Dead Fathers Club*, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Original Text
HAMLET

*To be, or not to be? That is the question—/ Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/ Or to take arms against a sea of
troubles,/ And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep—/ No more—and by a sleep
to say we end/ The heartache and the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir
to—'tis a consummation/ Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep./ To sleep,
perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub,/ For in that sleep of death what dreams
may come/*

(*No Fear Shakespeare* “Hamlet,” Crowther 3-4)

Modern Text
HAMLET

*The question is: is it better to be alive or dead? Is it nobler to put up with all the
nasty things that luck throws your way, or to fight against all those troubles by
simply putting an end to them once and for all? Dying, sleeping—that's all dying
is—a sleep that ends all the heartache and shocks that life on earth gives us—that's
an achievement to wish for. To die, to sleep—to sleep, maybe to dream. Ah, but
there's the catch: in death's sleep who knows what kind of dreams might come, after
we've put the noise and commotion of life behind us.*

(*No Fear Shakespeare* “Hamlet,” Crowther 3-4)

Adaptation Text

After a bit he said To be or not to be thats the question Phillip. I said What do you mean? and Uncle Alans heavy feet went by the door. Dads Ghost said You must put an end to this son. There must be an end...But that is all I said because he flickered out. I just sat there a bit more...thinking about what Dads Ghost said and what Dads Ghost meant (sic)

(Dead Fathers Club, Haig, "Spiderman 2")

Though the original text of Shakespeare's famous soliloquy is written in a poetic style known as iambic pentameter, employing literary techniques such as metaphors, the Modern Text of *No Fear Shakespeare* is written in paragraph form. This resource, then, has eradicated the verse and form which the Ohio Department of Education argues is important to teach through the use of Shakespeare (ODE "New Learning Standards"). Not only does the modern text change the verse and form of the original text, but it takes away the challenge of reading the original text by explaining the metaphors, instead of allowing the audience to unwrap the meaning themselves. There is no need for the reader to grapple with the modern text. The act of unwrapping a complex text, however, is important for successful literature education for the reason that it engages the student in an active manner, demanding close reading and analysis.

"The Revised Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3-12" is yet another publication produced by the Core which outlines the importance for the use of complex texts in the classroom. Though this text is a guideline for publishers of educational resources, the criteria which are outlined are important to consider when arguing for an adaptation against a translation. According to the "ELA and Literacy Curricula, Grades 6-12," the key criterion for text selection includes text complexity (ODE "Revised Publishers" 3-6).⁴ Complexity is not prevalent in the translated text of *No Fear Shakespeare*, but can be found in the adapted text, *Dead Fathers Club*.

Specifically, the original text of *Hamlet* reads, “Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer/
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/ Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,/ And, by
opposing, end them?” (Crowther 3). Though the original text is using a metaphor to describe the
contemplation that Hamlet has concerning the nobility of suicide, the *No Fear Shakespeare*
version of the modern text translates these lines to say, “Is it nobler to put up with all the nasty
things that luck throws your way, or to fight against all those troubles by simply putting an end
to them once and for all?” (Crowther 3). The Modern Text version does not employ the use of a
metaphor but directly states the meaning of Shakespeare’s text in a much less poetic, and
valuable way.

Matt Haig’s *Dead Father’s Club*, written through the voice of an eleven year old Phillip,
is slightly different. Though the grammatical and punctuation errors in the writing are noticeable
to the audience, these factors are able to comment on an issue which the author feels is
important. For example, the main character, Phillip, seems to have some emotional or mental
issues. This is evident through the way in which he speaks. Phillip’s language and content are
reflected choices of Haig. The inclusion of mistakes in grammar and punctuation help create a
characterization of the narrator which implies that he is young in terms of his mentality and
education. In this way, the adaptation’s text is able to be studied for the pieces of information
which are not explicitly explained, as is the case in the translation. There is more of an
educational value in the adapted text than there is in the *No Fear Shakespeare* because the editor
of that text is only trying to translate, instead of offering commentary and meaning through form.

