

EDUCATION IN RETROSPECT: FROM SHAKESPEARE AND GENDER IN THE
CLASSROOM TO CONFLICT AND TRUTH IN
AN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

By

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST (Required)

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APPROVED



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Approaches to teaching Shakespeare at the undergraduate level are as diverse and contradictory as the critical theories about the plays themselves. For students, these conflicts can be frustrating, overwhelming, or empowering, depending on how they emerge in the classroom and in their undergraduate experience. The initial goal of the project was to research a multitude of these approaches and progress towards an understanding of what the best way to teach Shakespeare might be.

My methodology consisted of observing Shakespeare courses at the University of Oregon, interviewing professors and students involved in these courses, and examining them in the context of pedagogical theories today and my own personal experience.

The results expanded far beyond the scope of Shakespeare into an attempt to make sense of my own undergraduate education. There is not one way to teach Shakespeare or any other subject. Truly teaching means reinventing a course for each unique group of students. It involves engaging students in an inquiry that enables them to embrace the conflicts in the literature, its criticism, and their own lives. It encourages students and professors to close the gaps between the literature, history, their personal experiences and each other.

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I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions---a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.

---bell hooks

PART I

HISTORY OF THE QUESTION

My interest in the issue of gender in teaching grew from an unusual academic experience I had while studying abroad at Oxford University during the winter and spring of 1997. I enrolled in a comprehensive Shakespeare course, which consisted of a weekly tutorial and optional lecture. The tutor and lecturer were both professors at an Oxford college and both were articulate, engaging and passionate about Shakespeare. However, it was almost as if they were teaching two completely different playwrights. Dr. Barry Webb, the lecturer and exam writer, is an 18-year veteran at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford University. In a term in which he covered 17 Shakespearean plays, he did not make one reference to gender issues or sexuality in Shakespeare. He focused on traditional themes that he argues exist throughout Shakespeare. Dr. Joanne Woolway, the tutor and paper grader, is a new professor at Oriel College at Oxford University. Her tutorials, on the other hand, consisted mainly of discussions of gender, the female voice, and sexuality. Three of the essays we were asked to write consisted of responses to the following questions, "How do women find a place in male language and narrative in two of Shakespeare's plays?; How do women achieve power through discourse, using two plays?; How do women use their sexuality to express themselves in a male society, using at least one play?" Each professor was brilliant and educated, but each saw the other's work as misguided. Webb provided us with the history of tragedy and comedy, the Elizabethan world, and Shakespeare's life. Woolway insisted that history was a male term and one that could not be trusted when evaluating Shakespeare or any other playwright or author. She gave us the newest and most controversial

ideas in Shakespeare studies. It was rather disconcerting to see that even the experts did not agree about the most fundamental aspects of Shakespeare. Consequently, it was impossible for me to determine what basic ideas I should retain from my reading and study of Shakespeare.

Beyond the frustration of reconciling two expert yet opposing views, I also discovered that I had a great deal of resistance to the feminist approach of Joanne Woolway. It was my first experience with a class that even touched on issues of gender, and I was not initially comfortable with it. While Woolway would discuss any topic we expressed interest in, all of the discussions culminated in her explanation or presentation of feminist issues. Looking back, I realize it made me uncomfortable because she was forcing me to see issues in Shakespeare that I wanted to ignore. However, the extent of her focus on gender made the tutorial appear biased and myopic, which made the discussions seem less academic and more personal. Often I did not agree with what she said, and I could not help but feel as though she was neglecting a number of other important themes in Shakespeare. She was so interested in the gender issues in the plays that she could not seem to leave them long enough to discuss any other theme.

However, I was also weary of Dr. Barry Webb's aversion to questions of gender. He went to great lengths both to avoid the topic of gender and to discredit work in the field of feminist studies. He too seemed to leave out important themes in Shakespeare. He discussed themes of love and the complexity and layers of language; he discussed nature and evil and bastards. However, he ignored the issue of cross-dressing on the Elizabethan stage, and he never mentioned the terms *gender* or *sexuality*.

The easiest way to understand the extreme difference between the focus of these two professors is by examining specific lectures and tutorials that centered on the same plays. The first play we studied during the course was *Titus Andronicus*. Webb employed this play as a

tool to explore the evolution of Shakespeare's plays from Roman tragedy. He claimed that the gore and bloody detail of *Titus Andronicus* made it typical of its period and of Roman Tragedy, though it is now considered one of Shakespeare's most atypical plays. He used this play as a springboard for a discussion of Shakespeare's historical roots, as he demonstrated through a careful examination of this play that we can see Shakespeare writing himself away from Roman tragedy towards a form of tragedy that would make him known to the world.

Woolway's discussion of *Titus Andronicus* focused on the women. She asserted that the play was essentially about men denying women the ability to communicate. She discussed the unbelievable torture to Lavinia's body and mind, as men attempted to silence her to the world by cutting out her tongue and removing her limbs. For the greater part of the tutorial period, we discussed Lavinia's triumph over her barriers to communication. Lavinia successfully communicates her story to her father using a stick that she controls with her mouth and stubs of her arms to scratch words in the dirt. Woolway argued that the sexual implications associated with this scene were obvious at the very least. She further asserted that Shakespeare allowed this mutilated female to overcome her male oppressors through her sexuality, and that Lavinia's act of communication was a representation of a sexual act. If a student had neglected to read the play and attended both the lecture and tutorial, he or she could have been convinced that two different plays were under discussion in these two sections.

This difference continued from the first play through the last play in the course. With *Hamlet*, Webb focused on the question of Hamlet's hesitation or procrastination, as he presented a clear and concise argument that Hamlet had no choice but to hesitate. He also highlighted the issue of the ghost by asking our class, "How real is the ghost and how much is he a representation of Hamlet's fears?" He focused on the external and internal aspects of tragedy

and the psyche of Hamlet. He also made a short, but assertive reference to the absurdity of the critical claim that Hamlet is in love with his mother, arguing that there was no textual evidence for such a claim. The lecture on *Hamlet* was effective and easy to understand, and I remember the substance of that lecture clearly, even without reference to my notes. Woolway's tutorial period focused on Hamlet's desperate love for his mother; in fact, it was the only topic discussed in the hour-long period. My notes from this discussion are minimal and even with the notes, my memory of the specifics of the tutorial is weak. This is primarily because the last thing I remembered from the lecture was Webb's confident comment about the falsity of this critical idea. Within the text, I could see room for asserting that Hamlet was in love with his mother. However, Woolway took the point and argument beyond what I thought the text allowed for. When there is only an hour to discuss *Hamlet*, Hamlet's obsession with his mother is not the only topic worthy of discussion.

With *King Lear*, the situation was the same. Webb focused on the idea of *nature*, as he illuminated the factors that made a character unnatural or natural. He discussed the culture and ideas associated with bastards during this period, as well as the family interaction that was considered acceptable and natural in Elizabethan society. Woolway focused on the inappropriate relationship between Cordelia and Lear, as she asserted the evidence that an incestuous relationship exists between the two characters. She further used this play to highlight the power relationships that occurred in families and between the sexes during Shakespeare's times. Woolway and Webb chose completely different structures through which to analyze this play, and again it seemed as though we were looking at two different plays.

The most frustrating aspect of this course was that we turned papers into one person and took a final exam written by another. The papers we wrote in no way prepared us to take the

exams, and the final only reflected what we discussed in lecture. In order to do well on the papers, we had to focus on a discussion of the female voice or female's assertion of power. To do well on the final, we had to write essays that duplicated arguments given in lectures. Thus, there was very little room for independent thought. If you wanted to do well, you wrote about what interested the professor. I realized that this type of phenomenon occurs all the time in academia, but that it was more obvious in this situation because it was an extreme case.

As I left this course, it seemed that Shakespeare's works were relative pieces of literature, and that one could argue that almost any theme exists within a given play. Each instructor left Shakespeare incomplete, while each focused on what he or she viewed as essential. I began to wonder if literature is always relative, if people only see literature as it relates to their own lives or areas of interest. I was fascinated by the fact that two students could take identical courses from different instructors and come away with two entirely opposite ideas of the significance of a given Shakespearean play or Shakespeare's work as a whole.

It led me to ask the question at hand, that is, what the best way to teach Shakespeare might be. This question asks what is best for the students educationally, but also asks what method of teaching Shakespeare is most faithful to the text? In a sense my project stems from an interest in resolving my own resistance to a gendered approach to Shakespeare and an interest in what type of teaching best equips students to think independently and analyze literature effectively. Though it is perhaps an impossible question to answer definitively, it is my intent to progress towards a better understanding of what that best method might be.

I am seeking to answer this question according to my own educational ideal that education should encourage students to think independently and read critically. Through education, a student should gather a great deal of information and knowledge; however, students

must also learn how to access information for themselves, and in turn, to communicate their ideas. Education should assist students to read carefully, write well, and effectively articulate ideas. In short, it should provide students with the skills they need to find and process information independently of institutions and instructors. Students cannot learn to think for themselves if all they do is take in information, memorize it, and then reproduce it for exams. However, students cannot obtain the information they need to analyze literature effectively and write coherently unless they first receive basic information. Also, the degree of information students receive in a given course again mandates balance. While a diverse presentation might be beneficial for a student's perspective, too many themes will only create confusion. There must be a careful balance between simplicity and complexity, and between instructor guidance and independent thought. Every course should provide a strong base upon which students can build.

Methodology

In order to evaluate my project question, I chose to focus on Shakespeare courses at the University of Oregon. My intent was to evaluate what role gender played in courses on the campus. I observed three different lower-division Shakespeare courses and one upper-division course during the Spring 1998 term. During my observation, I noted teaching style, material discussed, and student participation. I also passed out questionnaires to every student in each of these classes. The questionnaires asked seven basic questions: 1) Is this your first Shakespeare course? If not, how much Shakespeare have you studied? 2) What are some of the most important or recurring themes in Shakespeare? 3) What is your favorite play? Why? 4) Of the plays you have read so far, who is your favorite character and why? 5) Do you think gender is

an important issue in Shakespeare? 6) Of the plays you have read so far, which (if any) do you feel presented gender issues? 7) If you are willing to do a short interview, please leave me your email/phone-number.

I conducted interviews with approximately 11 students, which were much less formal than the questionnaires. My intent was to get students to talk openly about the course they were taking. I also interviewed at length each of the professors whose courses I observed, as well as other professors who teach Shakespeare at the University. The reactions and responses from students and teachers alike were varied and enlightening. There were some professors who were unwilling to participate at all, and there were students who seemed irritated with the duty of filling out a questionnaire. In turn, there were also teachers and students eager to participate in my project and interested in the finished project.

The courses I observed were as follows: Professor Rockett's English 207 Shakespeare course, Professor Freinkel's English 208 Shakespeare course, Professor Grudin's English 208 Shakespeare course, and Professor Farwell's English 407 Adaptations of Shakespeare course. I received five questionnaires from students in Rockett's class, 28 from students in Freinkel's class, three from students in Grudin's, and three from students in Farwell's class. I interviewed eight students from Freinkel's class and three from Farwell's class. I did not interview any from the other two courses. I also interviewed Professor Rowe and Professor Bishop, who teach Shakespeare at the University of Oregon.

After observing these courses, I noted three distinct answers to the question, "What role does gender play in various Shakespeare courses at the University of Oregon?" In addition to a difference in the treatment of gender issues in the classroom, there was also a difference in teaching style between professors. Professors who upheld strong views regarding gender tended

towards a more lecture-structured environment, while professors with less-defined views invited more discussion. There seemed to be two extremes and then a variety of teaching approaches that fell somewhere in between these extremes. Each instructor stressed different themes in Shakespeare and employed a different teaching approach. Some teachers encouraged constant class discussion, others primarily lectured, and others still used a combination of both. In interviewing the professors, it became clear that each professor used a given teaching style, discussion or lecture, for specific reasons and in order to attain certain goals.

PART II

RESEARCH: WAYS OF TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

In order to articulate the essence of each of the three methods of teaching Shakespeare, I have described in detail each of the courses using information from my own observation, student questionnaires and interviews, and professor interviews. Due to the differences in course level and the varied amount of input I received from students in the classes, the descriptions will be necessarily different. For example, in one class, not one student volunteered to do an interview, so this class description consists more of my observation than do descriptions of the others.

The three courses I researched and here present are two lower-division courses taught by Professor Freinkel and Professor Rockett and an upper-division course taught by Professor Farwell. Each of these teachers employs one of three very different approaches to teaching Shakespeare. Following the presentation of these three methods, I will include my research from the other classes I observed and the other professors I interviewed. I will define each of the additional courses and professors in terms of the three prominent methods of teaching Shakespeare on the University of Oregon campus.

After establishing the pro's and con's of each method, I will examine them in the context of additional pedagogical theories and my own academic experience. In this process, I hope to take a step closer to determining the elements of a Shakespeare course that serves students, teachers, and Shakespeare alike.

Method #1

Professor Rockett's English 207 course at the University of Oregon emerges as one extreme on the teaching spectrum. The course is entirely lecture based, and students' questions are few and usually limited to issues regarding plot or events in the plays. Professor Rockett begins every class by drawing a visual diagram on the board. The diagram illuminates the plot structure and significant events or passages of the play, act, or scene of the play at hand. Not only does this facilitate note taking, but it also helps students focus on important themes or events. It creates a consistency and clarity that students seem to enjoy and appreciate. At the beginning of every section of notes is a concise diagram that guides them through their own notes and the specific plays.

The lectures are always well-organized, concise, and entirely informative. A student walks away from each lecture with a clear understanding of the play and certain important themes. At the beginning of every class, Professor Rockett asks if anyone would like to propose any questions on the themes or issues discussed in the previous classes. At no point during the term did any student respond to his offer for questions. After proposing the question, he always proceeds to give a brief summary of the previous lecture before moving on to the next act, play, or subject. He connects every lecture to the one preceding it and following it, which helps students to draw connections between plays and characters, and also to retain ideas, as they are repeated several times in different contexts.

In the interview with Professor Rockett, he made his reasoning for the lecture-based class clear:

I try to strike somewhat of a conversation mode, but I end up doing most of the

talking. I think the absolute worst thing you can do is to ask leading questions.

When interesting discussions take place, they are spontaneous, not the product of leading questions. While discussions may seem interesting and stimulating, they don't really accomplish anything.

Rockett is not opposed to class discussion. He simply views lecture as the most effective way to teach Shakespeare to students. His point about discussions being ineffective is interesting and important. Discussions are by nature less structured and concise than lectures and do have a tendency to wander in subject matter and relevance. Often, by the end of a discussion, the subject might be a distant echo of that which began the class. While this unrestricted discussion might seem interesting at the time, sometimes a student will leave a discussion without a clear idea of the central or important issues of the subject of discussion. It is also more difficult to take notes and retain information, simply because a discussion moves at a rapid pace and in a disorganized manner. Rockett has a clear idea of the themes and skills he wants to impart to students. The lecture-based class best enables him to touch on every subject and idea he deems important. He indeed makes use of every minute of the 50-minute period beginning exactly at 8:00 am and ending the lecture at 8:50 am, without exception.

It is interesting that this predisposition to a lecture format, traditional in nature, is also associated with a focus on more traditional subjects in Shakespeare studies. One topic noticeably omitted from Rockett's class is the issue of gender. Rockett freely acknowledges that his focus is not on issues of gender: "Gender really doesn't play a role in my teaching or my writing or my own study of Shakespeare." None of the five questionnaires received from students in Rockett's class named gender as an important or recurring theme or issue in Shakespeare. This makes sense. In a lecture format course, students traditionally take down

notes regarding important themes and ideas and then incorporate those ideas into papers and exams. If certain ideas or themes never emerge in the course of the lecture, many students assume they are not important themes. Based on the questionnaires, it seems that students noted the themes Rockett discussed as central to Shakespeare, and dismissed or disregarded themes not discussed in class. Though he says that gender plays no role in any of his Shakespeare classes, in fact, he does discuss some aspects of gender depending on the play at hand: "I talk about gender with *Othello* because Desdemona's tragedy is every bit as tragic as Othello's. It also comes up with *The Winter's Tale*, and there is a gender dimension in *Merchant of Venice* because of Portia." While he will make references to gender issues in these select instances, he believes that Shakespeare himself had no intention of presenting gender issues in his plays: "Shakespeare himself wasn't aware of gender issues; he couldn't possibly have been. Gender issues are an invention of the recent past."

Rockett focuses on ideas that were relevant in Shakespeare's world, not issues created by our current concerns. Rockett is committed to teaching and exploring the text itself, without allowing modern concerns to alter the text. In this way, one might argue that an approach similar to that of Professor Rockett is more faithful to the text than an approach that allows discussions to veer from the text. His lectures are entirely text-based. For every argument or statement he makes in class, he qualifies it with specific lines from the text. Unless the text clearly defines an idea, Rockett will not discuss it. He is not opposed to the idea or existence of gendered or feminist readings; he simply thinks that some of the issues they assert and claim are not present in the texts. He also asserts that issues of gender are secondary at best within the study of Shakespeare. Therefore, he does not think that gender should ever be the focus of any one discussion, let alone an entire course.

Feminist readings of Shakespeare are fine until they start distorting plays. For example, feminist readings portray Hermione in a way that takes everything away from what Shakespeare was trying to do in the opening scenes of *The Winter's Tale*. But, if they are in harmony with the dramatic structure of the play, feminist readings are fine.

Most important for Rockett is that students learn to read the text closely, write well, and discover the undying themes of Shakespeare.

Rockett asserts that the most important and recurring themes in Shakespeare culminate in *The Tempest*, the one play containing the composite of Shakespeare's themes: "I would start with *The Tempest* and its subordinate themes: loss and recovery; resurrections; reunions, recognitions. You could ask Shakespeare what the most important themes in Shakespeare are, and he would probably say, 'go read *The Tempest*.'" The single concept Rockett wants students to grasp is the same for every play. The concept is irony, in all its forms. He emphasizes the form of irony in which arrogance and ignorance are inseparable within a given character. Rockett uses King Lear's exaggerated sense of self, combined with his blindness, as the most powerful example of this concept of tragic irony, in which the irony within a character causes the play's tragedy. Rockett highlights this *tragic irony* in many of Shakespeare's plays as a fundamental idea for students to comprehend and observe. Above all, Rockett hopes that students leave his class with improved writing skills, or as he says, "the ability to translate their perceptions of Shakespeare into convincing prose." He stresses that students' ability to write is almost as important to him as their ability to read the text.

While students' writing ability cannot be evaluated through questionnaires and interviews with students, other comparisons between what Rockett stresses and what students see as

important can be made. Interestingly, from Rockett's English 207 Shakespeare course, only five students returned a questionnaire that was handed out to the entire class of approximately 40 students, and no one in the class was willing to do an interview with me. In class, students were not invited or encouraged to discuss their views, and in turn they were unwilling to discuss their opinions with me. Though a number of other factors may have influenced the lack of interview volunteers, one might hypothesize this response was in part due to the lecture-based teaching style of Professor Rockett. When students are not encouraged to articulate their ideas in class, perhaps they become uncomfortable speaking about their ideas at all.

The questionnaires asked them about the extent of their course work in Shakespeare, their perception of important themes, their favorite plays, and their perception of the importance of gender in Shakespeare. Rockett's students listed the following as important and recurring themes in Shakespeare: love, death, dishonesty, loyalty, friendship; jealousy, greed, ambition, trust, human faults, political strategies; man's humanist desire to examine and improve the self; being true to oneself; and how to control the baser passions of man. Considering the plays read during the term and the central points of many of the lectures, these responses are reflective of the material learned in class. Rockett focused consistently on character qualities and interpersonal relationships in the comedies, the histories, and the one tragedy studied in the term. For example, with the *Merchant of Venice*, he focused on the depth of the friendship and loyalty between Bassanio and Antonio; he also spent a significant amount of time discussing the greed and ambition of Shylock and the love between Bassanio and Portia. With the histories, he focused on their parallels to Machiavellian theory, as well what character traits made an effective and ineffective leader. With *Hamlet*, he focused on issues of the self and the human psyche, human faults, and again on loyalty and friendship. The students' perceptions of important

themes in Shakespeare are in accordance with the themes that Rockett intends to introduce to them. The questionnaires completed by these five students demonstrated a consistency of responses that other classes' responses did not possess. Students in Rockett's class have clear ideas of what is important and are able to retain those ideas because he focuses on them repeatedly.

Likewise, issues that Rockett acknowledges that he intentionally omits in his lectures were also absent in the student questionnaires. Not one of the five questionnaires named gender issues or gender roles as an important or recurring theme in Shakespeare. The only questionnaire that simply answered "No" to the question "Do you think gender is an important issue in Shakespeare?" was a questionnaire from this class. Three other students responded that gender was an issue only because of its absence: female roles were not important in Shakespeare, Shakespeare portrayed more main male characters than female characters, and Shakespeare simply did not create strong female characters. Only one student responded that gender was an issue, though he noted that it remained hidden in the text. This student was the only one of the five students who had studied Shakespeare previously to this course. Students seem to see what Rockett stresses as important and what he does not stress as unimportant.

In Rockett's lower-division Shakespeare, gender is simply not a central issue. He focuses on basic and ever-present themes in Shakespeare, and he effectively presents and argues the information so students can easily retain the material. He offers a richly informative introduction to Shakespeare, and one that students can build upon. The class is undeniably text-based and rooted in tradition. New and flashy literary trends are absent from this course, as his main focus is to provide students with a general and basic understanding of Shakespeare's plays. Professor Rockett is indeed successful in achieving this goal.

Method #2

On the other end of the spectrum is a class that is discussion based, where the students' interaction with each other is the center focus of this class. The class with this type of structure was an upper-division Adaptations of Shakespeare course taught by Professor Marilyn Farwell, who also teaches lower-division Shakespeare at the University of Oregon. The upper-division Shakespeare course (English 425) was a class of 20 students that met in a small room once a week for a three-hour session. The class was almost entirely discussion based, and the students were eager to participate in the discussions. They all seem very comfortable expressing opinions, and there is interaction between students throughout the period. Professor Farwell indicated that she does some lecturing in the lower-division Shakespeare, but that it too is primarily discussion based.

Though she stresses her willingness to allow students to decide the course of the discussion, she admits that she does have an agenda with the discussion: "I usually have something in mind. I am willing to entertain all sorts of opposing ideas, but I do want to get to a certain place with the discussion." In this class, students reach conclusions based on the interchange of their perceptions and observations, and they appear to enjoy the opportunity to debate and sort through issues in the text. Out of the class of approximately 20, I interviewed three students, each of whom expressed their enjoyment of the discussion orientation of the class. Elizabeth Arcaic, a junior and English major, said of the class discussions: "It was absolutely wonderful to hear other people's ideas because we all have something brilliant and interesting to say." Arcaic also noted that lectures were great because you could take in so much information, but she said a lecture class demands a very good teacher because it takes a lot of responsibility off the students. If students have no obligation to contribute to class discussions, and thus prove

they have completed their reading, they do not have to do the reading to make it through the class. Her point was that only an especially inspirational instructor could convince students to do the work for their own benefit, if they were not required to prove their work by class participation.

Carol Steffens was the only student interviewed who absolutely preferred lecture saying: “I like the opportunity to make a few comments, but I feel as though I have so much to learn that I really want to benefit from the professor’s knowledge and experience.” Another student, Kirsten Leishman, indicated that Farwell’s was the most effective discussion class she had ever taken and explained why in general she preferred discussion:

From a discussion, I walk away saying that was what he said or she thought, and I am able to think about a number of different perspectives. But, with a lecture I only walk away with the professor’s theory or background, and even though the professor doesn’t think that it’s limiting, it really is . . . you only get one perspective.

The structure of this class is consequently different from Professor Rockett’s, and the central focus is different as well. While Rockett generally omits a discussion of gender in his classes, Farwell uses gender as the centerpiece of every class she teaches. She indicated that the one thing she wants students to leave her class with is a sense of gender and sexuality as the primary analytic tools in all literature: “They are not frills, they are structural, and you can’t understand a text until you see the power relationships within it . . . gender and sexuality are the primary ways I go about doing an analysis of power.” Farwell explains that society itself exists within a structure of power relationships, and that literature simply reenacts these relationships, sometimes tearing them apart, sometimes reinforcing them.

Essentially, Professor Farwell views gender and sexuality as the primary basis for analyzing any literary text, especially Shakespeare. In the interview I asked her what single most important theme or concept she would want students to take from each of the following three plays: *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *As You Like It*. From *Othello*, she wanted her students to see the often forgotten daringness of Desdemona: “I would like them to get a sense of Desdemona as more complex, than the pure, chaste figure we associate her with. In the first act, we have a very daring girl who goes against her father and runs off with a black man.” From *King Lear* she wants students to see Lear as a very pained character, something that younger people often have a harder time comprehending. However, she also wants them to know that Lear is a “royal pain in the ass”: “This play is all about male power . . . we have this stubborn figure completely unaware of his vulnerability and, if you will, his female side.” Finally, from *As you Like It* she wants students to get a sense of Shakespeare’s play with gender and sexuality, particularly if you bring in the issue of boys as acting in female roles, as they did on Shakespeare’s stage. Sexuality, she argues, is very complex within this play and throughout all of Shakespeare.

Since Professor Farwell views gender constructs as the structure through which all literature must be viewed, it makes sense that the most important concepts from each play would be connected to issues of gender. However, Farwell did indicate that especially in the 200-level courses, she attempts to play gender down and make it only part of the class structure. Her intent with making gender part rather than whole is simply so she will not overwhelm first-time Shakespeare students with concepts they might be uncomfortable with. However, since it is the centerpiece of her own study and interest, gender is central to the structure of each of her classes. As opposed to the questionnaire results from Rockett’s students, each of the five questionnaires received or people interviewed said, without question, that gender was an important issue in

Shakespeare.

However, the five students had varied responses to questions about the role gender played in the class discussions. One student, Carol Steffens, who recently graduated with an English major from the University of Oregon, said that gender played a very small role in the class and that it was not at all a predominant factor. When asked if she thought gender was an important issue in Shakespeare, she responded, “One certainly can look at gender; however, it is not necessarily important, or in any way more important than any other themes.” However, Kirsten Leishman said that at least 50% of class time was spent talking about gender issues and feminist views: “We talk a lot about how women are represented in Shakespeare; there are so many contradictions.” Leishman added that she had the impression that Farwell was a feminist but said she tried not to let it dominate: “Because it’s a big focus for her, I think she is careful to make sure it doesn’t take over the class because this is not a feminist class . . . but there are definitely a lot of feminist undertones.” Elizabeth Arcaic also noted that gender was a significant issue in this class and that it needed to be: “Whether gender is an inherent theme in Shakespeare or not, doesn’t really matter. It is such an important theme in our time that we can project our ideas onto Shakespeare, which is not a bad thing; we just see Shakespeare through a new lens. Gender seems to be the current theme that people are interested in, so we have to look at it.”

It is interesting how differently people interpret and perceive the word *gender* and how it immediately strikes a different response from each person. For instance, these three students attended the same course for ten weeks, yet each had something different to say about the role of gender in the classroom. However, each of them agreed on the same point: that a discussion of Shakespeare without attention given to gender constructions would be incomplete, but also that a discussion of Shakespeare centered on gender would be equally incomplete. Leishman explains

that in a class centered on gender, she would be “bored to death”: “I’m interested in gender, but I don’t like it to dominate a class. I avoid feminist classes because they are too biased. I can’t stand it when that’s all you talk about in a class.” However, she is clear on the fact that gender deserves some attention in a Shakespeare class: “There are so many different kinds of men and women and so many different kinds of relationships. He probably wasn’t as aware of gender as we are today, but I think his portrayal of relationships probably reflects his own life and relationships.” Arcaic indicated that if gender was the central focus of a Shakespeare class, it would be interesting as a seminar, but that it would be difficult to do well: “Everybody would bring their own agendas, and that is a kind of dangerous place. It is very subjective, and you would get a lot of really personal stuff.”