Julia Perlowski, Master Teacher and Ambassador for the Folger Shakespeare Library
offers her own thoughts on the value of translated texts, such as *No Fear Shakespeare* in a
webinar titled “Shakespeare in Other Words” (12 March 2013). Perlowski directly reflects on the

commonly used resource, *No Fear Shakespeare*, as it has been increasingly used in secondary schools. She explores the differences between the texts and highlights the teaching opportunities that are lost when employing the use of a translation in the classroom. According to Perlowski, there is more than just literary devices that are lost through the translation (12 March 2013). The function of *No Fear Shakespeare*, as explained by Perlowski, is to explain and present the text of Shakespeare in a modern language so that the plot and characterization becomes more accessible and clear. This clearness, however, erases the complexity of the text which usually allows teachers an opportunity to explore the reading content and writing standards of the Core (Perlowski 12 March 2013).⁵

Interestingly, Perlowski also explores the differences between the original texts of Shakespeare in comparison with the *No Fear Shakespeare* versions. While she, too, alludes to the fact that the simple, upfront meanings of the language found in *No Fear Shakespeare* holds little value in the classroom (Perlowski 12 March 2013), she also explains the lessons which could have been employed through the original text. For example, Perlowski includes a soliloquy from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and compares this soliloquy with the resource, *No Fear Shakespeare* (Perlowski 12 March 2013). She explains how the importance of the iambic pentameter form of the original text loses the meaning when read in translation. The form, she argues, is important for the reason that the moments when Shakespeare breaks his form signal to the reader that an emotion has changed (Perlowski 12 March 2013). Specifically, Perlowski includes the following soliloquy in her lecture.

Full of vexation, come I, with complaint,/ Against my child, my daughter Hermia./ Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,/ This man hath my consent to marry her./ Stand forth, Lysander: and my gracious duke,/ This man hath bewitch'd the bosom of my child;/ Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hath given her rhymes,/ And interchanged love-tokens with my child:/ Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,/

(Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as qtd. by Perlowski)

No Fear Shakespeare – A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Modern Text

I’m here, full of anger, to complain about my daughter/ Hermia.—Step forward, Demetrius.—My lord, this man, Demetrius, has my permission to marry her.—Step forward, Lysander.—But this other man, Lysander, has cast a magic spell over my child’s heart.—You, you, Lysander, you’ve given her poems, and exchanged tokens of love with my daughter

(*No Fear Shakespeare* “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” as qtd. By Perlowski)

Perlowski argues that the break in the iambic pentameter of the original when Egeus repeats, “Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hath given her rhymes” is an important lesson for educators to explore in order to explain the ways in which a text and its form can convey the feelings of a character (12 March 2013). She explains that the feeling of Egeus is conveyed to the readers by the assonance of the stuttering, repetition, and break of poetic form which does not exist in the translation. Perlowski, then, agrees that the translations, such as *No Fear Shakespeare*, should not be employed as resources for the use of educational purposes. Instead of relying on the invaluable translated text, the inclusion of adapted text presented in combination with original text should be employed.

How Adaptations will Reform the Canon

The academic canon, which has included works by Shakespeare for over two hundred years, must evolve, just as instructional methodologies must in order to relate to modern students. This canon, which has been greatly impacted by the reputation of the authors, has excluded most modern texts, ultimately barring the inclusion of adaptations.⁶ It is Shakespeare’s reputation as the greatest playwright in literary history which promotes the use of his works in secondary schools. His reputation is so extensive that almost every student has heard his name

before they have even been formally introduced to his works (Hamilton 1). Hamilton explains his reputation, stating that “Just the name [Shakespeare] represents the standard of eloquence and culture,” (1). Karen Cunningham calls Shakespeare the “Heisman trophy winner of writers” (294). The reputation of the author, however, should not be the only attribute which affects a text’s role in the academic canon.