Each student interviewed from Professor Farwell’s class had a great deal to say, sometimes adhering to comments strictly about the class, but sometimes veering into other issues related to gender and education. I noticed that in the classroom the same sort of phenomenon occurred. Professor Farwell encourages students in her classes to think freely and to express thoughts even if they are beyond the scope of the discussion or in opposition to a position Farwell or another student has taken. In the first class that I observed, Farwell made it clear that she wanted students to think for themselves. She referred to an email list that had been set up for class discussions and suggested her removal from the email, so students would feel more comfortable participating in online discussions. One student said that she did not feel threatened by Farwell’s presence on the account, but another student asserted she was reticent to participate knowing Farwell would be reading everything she wrote. Farwell then insisted that her name be removed from the account so that everyone would be comfortable. The next announcement pertained to the class group project, and here she made it clear that students were welcome to do

the project on almost anything they wanted, as long as they could argue that it was some kind of adaptation of Shakespeare. Within the first minutes of class, she made it clear that she wanted her students to be autonomous.

The discussion for this same day centered on the play *King Lear* and two adaptations of the play, Jane Smiley's novel *A Thousand Acres* and Kurosawa's film *Ran*. Smiley's novel adapts Shakespeare's *Lear* in a number of ways, one of which is the inclusion of an explicit incest theme. Three sisters grow up on a farm in rural America, and their father, like Lear, is dividing up his land for the three of them. During the course of the novel, we discover that the father, the Lear figure, has raped each of his daughters. Farwell opens the class with a discussion of this incest theme and asks how "we" interpret this theme in terms of *King Lear*. One female student immediately objected to the idea of an incest theme in Shakespeare's *King Lear*: "I just don't see it in the play." Farwell then provided background into the play itself, explaining the folklore source of the play in which the daughter is the central focus, not the father. In order to demonstrate that she was not the only critic aware of the possibility of an incest theme in Shakespeare, she cited one critic's observation of the conflict and ambiguity associated with the father/daughter relationship in Shakespeare's plays from *Lear* on. She further argued, "Shakespeare seems fascinated with the father/daughter relationship and particularly with problems of giving the daughter up."

She continued to explain the background of the father/daughter relationship and then asserted that the incest theme articulated by Smiley was well within the bounds of Shakespeare's *Lear*. A student added, "Smiley gives voice to what might be hiding in Shakespeare." Farwell also explained that incest and repressed memory were big issues at the time of the publication of Smiley's novel, perhaps encouraging Smiley to see more in the original *Lear* than might have

been seen before. Farwell posed the question, “Can we read *King Lear* differently after we read *A Thousand Acres*?” A student responded, “we almost have to.” Farwell used these leading questions to keep the discussion moving in a certain direction, or rather towards a specific conclusion. In this case, the conclusion she gives preference to is that Jane Smiley’s novel brings to the surface issues in Shakespeare that we cannot ignore upon returning to *King Lear*. It is a very effective way of encouraging student participation and independent thought but simultaneously keeping the discussion on the track she thinks is best. Later she asked similar types of questions: “Do you think this novel is Shakespearean? . . . How do we judge this book?” A female student offered that Smiley simply brings to the surface what is already in Shakespeare’s play, but another student was quick to refute the statement: “This is not what is Shakespeare; this is simply how Smiley interprets Shakespeare.” Throughout the class period, students were extremely conversational and not afraid of disagreement or debate. The discussion moved rapidly and touched on current issues and Shakespearean issues. Farwell asserted that reading these adaptations is a way of rereading Shakespeare: “We are looking at an ancient text through our cultural glasses.”

The second adaptation of *King Lear* Farwell’s class discussed was Kurosawa’s *Ran*, a film which recreates the play, only setting it in Asia with a Japanese family and instead of three daughters, there are three sons. Farwell began the discussion of the film with an explanation of the gender complication because of Kurosawa switching the three daughters to sons. Interestingly, the discussion of the film invoked greater participation of male students, while Smiley’s novel seemed to encourage more response from the female students. Farwell asked if there was a gender issue in terms of the student response to the two adaptations and the characters of each. This question appeared to make the class uncomfortable because there was

no response to the question. The room was quiet for the first time, and another student completely changed the direction of the discussion with an unrelated comment. It was almost as if the students sensed the delicate and more personal nature of Farwell's question and simply opted to avoid personal controversy by ignoring the question. Students were comfortable commenting on the gender issues within the texts, but the minute that the discussion addressed their own lives, their willingness to discuss gender ceased.

It was an interesting event and led me to question the role of feminist teaching. Feminist thought has at its root the purpose of improving our present condition. Yet, if we cannot apply the criticism and feminist questions to our own lives, what is the purpose of studying the feminist questions in literature? David Bleich draws attention to the value of the feminist revision of psychoanalysis in literature: "Its dependence on language as a substantive feature of human relationships, and the detection, through language use, of important feelings and forces of which we were at first unaware: unconscious feelings, attitudes, fantasies, assumptions and so on (Bleich 47). That is, the purpose of our literary questions should be to bring the unconscious to the conscious, in terms of the literature and our own lives. Yet, why is there such resistance on the part of students to a discussion of gender issues? I remember feeling the same resistance in my own experience, but I was unable to understand why. It is remarkable how uncomfortable we become when we lose the distance between ourselves and the literature we analyze. Or is it the manner it is presented in? In the course I took in England and in Farwell's class, the perspective of the professor was very clear, and in terms of gender in both cases, each professor made a stalwart argument for her own perspective. When only one option emerges in a classroom, it makes opposing that option difficult and sometimes uncomfortable, especially in the context of an already controversial topic. For even in this class filled with students ready to

discuss controversial topics, there was a limit to how close the conversation would come to their own lives. Yet, this class was the most open and the most liberal, as far as the gender discussion was concerned, of all the classes I observed.

The environment in this classroom and interchange between students could not be more different from the environment in Professor Rockett's English 207 Shakespeare class. A number of factors demand consideration when comparing these courses and instructors. Farwell's class is an upper-division honors college class and not only a Shakespeare course, but also a course on adaptations of Shakespeare as well as Shakespeare. It is more than an introduction to Shakespeare and will automatically be different in nature. Furthermore, the caliber and interest level of the students is clearly different in an upper-division honors class than in a lower-division class.

However, what can be compared is the basic teaching style and environment created by these two professors. Professor Farwell stresses in all classes at all levels the importance of student interaction and participation. She creates an environment in which students are encouraged and expected to speak, disagree, and to some extent reach their own conclusions. Elizabeth Arcaic noted that the value of participating in class discussions is immeasurable: "It makes you so much more articulate and it makes you learn it twice. You have to have a clear understanding of something before you talk about it, and then when you put it into words, you almost learn it again. You really get to strengthen your persuasive skills." Another student commented that people got involved in the class and cared about what they were studying. He had previously taken a Shakespeare course in which the opposite had occurred: "It was horrible. No one talked; no one came to class. People didn't do the reading. The class was all lecture, and it was completely unengaging. The instructor just couldn't tap in to the students and what they

cared about.” Students in Farwell’s class commented on her ability to make historically distant texts relate to their lives. Farwell encourages them to read these texts through their own cultural lens, to see today’s society and reality in Shakespeare. This appeals to students and excites them; they end up talking about so many interesting issues that they almost forget the text they are talking about is centuries old.

However, despite the fact that student discussion is central in this course, students said Professor Farwell decided the terms of the discussions and often guided them in a very particular direction. This direction was not always in line with what students wanted to discuss. Elizabeth Arcaic said that at times she wished the class involved even more discussion:

Sometimes it got a little bit into the “Farwell world,” and we had to pull the discussion back out. With thirty years of teaching experience, she knows a lot, and instead of tapping into what we wanted to talk about or letting the discussion guide itself, she would talk about what interested her. She has very distinct ideas about Shakespeare, and she is very unyielding.

While Farwell does allow the class to take its course, as she mentioned in her interview, she also has an agenda and a plan. She wants students to come away with certain concepts, and she attempts to ensure that this happens. She pushes students to think beyond plot, irony and characterization. Sometimes she pushes beyond their comfort zone. She insists they go beyond the basic and simple themes and struggle to understand the relationships and power struggles at the heart of Shakespeare. Every student interviewed admitted that this course had indeed altered the way he or she perceived Shakespeare. One student commented that the class had taught her to see things she never would have noticed before, but now could see them everywhere: “I never noticed the degree of power relationships within every single play.” Professor Farwell is

remarkably successful at enabling students to see and question aspects of Shakespeare that other courses or teachers ignore. Students leave her class with an ability to articulate and discuss the ideas presented in class; they come away from this course with the sense that they stepped more deeply into the meaning of Shakespeare.

Method #3

Professor Freinkel's English 208 emerges as an interesting and effective balance between the two previously described methods of teaching Shakespeare. Both Professor Freinkel and her students defined her class as a combination of lecture and discussion, and based on my observation, I would say the same. Professor Freinkel manages to combine the benefits of lecture and discussion to create a class that is true to the text, interesting to students, and challenging.

She begins each class with some kind of announcement, usually about Shakespearean events on campus. Then, she begins the actual class period with a quotation from the relevant play or another literary text that nicely introduces the theme or topic of the day's discussion. She provides background information and gets them focused on whatever she wants the discussion to center around. For example, in talking about *Othello*, she asks them to think about motivation and about the duplicity of language. She also points out the ambiguous connection between words and sex, as she uses the example of the word *lie*, which potentially has a number of meanings (to tell a lie; to lie with someone sexually; to lie down). She pushes them to think about the untrustworthy nature of language. She asks questions about meaning and allows students to answer questions. She seems to want them to reach conclusions about the text on their own. For instance, citing *Othello* Act III, lines 263-268, and she asks, "What do these lines

mean? What does ‘haply I am black’ mean?” She does not answer any of these provoking questions definitively but instead insists that students find answers to the questions.

She is open and encouraging to all responses and finds insight in every student comment. Her willingness to accept all responses seems to invite even greater participation on the part of the students. They struggle to find meaning and answers, and she helps navigate their search. This discussion is much different from that of Farwell’s class in that Freinkel’s discussion is more contained and more focused on the text. The discussions in Farwell’s class seem to possess no boundaries defined by the text, while Freinkel is careful to bring the discussion back to the issue at hand when it wanders. Farwell will guide the discussion, though not necessarily in terms of the text at hand.

One of the most prominent features of Freinkel’s class was her ability to empower students to work through the text independently, incorporating their own experience, while simultaneously keeping their attention focused on the text. She incorporates a great deal of group work in her class; however, the group tasks are always clearly defined. For example, in one class I observed, students broke up into groups of four or five to rewrite one of Othello’s soliloquies in the language and tone of another figure. The groups rewrote the passage in the language of a fraternity boy, Jack Nicholson, a surfer, a cartoon character and many other varied and creative figures. Not only did the students thoroughly enjoy the project and the opportunity to interact with one another, but also they looked to the detail and significance of the actual text. In order to rewrite the passage with the emotion and experience of an unrelated figure, they first had to look to the emotion and experience behind the original speaker of the passage. It was a masterful way to direct students to think independently while making certain their thought remained focused on the text.

Throughout the course, Professor Freinkel consistently asked for student input but was always careful to maintain her expectations of student work and her grading standards. This was the only course I observed in which the teacher actually had students write a midterm evaluation of the course and of her. The evaluation consisted of the three following questions: 1) What should Lisa Freinkel continue doing? 2) What should Lisa Freinkel stop doing? 3) What should Lisa Freinkel start doing? Professor Freinkel told the class that this was their opportunity to influence the remaining five weeks of class. She did not promise she would do or stop doing everything the students wrote down; however, she did promise to read and consider every comment. Student input into class structure was literally nonexistent in each of the four other classes I observed. Other instructors were willing to entertain student input about paper ideas or project ideas, but at no point was there an opportunity for students to provide ideas about the class itself.

In another class I observed, Freinkel asked for feedback on how students felt about the midterm they took the week before. She asked for insights and comments, and it became immediately clear that the midterm had been very challenging. She accepted every comment and criticism made about the midterm yet remained firm, refusing to eliminate parts of the test or change any grading policy. She demonstrated a great deal of confidence with her willingness to receive input combined with her refusal to give in to students who claimed they needed an easier test. The students respected her decisions and appeared to enjoy the challenge of her course.

In each class, Freinkel pushes students to think about and question the meaning and significance of the texts they have read, and her class discusses a variety of themes and topics. In the interview with Freinkel, she indicated that for clarity she unites all the plays and discussions with the general theme of appearance vs. reality and the ways in which Shakespeare

exposes the theatricality of social life. She uses this general theme to tie a number of diverse plays together and as a basis for discussing a variety of other themes within this greater theme. When asked what the skills or knowledge she wanted students to leave her class with, she responded differently from both Rockett and Farwell. Rockett stressed the ability to write convincing prose, and Farwell said she wanted her students to recognize gender and sexuality as the structure through which all literature must be studied. Freinkel said she wanted her students to be able to work with the text and develop a sense of the Jacobean and Elizabethan periods that produced Shakespeare. Further, she said that she wanted them to see Shakespeare as a living text: "One of the things about teaching Shakespeare is that it's an easy sell because students want to like it. So I try to take that energy and use it to help them be good close readers." She talked a great deal of making the text seem alive to the students but simultaneously making it seem alive in its appropriate historical context.

When I asked what important concepts she wanted students to grasp from individual plays, her answers were again different from those of Rockett and Farwell. From *Othello*, she wanted her students to understand the power of language, something not mentioned by any of the other professors interviewed. From *King Lear*, she wanted students to see the theme of homelessness: "that man is homeless, that he has no place in nature nor in heaven or earth." Then with *Twelfth Night*, she stressed the idea of folly as important for students to understand. While none of the above responses is associated with gender or sexuality issues in Shakespeare, Freinkel and her students noted that both issues came up often in Shakespeare and in class discussion. Issues of gender were not the centerpiece of the class or of any particular themes, yet they were absent completely from a class discussion. Here we have perhaps the most striking example of Freinkel's balance between the style and thematic focus of both Professors Rockett

and Farwell.

Freinkel noted in the interview that certain plays--*Twelfth Night*, *As you Like It*, and *Taming of the Shrew*--have a strong emphasis on the question of gender and thus make it necessary to talk about gender differences and sexual difference. She also commented that she tries to be sensitive to questions of gender and sexual orientations: "I've become aware of the problem of sexuality . . . you have to make sure you put things in quotation marks, especially when you are talking about the sonnets and the theme of procreation." However, she also noted that she does not feel as though she needs to particularly focus on gender, just because she's a woman: "Because I am up there modeling that you can be a woman and a loud mouth, I am already talking about gender." She commented on the necessity of distinguishing between feminist goals and paying attention to questions of gender: "I am not a critic who works on the feminist project. I think that feminism needs to be bracketed, but you would be a bad reader if you didn't pay attention to gender because Shakespeare is concerned about it." She added that, by way of example, the cross-dressing nature of the Elizabethan stage demands consideration.

It is an undeniable historical fact that men played the women's roles in each of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare himself made constant reference to this role playing and made ambiguous statements by having female or male characters disguise themselves as members of the opposite sex in the plays. For example, in the *Merchant of Venice*, Portia disguises herself as a male lawyer in the scene in Act IV. This means that during Shakespeare's time a male actor was playing the role of a woman who was disguised as a man. That is, we have a man dressing up as a woman, dressing up as a man. Freinkel is correct to say that this complicated interchange of male and female role-playing mandated that Shakespeare think about gender and gender roles. It is impossible that Shakespeare accidentally inserted these questions of gender into the plot of

each of his plays. How could Shakespeare miss the contradictions, jokes, and ambiguities of men playing women?

She further stresses the importance of understanding how sexual orientation fits into Shakespeare, even though students often have resistance to it: “Students have a hard time understanding the homo-erotics of Shakespeare . . . it makes them very uncomfortable, especially the men. Talking about man-to-man desire is simply not comfortable for them.”

Interestingly, class observation and student questionnaires seemed to suggest that Freinkel addressed issues of gender more than she herself realized. Throughout the discussion of *Othello*, Professor Freinkel asked the students to focus on gender and in understanding why Othello kills Desdemona, why it is that she must die. There was also a fair amount of reference to Othello’s discomfort with sexuality. In the class when this was discussed, the students demonstrated a great deal of interest and were eager to discuss it further.

The class primarily consists of interaction between Freinkel and her students. With Professor Freinkel there is more than one acceptable response; she is open and willing to discuss every comment. Freinkel’s students were the most responsive to my questionnaires and the most willing to be interviewed of all the students asked to participate. In part, we can attribute this to the fact that students were asked to fill out the questionnaires during the first five minutes of the class. Professor Freinkel demonstrated her interest in the questions I was seeking to answer, and this helped spur their interest and willingness to help. I received 29 questionnaires back from her students and then interviewed seven of the 29 students. The student responses were diverse but also reflective of information observed in class and received from Freinkel in the interview.

Of the questionnaires I received, nine highlighted differences between appearance and reality or social constructions and fictions as one of the most important themes in Shakespeare.

Eight questionnaires mentioned disguise as a fundamental theme, and approximately the same amount mentioned nature and order as important themes. Some of the other common themes listed are as follows: love, betrayal, deceit, irony, sarcasm, duplicity of language, and class issues. All the ideas listed, whether or not they deserve the titles of themes, were concepts discussed in class repeatedly. Students selected issues stressed in class as the most significant issues in Shakespeare. This indicates that students listen and believe in the accuracy of ideas discussed in class.

Interestingly, the theme that the most students noted as important in Shakespeare was something to do with gender, either gender roles or issues or disguises. Thirteen out of 29 questionnaires listed some aspect of gender as the most important and recurring themes in Shakespeare. Also, 24 out of 27 students who answered the question “Do you think gender is an important issue in Shakespeare” answered “yes.” Nearly every student interviewed from Freinkel’s class thought that gender was an issue in Shakespeare. However, there was a discrepancy in the responses to the question “What role does gender play in this class?” As I noted with the responses from students in Farwell’s class, the term *gender* seems to mean different things to different people. To some students, the word *gender* refers to feminism, while to others it means a discussion of the differences, similarities, and complications associated with gender constructions in literature. While some people said that gender played a large role in class discussions, others indicated the issue emerged rarely if at all.

Eric Chang, a student who studied Shakespeare for the first time in Freinkel’s class, indicated gender was very significant in the class: “Gender plays a huge role because Professor Freinkel herself likes the differences between males and females in all the plays. She brings up sex and gender roles.” Molly Nealy, who had taken two Shakespeare courses previously to

Freinkel's, said that gender played a much bigger role in the beginning of the term: "At first we talked a lot about differences in gender and what Shakespeare was saying about gender. We also talked about what happens when a man dresses up as a woman or vice versa." Andrew Thaler, another first-time Shakespeare student, disagreed: "We don't spend very much time on gender at all . . . we spend time on the bigger themes. I usually bring up the gender issues . . . she never talked about mothers being absent in Shakespeare or anything like that." Shannon Cranston also said that gender played a very small role in the class:

We typically don't discuss differences of the females in Shakespeare's time. She does bring up sexual issues a great deal. But it doesn't dominate at all and that's good. I've had a bunch of classes centered on gender, and it gets old. There should be a full range of topics discussed.

Travis Doane expressed his surprise at the amount of gender constructions in Shakespeare: "A lot of Shakespeare has to do with differences between appearance and reality, gender is one of those things. It's something I had not really expected from Shakespeare, but it is valid. There are gender issues in Shakespeare, and it would feel strange if we didn't discuss them." Allison Dino agreed that gender played a big role in Shakespeare and in Freinkel's class: "We discussed a lot of stuff with gender because a lot of the plays have women dressing up as men but really it is men dressing up as women dressing up as men. We also discussed Shakespeare's attitudes towards women."

The difference in responses to these questions appeared to stem from varying definitions of gender and what exactly constitutes a gender issue. The term itself often creates an immediate reaction in students. Some are clearly uncomfortable with it, while others are eager to talk about it. Perhaps one of the most interesting responses to questions came from Elizabeth Arcaic, a

student who took Professor Farwell's English 407 and Professor Freinkel's English 208 simultaneously. It was fascinating to hear her comparison of the two teachers and courses. She said that gender played a large role in both courses but in radically different ways. She said that for Freinkel gender was definitely a big issue: "Freinkel is obviously very interested in gender so it comes up in class – the whole idea of disguise v. natural gender and gender as a mask or disguise." She noted that Farwell was more interested in relationships and power exchanges, for example, what it means for Lear to treat his daughters as mothers.

The primary difference between the place of gender in Freinkel's class and Farwell's was not difficult to identify. Freinkel points to gender and sexuality in the context of certain plays and discussions with regularity, and she focuses on gender roles. However, for Farwell's class, gender and sexuality constitute the main structure of the course, and power relationships are the primary focus. An interesting aspect of Freinkel's treatment of gender is that she seems unaware of the degree to which it informs her class and discussions. She said she does not contribute to feminism other than the fact that she is a woman modeling intelligence and confidence to female and male students. However, a number of her students commented that gender was undoubtedly an area of interest for her. Based on my observation, I would agree that she proposed questions of gender consistently in class. However, the key here is that Freinkel *proposed questions*, as if she was still unsure herself of her ultimate stance on some of the gender issues. Farwell, on the other hand, made statements more frequently than she asked questions, implying she had already reached a decision. Farwell, as a veteran teacher and feminist, long ago arrived at her conclusions about gender constructions and power relationships within Shakespeare. Therefore, she is less willing to entertain a variety of responses or observations about the questions of gender that she believes she has already answered. Freinkel appears

genuinely interested in student responses to her questions, as though she wants their input to assist her in answering the questions she legitimately asks from a place of uncertainty.

This leads to another point of difference regarding Freinkel's style of teaching. She appears to want to learn from her students. Freinkel treats them as though they are bright, intelligent and capable individuals who have significant contributions to make to class discussions. She listens to their comments and thinks about them. Rather than responding instantly to a student question and labeling it either correct or incorrect, she considers the idea and asks for further comment. In this way, she too stands to learn from her students. The remarkable aspect of Freinkel's class is that it is genuinely a two-way exchange. After observing this course, I reached the distinct conclusion that Freinkel was not assertively teaching the passively receptive students, but instead that everyone in the classroom was actively learning, including Freinkel.

Other Professors at the University of Oregon

Professor Grudin's English 208 was the final Shakespeare course I observed at the University of Oregon. He actually taught two of these courses during the Spring quarter, and I observed both classes. Grudin's method and style falls somewhere between the respective styles of Freinkel and Rockett. The courses were lecture-based, and in both classes, there were few questions from students. Grudin focuses his lectures around historical occurrences and refers to a number of political figures or philosophers known during Shakespeare's time. He discussed the art and society of the Elizabethan age and looks to history to explain ambiguities in the text.

Grudin opens each lecture by asking students to open their books to a particular play.

The first class I observed focused on *The Winter's Tale*. Grudin began the discussion by

breaking down the plot of the play and then going through the list of characters, saying: “I am going to take you through a list of characters, and remember that you will have to know the names of the characters, so memorize them letter for letter.” He wanted the students to know the details of the plays and spent a significant amount of time making sure students understood the structure of each play and other facts about the play. The first 20 minutes of this particular class consisted of the plot breakdown and character list, and, during this time, not one student spoke. Grudin asked if anyone knew why the play was titled *The Winter’s Tale* and then spent the next 15 minutes with an answer to his proposed question. He then gave a detailed explanation about the meaning of the character names in the play. The remainder of the class consisted of Grudin reading out loud 20 lines of the play at a time and then offering an interpretation of those lines. For example, he read the first lines of Act I, scene I, and then said, “The main theme here is disparity of wealth. This is the thematic issue that maintains throughout the play.” Some students copied down almost every word he said, while others appeared to daydream during his discussion. Throughout the entire 80-minute course, there were only three questions, and they were all regarding confusion about the plot. However, he did provide a ten-minute break in the middle of the period and dismissed the class 15 minutes early. In fact, he did this with every class that I observed, which means that the periods were only 55 minutes on average. I questioned the reasons for the shortened length of the classes. It seemed as though neither Grudin nor the students were interested in creating a spontaneous discussion, and that both parties preferred an early release from class to an in-depth discussion of a particular play.

In each class that I observed, Grudin provided a significant amount of historical background and the information regarding importance of names in Shakespeare’s plays. The only reference to gender I observed was in a discussion of male-female love or relationships. He

spent some time on the issue of jealousy in *The Winter's Tale*, and he made references to the sexual language that emerges at different places throughout the play and concluded: "In Act II, we see women conditioning premature sexuality in a young boy. Shakespeare is trying to show a society that is disordered partially because of its sexuality." He clearly did not ignore or avoid issues of gender; however, he did not give them half as much emphasis as did Professor Freinkel or Professor Farwell, nor were his observations parallel to theirs in nature. He asserted that Shakespeare used sexual language and interplay in his writing in order to illustrate the corrupt nature of society. Grudin agreed that sexual references were present throughout Shakespeare; however, he did not acknowledge any connection between sexuality and feminism. Freinkel and Farwell not only note that sexual ideas exist in Shakespeare, they further analyze sexuality in the dialogue in order to uncover power relationships and structures between men and women. They view sexuality in literature as a tool that might uncover hidden, yet significant, meaning within Shakespeare. Grudin views the existence of sexual ideas, language, and themes only as a representation of corrupt society, not a literary tool.

Though Professor Grudin indicated that he lacked the time to discuss my questions regarding his teaching in depth, he did provide brief responses to a few of my questions. He said that there were only two themes in Shakespeare and that they were as follows: 1) how to behave in a disordered world; 2) male-female relationships. He indicated that he wanted students to leave his class with the ability to read carefully. In response to the question "What role, if any, does gender play in your Shakespeare course," Grudin responded: "Because it is an issue to Shakespeare, it has to be an issue to us." Professor Grudin views gender as an important issue in terms of gender relationships, primarily love relationships, rather than in terms of gender differences or issues.

Despite the fact that there were almost 80 students in both of Grudin's classes, I received only three completed questionnaires and had no volunteers for interviews. The one student who thought that gender was a central issue in Shakespeare had studied Shakespeare previously. This student noted that Shakespeare's gender discussion was especially interesting because of the times in which Shakespeare wrote the plays.

The limited response from students and from Professor Grudin himself makes articulating and classifying Grudin's courses more difficult. Like Rockett, he views gender and specifically feminism as less important in the majority of Shakespeare's works. Grudin does admit that references to gender and sexuality exist in the plays, yet he does not consider them worthy of examination. The lecture-based nature of his classes is also similar to the teaching style of Rockett; however, Rockett's lectures are more structured and concise. Grudin falls somewhere between Rockett and Freinkel. However, his ideas are clearly different from all of the professors included in my inquiry.

Professor Bishop and Professor Rowe, the two other professors I interviewed, were easier to classify according to the three primary methods, despite the fact that they were not teaching any courses during the Spring quarter. Professor Bishop fell somewhere between Professor Freinkel and Professor Farwell in terms of style and her treatment of gender. Bishop identified herself as a feminist, and she demonstrated interest in my project and the questions I was asking. She indicated that the most important themes in Shakespeare were power relationships and individuality. In addition to those themes, she noted that it was important for readers to ask the question "How much do the plays reflect us, and how much do we reflect the plays." She estimated that her classes are generally 50% discussion and 50% lecture, and she added that student contributions determine the direction of the discussion almost 30% of the time.

With her Shakespeare classes, Bishop wants students to learn to analyze literature and to understand how our minds influence our perceptions of the literature: “students ought to realize the way our imaginative structures affect the decisions we make.” Bishop further noted that gender issues motivate a portion of every play studied in a term and that with some plays, like *Antony and Cleopatra*, gender topics motivate 90% of the discussion. In regards to gender issues and feminist ideas, she added: “They are always there, and sometimes, they are everything.”

Like Farwell, Bishop has more-defined ideas about gender and Shakespeare, and she acknowledges the significant role that feminist ideologies play in all of her courses. Her clarity on questions of gender in Shakespeare is most likely also due to her experience and years of study. In many ways, her forthright discussion of her feminist views tended to place her closer to Farwell on the spectrum of methods. However, her depiction of her courses led me to think that her basic teaching style is more like that of Freinkel. She noted that discussions and lectures always remain close to the text. She also demonstrated that organization and direction are important factors in her own instruction of discussions. From what I could ascertain from the interview alone, Bishop seemed to strike an even balance between Freinkel and Farwell.