The academic canon should not be solely dependent upon the reputation and timelessness of the works or author, for a modern text cannot achieve this status so suddenly. Instead, the contents of the canon should be based upon the value and educational aspects of a work. It is on this basis that the adaptations must be included in to the canon and secondary school curriculum. Though the instruction of Shakespeare is so engrained in to the academic canon that removing his name, but not his works, from a college campus course catalogue caused a loud public outcry at both Georgetown University and Florida State University (K. Cunningham 294). The argument for the addition of adaptation will not affect the position and role of Shakespeare, but will only add to the educational value and needs of secondary school students.

Peter Shaw’s article, “The Assault on the Canon,” does well to explain the current debacle of the literary community. Though the term “canon assaulters” has a negative connotation which implies that these critics are arguing for the exclusion of certain revered masterpieces, they, like me, are only arguing for the inclusion of other worthy texts. Through the careful consideration of the worthiness and educational value of an adaptation in combination with original text supplements, it is evident that the modern adaptations would provide a much needed modern and relevant portion of the academic canon.

Shaw hypothesizes about a situation in which a text from Shakespeare be removed in order to include Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Such a situation poses a politically, and

ethically charged, debate over what is and isn't worthy for inclusion in the academic canon ("The Assault on the Canon"). Though the inclusion of an adaptation does not imply that an original text from Shakespeare be removed, the same remedy which Shaw poses would happen in the situation concerning Walker's *The Color Purple* should be a satisfactory arrangement for those who argue for the inclusion of adaptation to the academic canon. Shaw states that, "A compromise is usually struck in which the canon assaulters tacitly agree not to insist that the work being added is the equal of the masterpieces already on the list, and the canon defenders refrain from insisting that the work being added is not the equal of the others" ("The Assault on the Canon"). Therefore, introducing an adaptation to the academic canon will not affect the reputation or position of Shakespeare, but it will enrich and expand the canon to include modern authors.

Charlotte Templin furthers the argument for the reform of the academic canon by considering the way the canon addresses the institutional needs of the secondary schools. Templin refers to John Guillory's essay, "The Problem of Literary Canon Formation," explaining that the canon itself does not have the issue of totality, but the syllabus. Templin says, "The canon exists only in relation to the institutional adoption and use of selected works" ("Canons, Class, and the Crisis of the Humanities"). It is the decisions of the teachers to exclusively use Shakespeare's works which cement his role in the academic canon. Through the adoption of the adaptations by secondary school teachers, the academic canon will be forced to adopt these works, as the canon is directly affected by the institutional needs of the schools. If those critics who view the long standing issues with Shakespeare education as outlined by both Hamilton and van Cleve begin remedying the situation through the use of adaptation, the gradual inclusion of

the adaptations to the academic canon will pose no threat to the status of Shakespeare, but only respond to the twenty first century needs of the secondary school students.

The nature of the institutional needs of the schools is yet another reason why the inclusion of Shakespeare adaptations would prove useful. The secondary schools of today are educational homes to students much different than those students in the 1938 classrooms of Charles van Cleve. Despite the three quarters of a century difference between these secondary schools, the same issues of methodology exist today. The students, as well as their surroundings, have changed in a way that teachers of today must address in order to improve the educational experience of students. Bruce Avery comments on this situation in his article, "You Don't Know Jack: Engaging the Twenty-First-Century Student with Shakespeare's Plays." Bruce Avery's article, published by Duke University Press, discusses different approaches that can be taken to teach Shakespeare to students who are situated in a modern, twenty-first-century classroom. Avery has taught Shakespeare for many years, so he includes past and present approaches. Avery makes an interesting point, stating that paraphrases (such as *No Fear Shakespeare*) are unacceptable tools to teach Shakespeare (142). It is the language and poetry of Shakespeare which is most valuable, which is often times lost in translation to resources like *CliffNotes*, *No Fear Shakespeare*, and *SparkNotes*. Avery does not argue that adaptations are also unacceptable forms of instruction, but makes it a point to explain how methodologies must evolve to compensate for the changing dynamic of the twenty first century classroom.