Professor Rowe, however, seemed to employ a style that combines aspects of the styles of Freinkel and Rockett. Like Rockett, Rowe prefers a lecture-based format or, as he called it, a “teacher-centered classroom.” He estimated that three-fourths of all of his class periods consist of lecture, though he attempts to let student ideas influence class: “I try to go with the students, but I’ve got an agenda. I want to say certain things. I think any teacher who tried to say he or she didn’t have an agenda would not be telling the truth.” In reference to the question about the most important or recurring themes in Shakespeare, Rowe indicated that all of Shakespeare’s plays break down categorically: “With romances and comedies, Shakespeare is trying to get

across the idea of idealism, the ability to believe even when you know what you are believing isn't true." He said that there were versions of this idea everywhere throughout the plays and the study of Shakespeare. Rowe made an interesting comment in response to this question that echoed words of Freinkel's: "If you froze Shakespeare and said this is what it means, then Shakespeare would die. He has to speak to different people in different times, so Shakespeare must evolve." He insisted that the idea of a recurring theme was thus inappropriate because in order for Shakespeare to remain alive, themes must change and grow so that they speak to people across generations. Freinkel said something along the same lines, that in order for Shakespeare to stay alive, students had to see his relevance to their own lives.

Rowe highlighted some important themes he hoped students could grasp from specific plays, which echoed some of the same themes selected by other professors as important. From *Othello*, Rowe wants his students to grasp the inexplicability of Iago's evil: "Though we want to explain his evil, there is no rhyme or reason; the reasons just don't add up." This agrees with Rockett's conception of *Othello*. From *King Lear*, Rowe attempts to instill in students the idea that you can learn from your mistakes. He added that with this play he also discusses hatred within families and mentioned that *King Lear* was without question one of Shakespeare's most depressing plays. In Rowe's explanation of an important theme in *The Winter's Tale*, I was reminded of a lecture of Professor Grudin's regarding the same play. Rowe said that it was a play about competing views of imagination and sexuality: "The key image in the play is the pregnant Hermione. When I teach the play, I talk about it in terms of Shakespeare's world, in which imagination and sexuality lead to disaster." Rowe echoed Grudin's comment that Shakespeare views sexuality as a representation of the corruption of society.

Rowe said that his primary goal with the lower-division Shakespeare class was to make

Shakespeare alive to his students: “It’s not a matter of knowledge, but that they can create a dialogue with these texts. I want them to be better readers. I would like them to respect the texts, but mostly I want them to like them.” On this note, Rowe and Freinkel were parallel in their views. Each instructor wants Shakespeare to be truly alive to students and would rather have students love Shakespeare than grasp any particular theme of a given play. That is, they would prefer a student love the challenge of grappling with the ambiguities in the text than have an accurate conclusion about what those ambiguities mean.

As to the question of gender and the role it played in the classroom, Professor Rowe thought for a minute before answering. Rowe said that gender came up in his Shakespeare classes in different ways depending on the play, but mostly with the comedies: “I try to talk about gender generically with the whole business of disguising.” He admits that gender becomes an issue with all the disguising; however, he keeps attention to the issue on a surface or generic level. He noted that with the tragedies, a discussion of misogyny might develop, especially when dealing with *King Lear* or *Othello*. However, he openly acknowledged that gender was not on his list of priorities when teaching Shakespeare: “I don’t go into class thinking that I’m going to teach about Shakespeare and gender.” He too agreed that gender deserved a place in the study of Shakespeare, though not a particularly large one.

Gender and Professors

After concluding the professor interviews, it seemed as if there was an invisible wall dividing professors on the issue of gender and its importance in the classroom. There were varying levels of opinion on both sides of the wall, but there was a distinct division between those who viewed gender as important in Shakespeare and those who did not. Interestingly,

male professors stood on one side of the wall, while the female professors stood on the other side. Only Professor Freinkel stands directly in the middle of the male-female break down, though she deals with gender more than any of her male counterparts. My goal in answering this question is not to evaluate teaching differences according to the gender of professors; however, I would be ignoring an apparently fundamental issue by refraining to comment on the topic.

In general, men at the University of Oregon tend to employ a lecture-based format that may include, but does not emphasize, the subject of gender. The only professor who does not discuss gender at all in Shakespeare classes is a male, Professor Rockett. In turn, the only professor who structures the class around gender and sexuality is a woman, Professor Farwell. Further, though to varying degrees, each of the female professors favors a more discussion-based teaching style than each of her male counterparts. These differences may reflect fundamental tendencies in the preferred communication methods of men and women. In order to address questions of gender in literature and education, we must also explore the questions of gender in our professors. The issue of gendered teaching is undoubtedly a delicate one; however, it is a topic that warrants observation and discussion. There was also a gendered response to my project. The female professors were, for the most part, the most eager and interested in the topic of gender. Each female professor was excited about my project. However, that is not to say that many of the male professors were not eager to speak with me. In fact, Professor Rockett was one of the most willing to give his time and energy to my investigation. He also seemed to be the most forthright with his responses, regardless of how he thought they might be interpreted by his colleagues.

The Word *Gender*

Through my interviews and observations, I also became increasingly aware of the ambiguity and controversy surrounding the word *gender*. As I have already mentioned, the term *gender* ignites a different response in many people and often means different things to different people. To some people, the word triggers the idea of feminism, while to others it simply refers to one's sex and perhaps differences associated with the sexes. I repeatedly observed a discomfort in people when I said the word, particularly when talking with some of the male professors at the University of Oregon. There was an almost instant resistance to the word, and people appeared to exercise caution in their discussion of opinions surrounding the term.

I also observed a resistance to the word from female students more than from male students. From my subjective interpretation of female student responses, it seemed that some viewed gender issues and feminist thought as references to fields that made objections against a male-dominated society. More than one female student said that she was not a feminist and made a point of the fact that she chose not to take courses that discuss feminist perspectives. Many were quick to claim their lack of affiliation with any feminist cause. With these responses, I was able to recognize the same resistance that I experienced in England. Interestingly, many of the male students seemed comfortable discussing ideas about gender issues. It was as if previous experience and education conditioned them with an understanding that gender is important and, consequently, they demonstrated little resistance to a discussion of feminism and gender. Many of the male students were quick to say that gender is definitely important in Shakespeare.

My point here is to illustrate the delicacy of the issue of gender in academia and society. It is a sensitive issue for students and teachers, men and women. For this reason, the manner in which it emerges in the classroom is of great importance. Of course, some professors see no

value in discussing gender. In fact, before I investigated issues of gender and feminism in literature in general, I too, was more comfortable avoiding them altogether.

Preliminary Conclusions

However, when we look at the incredible ambiguity regarding gender in nearly all of Shakespeare's plays, how can we be true to the text without a discussion of these ambiguities? Furthermore, how can we be true to ourselves, students, and society without addressing the gender issues that are a part of our history and our present experience? David Bleich in an essay entitled, "The unconscious troubles of Men," discusses the effects in the classroom of changing gender dynamics, "as society reexamines traditional masculine roles"(Bleich 48). His research shows that the urgency for discussing sexuality and gender differences in literature and the classroom is maybe more important for men. As women struggle to find their redefined place in society and history, men also struggle to understand the subsequent redefinition of their own roles. Gender, feminism, and sexuality are not only issues for women and feminism, they are issues for men, and for men and women together. Bleich argues, "sexuality is now changing its identity in society; feelings of understanding and tolerance for homosexual behavior and respect for tenderness in heterosexual relationships have been concealed in similar ways for similar reasons" (Bleich 52). It is no surprise that we are uncomfortable with issues of gender and sexuality in the classroom, simply because we are struggling to come to terms with these issues as a culture and society. Yet, it is perhaps even more important to give attention to issues that are not only central to the text we study but issues that are also central to our own lives. We need to address questions of gender in the classroom, and Shakespeare's plays demand that we address the same questions in his plays.

A multitude of students and the majority of the professors interviewed indicated that a discussion of Shakespeare without reference to gender would be incomplete. It is a fact that men played women's roles in the performance of Shakespeare's plays, and further, that Shakespeare heightened this already ambiguous situation by having women in the plays dress up as men, and men as women. Shakespeare, with his constant inclusions of disguise, specifically gender-switching disguise, makes reference to the questions and complexities of gender. The variety of women and men that Shakespeare opted to depict, further makes us think that he was interested in gender. Gender has to be an issue to us because the text demonstrates that, to a great extent, gender was an issue to Shakespeare.

The question is no longer, should gender play a role in the Shakespeare classroom, but rather, how should gender discussions emerge in a classroom and what type of role they should play? There are pro's and con's associated with each of the three methods of teaching Shakespeare that I have presented. Professor Rockett's course is well organized, informative, and interesting. He highlights basic and everlasting themes and stresses them repeatedly to insure that students retain the ideas. The lectures are interesting and easy to follow. This course provides students with a strong base upon which they might build. The best aspect of this course is that it is entirely text-based. Students study the text, write about the text, and discuss ideas clearly supported in the text. This course is faithful to the text and a wonderful introduction to the world of Shakespeare. Yet, is it a complete and fair introduction to Shakespeare? Rockett completely avoids the topics of gender, disguise, and sexuality in this class. Even when students demonstrated interest in a discussion of gender, Rockett spoke briefly on the topic and avoided the issue. This occurred during the study of Hamlet, when a student asked about Ophelia and Gertrude, two characters Rockett chose to ignore in his lecture. Rockett provided a brief

explanation that Ophelia killed herself because she loved Hamlet and that Gertrude was a weak woman with a lustful appetite, and then moved on to a different topic. Rockett avoided the topic of gender and suppressed a discussion that was ready to emerge. While discussion is not always essential in every course, it involves students in a way that lecture cannot. It seems that students should possess the option to contribute to class and ignite a topic of discussion, and this is something that is not encouraged in Rockett's classroom.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Farwell's class, in which gender is the central structure through which she approaches Shakespeare. The discussion-based format of this class allows students to interact and exchange ideas, and it forces them to articulate their ideas to other people. Students in this course think freely and veer from the text so that the literature of Shakespeare's time applies to their own world and daily lives. They learn to see Shakespeare through a contemporary lens. The problem with this class is that it veers too much from the text, that there are no textual boundaries to the discussions. While it is interesting to discuss present-day issues and questions of gender, discussions often result in concerns far from the actual text. In this way, a class of this nature becomes more personally beneficial than academically beneficial, and one might argue that it is unfaithful to the text. The other issue is that the discussions are not as open and flexible as they appear. While students can veer from the *text*, it is much harder to veer from *issues* the professor raises. Students noted that Farwell's extensive experience contributed to her unwillingness to entertain ideas that differed from her own. For a student without experience in a course that focuses on gender, this course might be too much. It would necessarily exclude and alienate students who are initially uncomfortable with the issue.

Frankly, I think the best answer to my question would be for a student to take a Shakespeare course from each of the professors. A combination of the Shakespeare that each

teacher presents would provide students with a diverse yet complete experience of a multitude of Shakespearean themes and styles of learning. However, my question necessarily focuses on the best single method of teaching Shakespeare, if a student takes only one Shakespeare course. It seems easiest to select Freinkel's class because it lies in the middle ground; however, even that class does not avoid controversy. Rather, it combines positive aspects of both Farwell and Rockett's styles, remaining faithful to the text while being educationally and personally beneficial to the students.

Pedagogical Theories Today

Having evaluated these different approaches with detail and precision, it seems necessary to go beyond the scope of the University of Oregon and my own experience and to examine some of the pedagogical theories circulating today. Yet, it is also necessary to evaluate these additional resources in terms of all my previous research. We will examine approximately four essays, which highlight various pedagogical issues and possible solutions that have emerged thus far.

Gerald Graff has written a number of essays all surrounding the issue of "conflicts" in curriculum, in which he articulates an issue that I would wager nearly every student in the higher education system has experienced multiple times. The basis of his argument is against the diversification of the curriculum, as he claims that almost every time there is a conflict within a discipline, major, or even subject, we simply create a new and different major or course to accommodate that conflict. Rather than putting the conflict into one course, we go and create a whole new set of courses. We are constantly dividing and separating curriculums, based on date, based on what issues each course focuses on. For example, we have as courses at the University

of Oregon, “Contemporary Literary Criticism” and “Feminist Literary Criticism”. . .we have “Eighteenth century poetry” and “Women’s Eighteenth century poetry” . . . we have “Native American poetry” and “African-American prose” and “nineteenth century American Literature.” We seem to have a strange obsession with dividing and separating all of our departments, subjects, and conflicts. Graff argues that by separating conflicts, they only become more troubling and complicated for students.

We are missing a major opportunity if we do not turn our energies to making positive educational use of these debates by incorporating them into our subject of study. If we do not begin viewing the debates as an opportunity instead of a disaster, they will not only continue to generate ill antagonism and rage, but will make education more confusing to students (Graff 125).

While Graff’s essay reaches far beyond the subject at hand and into the reorganization of conflicts throughout departments and universities, his concept and theory can be directly applied to the question at hand. This phenomenon of separating the conflicts is precisely what I experienced in England and what made the experience frustrating rather than challenging. Our instructors presented us with two completely different pictures of Shakespeare; however, they did not provide a dialogue between the approaches. In fact, the manner in which these approaches were presented in this course led students to believe that they were mutually exclusive. Neither of the professors would acknowledge that a conflict even existed, and each acted as though his or her interpretation was the only valid one. Thus, we struggled through the confusing mess without a dialogue to tie the approaches together. Graff argues that the theories whether contradictory or complimentary need a shape in order to make sense to students:

Here is why concentration on the individual components of the curriculum is

counterproductive unless attention is also paid to how the components fit together, whether they form an intelligible conversation or set of conversations in the minds of the students who experience them. Students do not just study texts, ideas, and other materials in a vacuum; they study these things as part of a socialization into a set of community practices, practices which, to those not already familiar with them, often seem as mysterious and arbitrary as an initiation rite into a secret club (Graff 128).

In order for students to come to terms with the conflicts in what they read, study, and experience in the world, there must be a tangible conversation about those conflicts. The conflicts do not need resolution; they simply need to co-exist in a conversation, discussion, and classroom. Separating the conflicts, by adding more texts, subjects, theories and classes, will only serve to further confuse and alienate students. It seems that students are often alienated, not because of their disagreement with a professor's view of a certain text or literary theory, but rather, because of the overly complicated way in which the professor presents the theories or ideas. Overwhelmed at the amount of information, the intricate vocabulary, and all the different and apparently irreconcilable views on the same text, some students lose interest and turn away from the class, the professor, and often academia as a whole. It is the same with conflicts separated by courses or professors. When two highly educated Oxford professors teach completely non-complementary and non-interactive theories of Shakespeare in the scope of one course, it is alienating to say the least. It is as if you the student are simply on the outside of an argument that you are not educated enough to participate in, as if you are unable to access a private and very elite club, the academic club.