Specifically, Avery notes that Shakespeare lecture and intensive reading leave his students "disengaged" (135). Avery is noting the typical response his students have with the Shakespeare requirement. In order to reengage these students with the text, Avery is an advocate for active learning and exercise which both physically and mentally involve students with the

text of Shakespeare, as well as resources readily available. Although Avery is not arguing the reading is usually an inactive sport, he is referring to the fact that the typical methodology of presenting Shakespeare as a novel is disengaging. The activities for which he advocates are meant to reengage students with the text so that they may stay alert and closely examine the small nuances in Shakespeare's works. The fact that the expectations and needs of the student body are changing directly relates to the position of Charlotte Templin. Because the student body is changing, the needs of the institution have evolved as well. In order to respond to the new circumstances, not only have authors begun to modernize and adapt certain Shakespearean works, but educators across the nation have begun adapting their own methodologies in order to give their students the greatest possible experience of Shakespeare before they enter college.

Trevor Ross offers an analysis of the formation of the canon in his article, "Two Ways of Looking at a Canon." Ross feels that the important aspect of each work in the canon is that they stand "the test of time" (91). It is for this reason that the inclusion of a modern adaptation is difficult. If the work is modern and new to the literary community, it has not been able to stand this "test of time." The failure to complete this test, however, should not completely bar the work from the academic canon, and therefore the secondary school curricula. Trevor Ross also explains that the contents of the canon should represent the homogeneity of culture (91). An adaptation, then, could achieve this requirement which Ross sets forth. Although he believes that the canon itself has transformed in recent years to reflect the culture of consumption rather than production, the current canon has begun to reflect the cultural hierarchy rather than the aesthetic value of texts (Ross 91). Because of the way in which the canon was transformed in to an entity which supports and contributes to the cultural hierarchy of the world's literature, the canon has become tainted with biases. Through the inclusion of the adaptations, which do satisfy the

requirements that refer to the relation to the culture in which a work is create, the academic canon would regain the support of many “canon assaulters” (Shaw, “The Assault on the Canon”). While Ross argues that the canon is formed to represent the cultural influences that create the canon, the changing nature of the culture of secondary schools implies that there must be a reconfiguring of the academic canon to respond to the twenty first century school culture.

Field Experience: Columbus, Ohio

In order to defend the inclusion of adaptations to both the academic canon as well as secondary school curricula, it would prove worthy to study the educational value of the use of an adaptation in a real environment. Through a contact, Patricia Mariscal, an eighth grade teacher for Canal Winchester Schools in Columbus, Ohio, with a Master’s Degree in education, I was able to attend and critique a performance of a Shakespearean company based out of Ohio State University (*Twelfth Night*). The performance was put on for the eighth grade literature students to introduce them to the works of Shakespeare. The students were not introduced to his works before the performance, except through the synopsis of the play which was provided through the website, SparkNotes. *Twelfth Night*, which proves confusing for even the well rounded Shakespeare student, was performed by students of the Ohio State Shakespeare Theatre Group, consisting of college students from differing majors.

Though the students seemed to be engaged and watchful through the first few minutes of the play, they quickly lost interest and began talking amongst themselves. Some of the students began referring to the synopsis which was provided for them, again, at their seats. When I later questioned a group of students about their feelings about this portion of the play, they said that they were “confused” and “couldn’t get what they were trying to say” (28 Feb. 2013). Though

the Ohio State University Theater Group did well to perform this play as similar to the original as time would allow, they also employed new techniques to address the specific audience for which they were performing. For example, the Ohio State group decided to accentuate the role of the Fool. While the Fool is a somewhat minor character used for comic relief and commentary throughout much of the *Twelfth Night*, the Fool in this performance was an active participant in the audience, as well as a character on stage. The Fool danced throughout the audience, and changed her speeches into songs which she sang while strumming an acoustic guitar, usually to melodies familiar to the students, while using modern English (*Twelfth Night*). These alterations that the group made to the basic text as written by Shakespeare was an interesting way to involve the students, gain attention, and clarify important plot points.