For example, take a student who takes two lower-division Shakespeare courses at the UO

(English 207 and English 208). Imagine he takes the first section of the series from Professor Rockett, and that this course is his first experience with Shakespeare. In this course, the student falls in love with Shakespeare. He enjoys Rockett's convincing and entertaining lectures, and he leaves the class confident that he has grasped the most important basic concepts from the plays studied during the course. The next term, in hopes of gaining more insight into this famous playwright, he takes English 208 from Professor Farwell. This student will experience not only a completely different teaching style, but also a different Shakespeare. In this class, the concepts and ideas he learned in the previous course are likely to be not only in opposition, but there is a chance that Farwell might discredit some of the very theories that Rockett convincingly supported. So what happens now? If this is an inexperienced student, who is not ready to independently confront this conflict and synthesize all the contradictory information, it is quite possible that this will be an overwhelming and confusing experience. Each professor teaches an essentially conflict-free course. That is, Rockett does not present any theories on Shakespeare in the context of his lectures that might threaten or undermine the theory he argues, and Farwell certainly does not discuss the theories that stand in direct opposition to her gender-structured theories on Shakespeare. Are we allowing this student to build on a base of knowledge or skills, or are we presenting him with a challenge that he is not yet equipped to overcome? We are giving him a conflict, without creating a conversation about the conflict. Is there a better way to present this conflict?

In the following excerpt Graff refers to an essay of his in *Harper's* in which he describes a debate in the faculty lounge between a traditionalist and a feminist professor over Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach":

In the piece I suggested that the students whom the traditionalist professor

complains about who are left cold by “Dover Beach” might have found the poem more interesting and accessible had they been able to witness his debate with his feminist colleague, who questioned the gender assumptions about the poem.

After all, “Dover Beach” hadn’t been doing all that well with the students before any feminists and deconstructionists arrived on the scene (Graff 133).

By allowing students into the literary debates that rage through all academic fields between professors, departments, and different schools of thought, teachers are inviting students to be a part of their academic world. Yet, it would do far more than help to remove the common barrier between student and academia. Even observing a heated debate between two educated and passionate advocates of opposing theories promises to bring seemingly dead texts to life, for a range of students. Further, it brings professors, who often seem elevated to the status of some sort of genius and all-knowing body of individuals, to a more human and more approachable level. Yet, most importantly, watching and participating in this type of a debate provides them with a point of reference.

I have discovered to my surprise that it is much easier to explain the universality claimed by traditional canonical authors like Matthew Arnold once you introduce the feminist challenge to this idea, since students now have something to compare it with . . . I concluded in my *Harper’s* essay that the best way to rescue poems like “Dover Beach” was not to try to protect them from the critical controversies about their value, but to use those controversies to give them new life (Graff 133).

Graff goes on to cite the eagerness of his students to jump right into the debate, some taking the traditionalist side, some the feminist side, and some arguing that neither position was

adequate. This manner of experiencing a debate seems far more constructive and meaningful than if students take two separate courses, both of which study “Dover Beach,” and hear two different, yet disconnected pictures of the same poem. Separating the conflict in this way will only serve to push the poem father away from the student, making it intangible, incomprehensible, and uninteresting. On the other hand, I can only imagine how interesting it might be to witness or even participate in a discussion between Professor Rockett, Professor Farwell, and Professor Freinkel at the University of Oregon-----that would be a class I certainly would not miss.

Looking at resources more particular to Shakespeare, Edward Pechter writes an essay entitled “Teaching Differences” which encompasses an idea similar to Graff’s though in a different light. He asks the question about what to do about the extensive amount of conflicting criticism surrounding Shakespeare and how to address it in the classroom:

So many seemingly contradictory activities are being performed these days under the name of Shakespeare criticism. Who could hope to represent all this disparate material in a complete and even-handed way? Which of us would ever presume to appropriate Kent’s aggressive confidence, closing in upon Oswald: “I’ll teach you differences” (107 . . . King Lear, I.4.89)?

Pechter argues that the current need is not to unify or transcend these differences, but rather to make do with the differences:

There is no way “many of us can agree on some critics and approaches” as constituting “the best that we have done.” To be able to do so, we would have first of all to establish Shakespeare criticism as a unified totality, but . . . the fundamental conflicts within Shakespeare criticism cannot be resolved into such a

coherent subject. One possibility is to limit the nature of the subject to an artificially and arbitrarily manageable homogeneity. We could close ranks around a besieged formalist humanism or an insurgent materialist feminism, and simply not expose our students to the contaminants of difference. . . . But few of us can muster the confidence to effect such violent foreclosures (Pechter 122).

Though it seems ridiculous to suggest homogenizing critical theory as it is taught in the classroom, giving students one perspective, theory, or approach, it happens all the time in classrooms. The devastating part about teaching students one way of approaching a text is that often times they will accept the approach as fact rather than as an approach, and further, welcome it with open arms. This is because providing one answer or one way takes all the work, excitement, and challenge out of education. It makes it easy. A teacher argues an effective interpretation of *Othello*, and the students take it, memorize it, and then it becomes their own. Rather than reaching any conclusion on their own, they take the professor's along with all the evidence and hang on to it for dear life, because alas, if it came from a professor, it must be "right."

There is little doubt that simply denying the conflicts and multiple perspectives all together is a reasonable solution: "The teacher who tries to be comprehensive can be satisfied with no single, instantaneous view, but must examine multiple perspectives on the play in its duration" (xiii Edens). The conflicts exist. It is merely a question of how we handle them. Pechter suggests, "that we do not even try to solve the problem, but ignore it." He further makes a recommendation that echoes Graff's ideology:

I for one believe that an anthology conveniently juxtaposing recent and contemporary critical activity . . . would be a useful pedagogical tool. It would not provide a way out

of the game, of course, but it would furnish the occasion for an interesting and potentially productive way to play, and for a variety of players who find themselves located in fundamentally different teaching positions (Pechter 124).

It makes sense to look at the approaches, specifically the ones that are contradictory, together, and to use them as a tool to breathe new life into the plays and to deepen students' experience with a given play. The great irony is the fear surrounding the notion that too many possible answers or approaches will confuse students. In reality, is not the amount of perspectives that can be confusing to a student, it is the way they experience them. When they are presented together, complete with all contradictions, it is often a liberating experience for a student, a point at which he or she recognizes the limitless possibility of meanings and is then empowered to trust his or her own interpretation. However, when the student is introduced to one interpretation or approach, or experiences the different approaches independently of each other, then confusion and frustration are likely to arise.

Another issue that emerged early on in my project and continues to be of great interest is the role of the teacher in the classroom, and specifically, what teachers can do to empower the student to think independently rather than simply reiterate concepts. The question is of huge proportions, how do we give students a base upon which they build, a confidence in their ability to read and analyze Shakespeare, and further to voice their ideas? In his essay "Decentering the Instructor in Large Classes," Robert Carl Johnson writes about his approach to empowering students by taking the emphasis off himself as the professor. As a result of increasing class sizes on many campuses, discussion formats become almost impossible as any discussions are controlled by a vocal minority while the rest of the students, "treat the class like a lecture course: listening but not participating, simply copying down what they perceive as the salient points in

preparation for their eventual reading of the play and the upcoming exam” (Johnson 190). This is something I noted in a couple of the classes I observed, specifically Professor Grudin’s course and Professor Rockett’s. A few students would always get involved, but many would passively copy information that seemed relevant or that they might need to reiterate at a later date. The classrooms were not interactive at all. Johnson teaches the same type of course at Miami University, one section of undergraduate Shakespeare. His goals are basic and even common: “. . . for students to leave with confidence in their ability to read and interpret an unfamiliar Shakespeare play” and “to create students who find Shakespeare relevant to their lives today and who see the class as the beginning of a long-standing study and appreciation of Shakespeare (Johnson 190). However, his method of reaching this goal, the results of which he measures in several ways, is much less common.

The first interesting point he makes is in regards to notetaking. Noting to students that years from now they will not return to their notebooks, but with any luck will return to the texts, he discourages the idea of the student as notetaker: “I suggest that they not fill their notebooks with my comments, but instead jot down their own comments and reactions in the margins of the text” (Johnson 191). He further makes use of the one-minute paper at the end of class as a way of engaging a wide variety of students. In these short papers, he asks students to consider material not yet discussed or material they are just beginning to read. Students hand these ungraded papers in just before they leave class. In reviewing them prior to the next class, he is able to better focus discussions: “I am able to use the work of several students as contrasting interpretations or as springboards to get class discussion going” (Johnson 190).

Johnson, like Freinkel, is also a big proponent of performance-based criticism, and interestingly both professors found that involving students in often humorous role-playing

enhances both their understanding of the particular play and their interaction with other students. In order to aid students in growing comfortable with this degree of active participation, he divides the class into smaller groups to discuss the staging or interpretation of a particular scene. Freinkel divided students into groups quite frequently in the course I observed, and it was without question a very effective way of involving all students and increasing their interaction with one another. Johnson noted an additional benefit of the groups: “I am able to join one or more groups, usually just listening, but occasionally asking a question or contributing just like any other member of the group (Johnson 190).

Johnson also touches on a key component of some previous points regarding the importance of presenting students with more than one approach:

If one’s goal is to empower the student, then it is necessary to confront the student with alternatives and options. There are serious problems with having students view one performance of a play. Too often students will accept that version as a definitive version. But the exact opposite happens when the student sees two or three versions of the same scene (Johnson 193).

When a student is presented with one way, he or she will likely think that is the only way. The discovery of a multitude of ways to approach a text and the challenge of struggling through the differences and similarities in the approaches is precisely what instills students with the ability to read and interpret literature, and further, the confidence in their ability to do so.

So let’s examine a specific example of how one might construct the discussion surrounding one scene in one play so that multiple approaches or interpretations might surface, without bringing utter chaos and confusion to the classroom. Johnson begins his discussions in the same way that Freinkel often does, with a simple question: “What does Hamlet wish to

accomplish through the performance of his play and how successful is he in proving the veracity of the ghost? (note: he also asks students to pretend that they are someone other than Hamlet at the performance ie. Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia) (Johnson 193). Then he asks them to explain, from that character's point of view, what is happening in the scene, and further divides students into groups according to which character they have chosen. As they begin to discuss what their character is doing and thinking at each moment in the scene, students undoubtedly will reach a stage of confusion as they struggle with the lines, like those between Hamlet and Ophelia. In this type of an environment, questions will lead to more questions, and answers will lead to more questions. As a student in these types of discussions, I remember amazement at the depth of what seemed to live in the space of just two or three lines. It is as if the play grows in meaning as you pick it apart, questioning everything, and taking nothing as fact. Johnson claims to find amazing success with this type of a format:

The students quickly understand that the possibilities are endless, that each decision has other ramifications, that each student has different and often equally valid insights, and that my interpretation is but one of several and by no means the definitive answer . . . By the time we have reached the end of the term, these various activities have decentered the instructor and given the students a sense that they can understand or interpret Shakespeare on their own (Johnson 194).

In discussing these theories, all of which support the importance of incorporating a multitude of approaches including conflicting perspectives into classrooms, we have indirectly focused on the issue of teaching gender in the classroom. If a student is to experience different and even conflicting interpretations of a Shakespearean play, then he or she should be introduced to both Farwell and Freinkel and Rockett's approaches, perhaps even at the same time. In

confronting the consistencies and inconsistencies in their different views of a given play, students are forced dig deeper into the texts to uncover their own interpretations.

However, when we talk about gender in the classroom, we are reaching beyond an approach to Shakespeare. It is a term that undoubtedly effects the lives of each student in the classroom, perhaps far more today than ever before. Its amazing to think about the composition of just one classroom filled with twenty-five students. Each student comes from a different place and is influenced in thought and action by his/her gender history, society expectation, and family experience. For example, we might have athlete Joe, who grew up in a family with two sisters and a very traditional, even macho father, who focused all his attention on making Joe a real man, an athlete, and more importantly tough. Maybe Joe was expected to talk loudly, be aggressive, and to consider women, including his sisters, as secondary. Lets say whatever his sisters accomplished was nice, but simply not worth talking about. So Joe has worked hard to be a tough guy, showing no signs of weakness or sensitivity, especially not of any vulnerable emotion. Then we have Sara, who was sexually abused at day care from the time she was three until the age of ten. After keeping her abuse a secret, she began dealing with it as a teenager, in therapy and with her family. She has discussed all the feelings and emotions associated with her abuse, yet in social situations or groups of people, she is reserved, uncomfortable, and very wary of men. We also have Peter, a young man coming to terms with his homosexuality, working towards telling his family, afraid of the outcome, but relieved to have admitted the truth to himself. The list goes on and on. You never know the background of each student sitting in a class, yet how each appears in the classroom is connected to his or her background. Further, discussions of gender and sexuality are bound to touch personal cords in students and invite varied responses. We've established that its a topic that mandates discussion in the classroom,

yet considering all the variables, what is the best way to incorporate it into a discussion?

In his essay entitled “The Unconscious Troubles of Men,” David Bleich relays the accidental phenomenon that occurred in his advanced undergraduate course, “Seminar in Writing: Telling the Truth.” The substantive concern of the course was writing and language use as “telling the truth” in the sense of making what is unconscious conscious in public. The essay reminds me of Professor Freinkel’s continuous discussion of the multiplicity of language and the importance and difficulty of finding truth in the text, despite the deceitful nature of its language. The planned curriculum for Bleich’s course included the juxtaposition of Adrienne Rich’s *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, a feminist critique of society, and Lynne Cheney’s *Telling the Truth*, a more familiar and traditional academic viewpoint on telling the truth. However, because of the accidental enrollment of this class, (six white men, two women, and the white male teacher . . . five of the seven men, were extremely talkative and loud; two of the men were soft spoken, and both women were extremely reserved) it ‘unconsciously’ had as a principal focus what is happening to men as society reexamines traditional masculine roles (Bleich 48). The course gave Bleich a unique insight into the way in which society and gender influence men and women alike in the classroom and their day to day life.

By studying the work of some of the men in my course, one gets a hint about what may be happening collectively on a larger scale. Some men accept the need for political change, while others answer its challenges with personal defenses, describing their own ‘sensitivity,’ their history of feeling responsive to the claims and interests of women and other politically active groups. In most men there is a new level of personal and social uncertainty, previously masked by such behaviors as macho bravado and military truculence. Men’s traditional

unconscious uncertainty about roles, authority, knowledge, and justice, for example, previously obscured by fluent and simple assumptions about self and society, is now becoming conscious (Bleich 48).