I asked a group of students how they felt about the Fool, and only received positive feedback. The students, as well as Mrs. Mariscal, believed that the way in which the Fool encouraged involvement from the students was a good way to bring the performance to their level, making the plot a bit clearer (28 Feb. 2013). The students also found her role to be extremely comical and agreed that “She was the only one I really understood” (28 Feb 2013) because of her modern language. When asking the company why they decided to rewrite the position of the Fool to include audience involvement, music, and outside commentary, the director, Tori Matsos, said that they were trying to address the students in a way that was not “above nor beneath them” (*Twelfth Night*). Like Bruce Avery, the Ohio State University Theater Group realized that the students of today’s classrooms have unique needs and desires when it comes to learning. Just as Avery advocates, the Ohio State University Theater Group found it important to redirect their performance to accommodate those needs.

Following the performance, the Ohio State University students engaged the Canal Winchester students in small groups that they called “breakouts.” In these breakouts, the Ohio State University students used different techniques to engage and teach students about Shakespeare. I attended the breakout group which was hosted by the director, Tori Matsos. In this session, the students were asked to read short snippets of the Shakespearean text. Many students had trouble with the versification and vocabulary. The Ohio State Students asked them to act out certain lines, to show them that meaning can be made clear in ways apart from just reading the text from the page. They supported the trial and error of the students in order to help them understand the text without much help.

After watching both the performance and “breakout” sessions, I realized that the Ohio State University Theater Group was supporting the concept of teaching Shakespeare through the use of adaptations. According to Linda Hutcheon, the medium of an adaptation need not be different from the original in order to be considered an adaptation (Chapter 2, “Medium Specificity Revisited”). It is the changes and alterations which the adaptor creates in order to present the original in a new and innovative way which defines the work. When considering the alterations which the Ohio State University Theater Group created in order to accompany the audience to which they were performing, it is evident that this adaptation was more successful at teaching the students than both the synopsis provided by SparkNotes and the text of the original.

While it is true that the students did not understand the fast paced, complicated, Shakespearean dialogue, they found the modern speech and context of the Fool to be manageable. It would be impossible to determine whether these students did not understand the language because this was their first experience with it or whether they simply could not understand this language at their age level. That being said, I believe that the way in which the

students were able to grasp the meaning of the Shakespearean language in the breakout sessions proves that students did have the capabilities and cognitive skills necessary to understand, yet, pragmatically, they could not keep up and understand for their first experience.

The role of the Fool, an adapted character in comparison with the original Fool in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, related to the modernity and age of the audience. This adaptation pragmatically referred to the needs of the audience to convey meaning. Although Shakespeare's plays would have been written to fill the audience with persons of all ages, the Ohio State University Theater Group recognized that an audience of younger, eighth grade students would have different needs and comprehension levels. It is for this reason that the director made adaptations to the text, creating a play which not only engaged students, but helped to bring meaning to the complicated Shakespearean language.

The way in which the students responded to the adapted play put on by the Ohio State University Theater Group is evidence that adaptations can prove to be just as educational as an original, but are more relevant for the modern students of secondary schools. If teachers who present works of Shakespeare began employing the use of adaptations and engaging students, meaning would be made more clear and attainable, as well as provoking an interest in an author which proves to be a challenge for most students. The methodology of Shakespeare education was modernized by the Ohio State University Theater Group, which resulted in more participation and understanding of the Canal Winchester students.

Conclusion and Compilation of Evidence and Support

Though Shakespeare has become the most widely taught author in American secondary schools (Hamilton 1), the issues with the methodology of Shakespeare education have been

longstanding. First documented by Charles van Cleve in 1938, modern educators such as Julia Perlowski, Sharon Hamilton, Kate Porteus, and Bruce Avery have noted the same concerns and frustrations. Despite the issues with the former methodologies, Shakespeare has continued to be suggested for use in the secondary school curricula, both by tradition and educator resources like the Ohio Department of Education Common Core Content Standards. While the standing of Shakespeare in both the academic canon and secondary school curricula should not change, the modernity and educational needs of today's students must be considered in order to revamp the methodology of Shakespeare education.