These changes in social expectations and functions for men, likewise mean a change in roles for women, as men and women are learning to relate to one another in a different way. I experienced the influences of some of these changes during student interviews. A remarkable number of men were willing to talk about the importance of discussing gender in the classroom. They were more aware and less defensive of questions regarding gender than I anticipated. The cultural significance of gender issues in society will, in some form or degree, come into play in the classroom. It is perhaps a perfect setting for students and teachers alike to build awareness about themselves and society as a whole as they work through gender issues in texts and in the classroom. Aside from what textual gender issues may or may not emerge in the course of a discussion, the gender tensions, or differences influence every aspect of that discussion and what each student takes from the discussion. For example, Bleich describes the temper of the class discussions, many of which became male shouting matches, in which he often found himself part of, while the women remained silent. The following is an excerpt written by one female student citing an instance in the classroom:

Mr. G. would ask Bleich about the presidential election or vice versa and suddenly there was a debate on which candidate would win and then a bet over beer was being worked out to see who could guess the winner. Someone would ask what kind of beer the loser should buy . . . I suddenly found myself in left field. I didn't know whether I should say something because I felt that I had been gradually pushed out of the conversation, out of the circle, out of the field, and

onto the bleachers as a spectator. I was no longer a player. I was flustered because the males could introduce and carry on any conversation they wanted to and I could not. I wanted to be a participant because it was more fun (Bleich 49).

Repeated studies have shown that this is not a new phenomenon; however, the concept of this phenomenon being discussed in a class after the student composed an essay is new. This female student was attempting to truthfully describe the way she was alienated by language and further overcome with the feeling that she was unable to compete on the same level as the males in terms of language and perhaps aggressiveness. She wanted to speak and contribute and be involved, but somehow couldn't. In this course the students worked through the truth about all sorts of issues normally not discussed: "How the 'normal' masculine identity generally presupposes violence, misogyny, and homophobia, all connected with one another but ultimately unmentionable as values which are psychosocially necessary to 'normal' male identity in today's society" (Bleich 49). Bleich allowed the rare composition of students in his course to shape the course itself, which led to a rather powerful experience, through which he believes he learned more than his students. Rather than dancing around the topics that traditionally make us all uncomfortable, they talked and wrote about them candidly, as they feared and welcomed them---they struggled to tell the truth.

In Freinkel's interview, she mentioned the need for teachers to be both aware and sensitive all the issues surrounding sexuality today, including homosexuality, bisexuality, etc. Bleich agrees that sexuality is now changing its identity in society and must be addressed in the classroom. However, he found success not in sensitively touching on these controversial topics, but rather letting them flow freely. It resulted in all the students learning to interrogate their own language and cultural identity in addition to exploring what factors shaped their language and

perceptions of their roles in society. Bleich concludes his essay with his take on pedagogy as it was influenced by this class:

To take teaching seriously is to do, perhaps, the opposite of “theorizing” it: once in class, see who is there, think of what people want, examine what people actually do, and find the curriculum, backwards, in retrospect, after the moment has been seized and the class members have faced one another over time. In part, this essay is the retrospective description of my curriculum. Mr. S. concluded his essay with a redefinition, perhaps, of our course’s curriculum, observing that “It seems all sports are played on the same field.” We were unconscious of this thought when we went into the course. Now we are conscious of it: the curriculum is what we know after the course is over. That’s something to write about. It may even be telling the truth (Bleich 62).

It is an interesting and rather scary concept in our structured education systems, where the one thing we can always count on is the syllabus and structure and schedule. But perhaps it’s a genius way to reach students. It might even make perfect sense. Imagine the first step to reaching students is to get into the classroom and see who the students are before setting to work on a hard and fast curriculum and style, the one you have used with every course, every term, for the past three years, with only slight changes. Students are as diverse and contradictory as all the views and theories on education and literature. There is no “best” way to teach all students simply because students are not the same. While you cannot teach a course that is perfect for each of the thirty students sitting in the classroom, you might be able to teach a class that perfectly suits the class as a group. The group refers to the way the students’ function and work together as a unit, or the particular shape their interaction with one another takes. It sounds like a

very ambiguous and random way to conduct a class, but maybe that is simply because it does not fall in accord with the degree of planning and structure behind each course we find outlined in the course book. Maybe its time we go beyond the structure of each department and class.

Part II Conclusions

Based on my research, observation, interviews, and experience as a student, I have formulated some basic ideas about what we might consider when teaching Shakespeare, both generally and in terms of gender. I have also dismissed the idea of selecting one method that might come closest to representing the best way to teach Shakespeare. Rather, this is how Shakespeare might be more meaningful, academically beneficial, and personally beneficial for a student like me.

The first thing I would suggest is that we read less and go deeper into each play, that our goal should be covering texts in great depth, rather than covering a certain number of representative texts, even in a lower division class. The goal of lower division classes is often to give students a taste of a wide variety of texts, or in our case, a decent sampling of Shakespearean plays. The idea is that later on in a student's academic career, he or she can investigate in greater depth texts in a particular focus. However, while the goal is to give students a base upon which they can build their studies, it often does the opposite. Giving a student a base to build upon does not mean he or she has to read every play Shakespeare wrote, rather, to me it means giving a student the skills to read, interpret, and work through one text. The next question is how does one give a student the skills to read, interpret, and work through a text?

The first step seems to be teaching students how to read a text. The greatest gift a teacher

can give is in teaching students to envelop texts, rather than skim them. This means guiding them to struggle and question the meaning of specific lines and themes and the detailed structure of characters, guiding them to look deeper than the literal or surface meaning when reading any text, especially Shakespeare. This way when they read the next play, they will examine it with the same depth and critical eye; and further, they will have the skills and confidence to read and interpret a text. A great number of students never learn how to really read a text, not because they are not bright or willing to learn, but simply because no one ever showed them how to really read a piece of literature. Learning how to dig into a text involves an interactive environment, where the professor and students exchange ideas, questions, basic observations and complex observations.

Teaching a student to read for meaning, theme, relevance to his or her own life, and for a more in-depth grasp of the substance of one text also means providing multiple approaches to a given text. We should come at a play from all sides, view it in performance, maybe two different performances, act out the scenes in class; look at the text from different, even contradictory sides. With each play studied in a course, I think students should study multiple interpretations, even contradictory interpretations, even if the interpretations are in conflict with the professor's view. Students deserve to see the traditional theories, the feminist ideologies, and all the rest, and then draw their own conclusions. I think the idea of inviting two professors with contradictory views on the same play would be an excellent way to begin this process and to invite students to jump into the text. For example, in a given class, students would read *Othello*, and then view a couple of different versions of the play, and then observe and/or participate in a presentation/debate between, for example Professor Farwell and Professor Rockett. Throughout this process they can work through their own perceptions of the play independently in papers, in

class through interaction with the professor, and perhaps also through interaction with the students in small groups. As they work through their own ideas and come into contact with other students ideas and professor's varying theories, students will arrive at conclusions, that while educated by instruction, reading, and discussion, are their own.

It is in this context that my ideas about treating gender in the classroom come in to play. Part of educating students about multiple perspectives on a play necessarily includes educating them about feminist theories and gender issues within Shakespeare. Furthermore, in order for students to reach conclusions about texts that are both educated and personally and academically beneficial, they must work through the thematic issues in a play as they relate to their own lives, today's society, and Shakespeare's society. This means confronting questions of gender in the plays, history, and today. Dancing around the issue of gender will not make it disappear, nor will avoiding it, nor will teaching one angle of a gendered approach without allowing any others to surface. The best way to approach gender seems to be head on. This means we must allow the controversy of gender into the classroom. It does not mean we have to teach an angle, it just means we must invite it into our courses. We must present the debate, from more than one side, in the classroom and allow students to work through the conflict, in one course, not in separate courses.

Finally, we might think about allowing the "shape" of the particular class to in turn mold the shape of the curriculum. This means making time in the syllabus or even breaking the syllabus in order to reach the goal at hand: to provide students with a base upon which they can build. Each group of students is unique and each will function together in a different way. Reaching the goal might take varying means and varying amounts of time, and it might mean different things. Perhaps it is time to reconsider our schedules, syllabi and course structure in

order to allow conflict, controversy and a changing social structure into the classroom.

PART III

INTO THE CLASSROOM

With my observation, interviews, and research complete, it is now time to translate the ideas, theories, and conclusions into an actual Shakespeare course. In this section, we will examine my preliminary conclusions and research in the context of a practical approach to teaching a Shakespeare course. How do we build a course that both overcomes each of the obstacles and achieves each of the goals highlighted in the previous sections? In order to answer this question, it seems appropriate to revisit some of the most pertinent goals. The Shakespeare course I imagine would do the following:

- Establish a balance between lecture and discussion: What type of format encourages student participation and independent thought yet simultaneously keeps the discussion focused on the topic, text, or issue at hand?
- Invite gender into the classroom: How do we bring gender issues, alive in the text and students' experiences, to the classroom without alienating students with a biased perspective? How do we solve the problem of an agenda? How do we convince students to confront and discuss the issue of gender?
- Introduce conflict throughout the course and present a variety of approaches to a text: How do we introduce a number of approaches, specifically those conflicting in nature, in the same discussion without confusing or overwhelming students?
- De-center the instructor: How do we define the role of the teacher in this new context?

- Encourage in-depth reading.
- Provide students with the skills necessary to conduct a literary analysis.
- Build students' confidence in their ability to read, understand, and analyze Shakespearean texts, in writing and discussion.

These conclusions bring to light the most challenging question thus far: How do we make these things happen in the classroom? Can we reach each of these goals in the scope of one course? Is there a practical pedagogical approach that promises to make it possible? There is no single approach to Shakespeare that will solve each of the problems that teachers and students face while also accomplishing each of the outlined goals. However, there are number of approaches and teaching styles that provide the framework for a course that will help us take a step closer to this ideal. The format that Marie A. Plasse calls an "Inquiry-Based Approach" is one format that makes this step a real possibility.

Embracing this approach, however, will mean change on the part of teachers, students, and the educational structure that binds them together. All progress demands change, and at the heart of education rests the ongoing commitment to progress in all fields. Ironically, our system of education -- our styles, our approaches, and our curriculum -- is often an entity unwilling to change. Yet, as we progress in all fields, sciences and technology, literary studies, women's studies, language, and politics, our system of education must also progress.

This section will consist of two parts. The first will outline the basic structure of a class that will incorporate both my own conclusions and an essay by Marie A. Plasse, entitled "An Inquiry-Based Approach." The second part will supplement the first by setting the stage for how this approach might play out in the classroom, in terms of specific readings, issues of gender, and conflicting approaches to the study of one play, *Othello*.

An Inquiry-Based Approach

Plasse's approach provides a realistic base for the attainment of each of the goals articulated above. However, we will have to experiment with this structure, take some risks, and accept the fact that we will progress and regress as we work to develop this approach in the classroom. Plasse's essay provides insight into the events inspiring her transition to this approach and into the outcomes of the transition, as well as an explanation of the approach itself.

After several years of conducting her undergraduate Shakespeare course as a traditional Socratic lecture/discussion with regular midterm, paper, and final requirements, Plasse recognized a need for a change. She began to see something "slightly oppressive" about the class for her students and for herself. She entered each class with a set agenda, and though she welcomed other comments and questions, her approach to the plays governed class discussions, paper topics, and the final exam. In order to truly engage students in the study of Shakespeare and enhance the course experience for everyone involved, Plasse completely altered the format of her class. This alteration entailed drastic changes in her role as the teacher: "I step back from my customary position of control and call off the Socratic hunt for my own fully formed interpretations and insights (Plasse 121). She removed herself as the centerpiece of the classroom and turned the focus onto the students.

The goal of this course is to provide students with a foundation on which they can build: "The new structure focuses on teaching students how to develop their own inquiries into the plays and locates these at the center of the course rather than at the margins of a course built around the instructor's agenda" (Plasse 121). I believe this should be the focus of nearly every course at an institution. Learning facts and memorizing themes and plot is

not what constitutes an education, nor is learning how each professor interprets assigned texts. Rather, it is building the skills and knowledge that enable a student to approach a text independently and from a number of different angles. Education is not so much about accessing information as it is about learning how to process information and ideas.

Plasse made this transition in her own classes by changing the types of writing assignments in the course. Like many professors teaching a traditionally structured Shakespeare class, she found herself asking too much of her students. She expected students, with little or no training, to complete essays that required mastery of both difficult Shakespearean texts and the complex process of writing a coherent literary analysis. She wanted to build writing tasks that would engage students in learning how to interrogate Shakespearean texts before requiring them to create a finished essay. Thus, she abandoned her traditional format and developed the following three-part writing series that would serve as the core of the course:

- 1) Short pieces of writing (1-2 pages), which she calls “seed papers,” in which students pose a productive question about the text and then attempt to answer it.
- 2) Longer, more formal essays (4-6 pages) developed directly from seed papers, in which students expand and refine a seed paper idea.
- 3) A final exam essay (4-6 pages) in which students analyze a selected group of seed paper questions posed during the semester, explaining which questions were most productive and why (Plasse 121-122).

As it did for Plasse, I think this structure might radically alter the way students and teachers experience a course while simultaneously improving the skills both parties take from the course. The structure insists that the course start with basic, yet important questions that students

formulate about given texts. It allows students to begin with simple perceptions and build on their own questions and the questions of their classmates.

Plasse prepares the class for seed paper work during the first week of the term by explaining the goals of the course and evaluating sample seed questions. On the day the seed papers are due, Plasse asks students to do the following: 1) pose their questions to the group; 2) allow time to think through the question and to go back through relevant passages in the text; 3) listen to the ensuing class discussion; and 4) contribute the work of their seed papers to the discussion at an appropriate moment (Plasse 122). This type of project makes it possible for a number of important and beneficial things to happen in the classroom. First, it mandates student interaction and dialogue about their own ideas and questions, not questions provided for them in lecture or in paper topics. Second, it assists students in developing skills necessary to articulate ideas and initiate and participate in class discussions. Plasse characterizes class discussions as “lively, not focused on the teacher . . . animated by dialogue in which students listen to, develop, refute, and refine one another’s ideas” (Plasse 124).