The current literary community are both revisiting and adapting the works of Shakespeare in order to create new, relevant, and modern works. Although these works take many forms, such as staged plays and novels, they all have a common value for the secondary school settings: relevancy and engagement. Though it is argued that Shakespeare's role in the academic canon is based upon the timelessness and educational value of his plays, it has been observed by educators including, but not limited to, Perlowski, Hamilton, Porteus, Avery, and van Cleve that his works prove to be a challenge which result in the misunderstanding, confusion, and simple disengagement of students. The readily available resources such as *CliffNotes*, *SparkNotes*, and *No Fear Shakespeare* have watered down the literary devices which are so unique and important for Shakespeare education, but have still become both a supplement, and a crutch, for secondary school students of today.

In order to allow students to further their understanding and reading skills, the use of these resources must be minimal. While the complicated syntax and antiquated language of Shakespeare cannot be altered to make the text more accessible without losing the poetic graces and versification such as *CliffNotes*, *SparkNotes*, and *No Fear Shakespeare* have, the use of

adaptations may remedy this issue. While the adaptations are able to respond to the needs of today's secondary school students, they are also modern, manageable, and relevant in a way that demands involvement and conversation about the relationship between the texts.

Through the study of an actual use of an adaptation in a secondary school setting, I was able to support my assertions. The Ohio State University Theater Group's performance of their adaptation of *Twelfth Night* proved to be a successful introduction for Shakespeare education. It was their innovative and interactive Fool which clarified meaning, engaged students, and successfully told the story of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The Ohio State University Theater Group breakout sessions also advocated for a different methodology of Shakespeare education than simply reading, and practicing, Shakespearean language. They are not the only group to support the use of adaptation for the educational value, but Kate Porteus and James McKinnon have also been referred to, for they, too, employ the use of adaptations in their school settings, receiving positive results.

Although the inclusion of adaptations to the academic canon and secondary school curricula would change the consistency of each, the enriching result will be found in the skills and meaning attained by the students. The adaptations will both satisfy the requirements of learning set forth by the Ohio Department of Education and continue to encourage the practice of reading Shakespearean language. By supplementing the original text in place of the common resources such as *CliffNotes*, *SparkNotes*, and *No Fear Shakespeare*, the students will continue to advance their Shakespearean vocabulary and knowledge to be later developed in a college setting.

Though the inclusion of adaptations in the secondary school curriculum may prove to be a positive improvement upon the former methodology of Shakespeare education, the theory can

only be proven (or disproven) by practice and experience. Although there exists educators who support this new methodology, the practice of including adaptations in combination with Shakespeare's original text is still new to the scene. Therefore, the implementation of this methodology must follow in order to determine the worthiness of such a practice. Despite what evidence and support I can present, it is the actual practice of the inclusion of adaptations which will be the strongest evidence.

Notes

1. The title *Ur-Hamlet* was given by literary theorists to refer to the logical predecessor of the Shakespearean, *Hamlet*. “Ur,” which is the German prefix signifying the meaning of “Primordial” is given to a title that implies that this text must have existed and predates the central text; *Hamlet*, specifically. Though the actual text of *Ur-Hamlet* does not exist, the numerous references to a drama about characters and situations much like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* imply that such a drama must have existed before Shakespeare published his own work.
2. An e-book copy of Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* was purchased on a Kindle and used in this study. Therefore, the citations that follow do not include page numbers, but refer readers to the closest chapter and subheading.
3. Sample lesson plans which include adaptations of Shakespeare can be found at www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/film.lessonplan.filmadaptation.html and student.plattsburgh.edu/abunk001/lesson_plan_the_many_adaptations_of_shakespeare.html
4. Reading Standard 10 of the Core outlines the level of complexity a student should be able to handle at each grade, while “Appendix A” in the Common Core State Standards gives a detailed explanation of how developers measure the text complexity (ODE, “New Learning Standards”).
5. The reading content and writing standard which Perlowski refers to is R.L. 11-2 #5.
6. The current list of commonly taught works for secondary schools, Text Exemplars, can be found in “Appendix B:Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects” (ODE “Appendix B” 9-12).

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