This format alters her role in class sessions and makes it more interesting. In addition to articulating her own answers to the questions posed (without suggesting her response is the best one), her role is as follows: to refine or assist in the creation of effectively structured questions; push students to develop and clarify their responses; and make connections to questions proposed earlier in the course (Plasse 124). The instructor in this class would still assign secondary readings and supplement discussions with explanatory lecture, both historical and literary in nature. The primary change is in the in-class role of the instructor. A professor cannot come to this class with a strict agenda and a well-planned set of questions and notes. Rather, a professor using this type of approach must enter these “seed paper” classes without knowing

what the focus of each day's discussion will be. This idea is similar to what David Bleich refers to as teaching the curriculum backwards, in the essay in which he suggests releasing the tight grip on syllabi, schedules, and curriculum. This way, the "truth," or the substance of what students see in texts, society, and their own lives is allowed to enter the classroom.

Though Plasse admits this process was initially "nerve-wracking" for a compulsive class-preparer like herself, she began to enjoy the excitement of the class sessions. Discussions place students at center-stage and keep her on her toes: "The anxiety and tension of having to respond keeps us all engaged and interested, and helps me to produce fresh thoughts rather than canned riffs so many of us come to rely on" (Plasse 124). This makes teachers true participants in their classes while also providing them insight into what students find strange or puzzling. The format also significantly alters the class dynamic by manipulating the traditional student and teacher roles, placing teacher and student on semi-equal ground. The classroom becomes more than a location for an information exchange, in which the instructor relays information to the students, who then repeat the information back to the instructor in papers and exams. In this situation students and teachers work together to expand both parties' understanding and experience. It makes education a two-way street, inviting students and instructors to learn from each other.

In the second part of the writing series, students write longer, more formal essays that develop their initial inquiries into clearly conceived and supported analyses. In this step students stand to gain a true understanding of the process of a genuine scholarly inquiry, "by means of observations and questions pursued over a sustained period of time, refined by discussions with others, and fed by repeated readings of the text" (Plasse 125). Students learn to work through the texts as they learn the process of initiating and developing their own inquiries. They do not merely receive paper topics that ask them to follow inquiries the professor has already made for

them. Instead of reading one play, writing an essay and then moving on, students return to the texts repeatedly. They re-read the texts, reading in greater depth, reconsidering previous questions, and expanding those questions in order to build their analysis.

The final stage of this series consists of a take-home final exam in which students explain why the seed questions are productive and expound other issues to which the questions led them. In completing this process, students conduct the final step of a literary analysis: “Students who write strong answers . . . demonstrate that they have not only learned something about the subjects, characters, themes, and dramatic techniques of three plays, but also that they have grasped the principles of conducting a fruitful interrogation of any Shakespearean text” (Plasse 125). If students learn how to make a “fruitful interrogation” of one text and to articulate the process in discussion and in writing, they have developed the skills necessary to interrogate any Shakespearean text.

There are, however, certain sacrifices to be made within the scope of this format. Instructors must give up things that are both familiar and expected of them, such as “‘comprehensive’ coverage of individual plays” and “ordered, predictable class sessions” (Plasse 126). It might take a long time for the class to arrive at the understanding of an idea that the instructor could easily explain in a lecture. Further, there is no guarantee that discussions will always pursue a direction the instructor considers important:

It means that when a student asks a weakly conceived seed paper question, the class must struggle together to pursue a stronger line of inquiry based on that question. It also means that sometimes a full class period will be spent discussing something that the instructor finds uninteresting or only marginally relevant to what she wishes students to understand about a given play (Plasse 126).

In addition, this approach depends on a class consisting of students who are ready and willing to participate in discussions and classroom activities. Or rather, adopting this approach means making a commitment to teaching students how to participate. It also means taking a great deal of risk. An instructor must begin each course in a term with uncertainty about the direction his or her class will take. This makes the role of the instructor somewhat ambiguous and uncomfortable. It also means risking the status quo. This approach may bring additional problems and obstacles that were not at issue with the traditional approach. Finally, it means changing the structure and agendas that professors have employed and students have responded to for ages. Therefore, it involves re-training teachers and students in their roles in and out of the classroom.

This approach essentially requires us to redefine the role of the teacher and to ask some difficult questions about what that means. This approach does not assert that students can or should teach themselves, nor does it alleviate the importance of the teacher as instructor. However, it does change the way the teacher instructs the students. Students enter a class to learn something that they do not know. While I am arguing that a substantial part of this involves learning the process of learning, I am not suggesting that students can do this without careful and attentive instructor involvement. Yet, if the point of this approach is for teachers and students to explore a Shakespearean text together, why should a Shakespeare expert teach the course? It is an important question and one to consider carefully. How do you ask an instructor with years of experience with a playwright to avoid opinions and an agenda? Easily. Education and experience should not produce inflexible opinions and a rigid agenda. In fact, should not education enable a person to maintain a perpetually open mind? An expert in Shakespeare should be able to evaluate the plays and the playwright from every possible angle and

perspective. This is precisely what the instructor using this approach would need to do and precisely why he or she should be an expert in Shakespeare. The instructor in this course must adapt and evolve his or her perspective and approach, additional readings, and class activities with each new group of students. He or she must be able to view Shakespeare in a multitude of contradictory ways. This approach adds expectation and unpredictability to the role of the instructor, as it demands flexibility and a willingness to release the traditional structure of a classroom. The instructor in this approach must be an expert in Shakespeare, yet wise enough to know that he or she cannot know best how to apply it to students' lives.

While it places us in a somewhat challenging position, the Inquiry-Based Approach promises to bring new life to our Shakespeare courses. It opens up amazing possibilities: "The possibility of inspiring greater engagement among students with the processes of reading, discussing, and writing about the plays; exposes them to a wide variety of their peers' perspectives and encourages them to rely on one another as sources of knowledge; and builds their ability to respond critically to all the literature they will read and study" (Plasse 126). The approach insists that students reach conclusions independently of the professor. While facilitating this process might cause frustration for the teacher, the value of the outcome is immeasurable. Students remember ideas that teachers give them until the final exam, but they remember ideas they reach on their own for a lifetime.

This format will also necessarily allow Graff's "conflicts" into the classroom, as often points of difference between students will be the focus of class discussions. Along the same line, it allows and actually insists upon multiple perspectives emerging in the classroom. It gives students a complete, rather than one-sided view of each play, simply because each student is exposed to his or her peers' views in addition to his own and the instructor's. However, because

the conflicts are centered around basic questions proposed by the students themselves as part of their literary analyses, they serve to clarify, rather than confuse, students' understanding.

This format clearly de-centers the teacher, which Johnson argues in his essay, promises to build student capability and confidence. More times than not, students are unwilling to participate simply because they doubt their own ability and lack the self-confidence to risk their idea being the wrong one. Pushing students to participate actively in class discussions, without relying on the instructor's dialogue, enables them to recognize their own capability to read and analyze Shakespeare.

Further, by removing the agenda as the primary structure of the course, we allow the issues relevant to students to enter the classroom. When the agenda is relinquished, so are the boundaries--- the boundaries that keep students on one side and teachers on the other, and the boundaries surrounding certain controversial issues. How can we impose an inflexible and unbending schedule upon a class and then ask students to think freely and discuss issues that make them uncomfortable, like gender and race? It seems contradictory in nature to ask students do go beyond boundaries, when the course itself consists primarily of boundaries and guidelines. The agenda must be relaxed if we are to discuss all the issues relevant to Shakespeare, specifically the ones that touch a cord in our own lives, making the process a little more intimidating. The Inquiry-Based Approach does precisely this; however, it does so without giving way to wandering and irrelevant discussions. The remarkable aspect of these class discussions is that, while unpredictable, they necessarily focus on the seed questions. Each discussion has a center, though it is not the teacher or the teacher's perspective. Interestingly, the approach combines what I consider the best of Rockett's approach with the best of Farwell's

approach. Class discussions remain close to the text and issues at hand, while also encouraging students to think broadly, articulate ideas, and explore the texts' relevance to their own lives.

This course requires students to do more than skim texts or read the play's Cliffs' notes. It challenges them to investigate and struggle through the plays. Plasse's suggested structure plans for the study of only three plays; therefore, students work with plays repeatedly throughout the term. They read them in-depth, discuss them in class, observe their peers' perspectives, complete a true and progressive inquiry into the plays, and finally arrive at conclusions that are their own. In this type of a class, instructors can guide students through the plays and their analyses, and in the process, possibly learn something from their students. Students have the opportunity to leave this class with experience in reading Shakespeare and enhanced discussion, writing, and analysis skills. Rather than a notebook full of notes on theme and plot that they will likely throw away the day they take the final exam, they can leave with practical skills.

Finally, the Inquiry-Based Approach offers an honest and effective way to teach gender. This approach enables me to pose a possible answer to my initial question about the best way to teach Shakespeare in the context of gender. Within this structure, we can invite gender into the classroom without an agenda. The format of this class makes it impossible to ignore the issue of gender. The class evaluates and discusses every seed question presented; therefore, questions about gender cannot be ignored or suppressed, even if an instructor feels they are invalid or irrelevant. Plasse cites an example of the progression of a discussion about gender:

A question about how female characters in *Othello* are treated by male characters opened up a discussion in which students made connections between the play and their reading of secondary sources on women's roles in Elizabethan culture.

These connections led them to widen their conception of the play's theme,

moving from a narrowly conceived focus on Othello's gullibility and Iago's villainy to a broader view that included the play's dramatization of gender stereotypes (Plasse 123).

Yet, the format also prevents a discussion of gender to wander far beyond the scope of the question, text, or pertinent issue. The discussion remains focused on the question, not the professor's perspective. It invites the issues relevant to the students' lives into the discussion and into the view of the professor. It allows instructors' to gain insight into some of the issues students struggle with today and to see that those issues might be different than they imagine. Most importantly, this approach allows students to discuss the conflict of gender in the plays they read and in their own lives. It pushes them to evaluate different perspectives surrounding the gender issues in the plays, including the professor's, their classmates, and their own.

The Approach in the Classroom Study of *Othello*

In this section, we will examine this approach as it might come to life in the classroom study of *Othello*. There are a few questions left unanswered after an introduction to Plasse's approach. How do we get the discussions going when students are not prepared for their new level of participation? How do we guide or encourage students to embrace conflict when they conceive it as an obstacle? How do we insure gender questions are included in students' seed questions? Essentially, these questions ask how we will transition students and teachers into this new approach. In the weeks before beginning seed question activities, students need an introduction to their new roles and an invitation into discussion. Perhaps the best way to invite students into a discussion is to give them something good to discuss.

Incorporating the ideas of Gerald Graff, the essence of the following idea involves students first reading a play, in this case *Othello*, and then experiencing two juxtaposed interpretations of the play. We can do this in a number of interesting ways. For example, a professor might invite two professors with opposing views to a class for a presentation and discussion of their interpretations. The debate can then serve as the sounding board for students to develop and argue their own interpretations. It seems that experiencing this live debate would be a powerful tool, but it is almost impossible to simulate in the format of this project. For our purposes here, we will examine a possible way to create a similar activity with additional readings rather than with additional people.

Following is my vision of this introductory activity:

Students would read the play *Othello* and then read two essays with contradictory interpretations of the play (for example): W.H. Auden's *The Joker in the Pack*, and Carol Thomas Neely's *Women and Men in Othello*. By looking at these two interpretations of *Othello*, students will experience two completely different views of the same play. The initial classes will likely demand some explanatory lecture regarding plot, the additional readings and the essence of their difference, in addition to an explanation of the class itself. Students should understand up front the purpose and theory behind the course structure. They deserve to know what the course will demand from them and offer to them, and further that they will in part determine the course direction.

Upon completion of the reading, students could compose a paragraph-to-page essay about their perceptions of the debate or the text in terms of the debate. Once in class, the instructor might break them into groups, asking each group to determine an important fundamental question they wish to examine. The next step might entail each group's presentation of their

question. Eventually, the discussion will include the entire class. The amount of time spent on this activity and the transition into a large class discussion will depend completely on the particular class. For some students, this process will be easy and for others, challenging. Some students will jump right into heated debates while others will be reticent to voice their ideas at all. The structure of this course, from the first to last day, will be determined in large part by the students. Each class will be different and each will benefit from a slightly different format or emphasis. The instructor's involved participation is important in the small groups and class discussions to encourage students to ask more questions, contribute their ideas, and begin to create sample seed questions. As opposed to the approach in which the instructor argues one interpretation of a given play for the duration of the class, here the instructor encourages students to evaluate contradictory interpretations before drawing conclusions.

This activity has the potential to do a number of important things: 1) Invite students into the experts' arguments; this is an empowering gesture that tells students they are capable enough to participate in a real academic debate. 2) Introduce them to two different examples of literary analyses, giving them specific ideas of what it will entail to produce their own analyses. 3) Present them with the issue of gender and feminism, without introducing it as the only approach. 4) Encourage them to see that there is no right way to interpret *Othello* or any other Shakespearean play.

The conflict, as Graff notes, is likely to make the play itself seem more interesting and more alive, while it will also make the experts, like Neely and Auden, seem less perfect, more human, and thus more accessible. At this point, we can examine the two approaches and how they might emerge in the classroom.

According to Carol Thomas Neely, gender relationships, specifically love relationships, substantiate the heart of the *Tragedy of Othello*. W. H. Auden, on the other hand, argues the epicenter of thematic importance in the play is Iago. From the general conclusions to the specific observations, Neely and Auden differ on every aspect of their respective interpretations of this play, beginning with the first lines in each of their essays:

Relations between love, sexuality, and marriage are under scrutiny in *Othello* . . . we see here the idealization and degradation of sexuality, the disintegration of male authority and the loss of female power, the isolation of men and women, and the association of sexual consummation with death (Neely 91).

Any consideration of the *Tragedy of Othello* must be primarily occupied, not with its official hero but with its villain. I cannot think of any other play in which only one character performs personal actions----all the deeds are Iago's---and all the others without exception only exhibit behavior (Auden 75).

In reading the first lines of each essay, students have already experienced two radically different approaches to the same play. With Neely's essay, students can read the words of a true feminist, a widely read, yet simultaneously criticized Shakespearean critic. She views the entire play through the gender roles and power structures created in male and female relationships. Neely's essay draws attention to issues of gender that many students might not otherwise notice. The instructor might ask questions that push students to consider the issues: Did you observe these issues in your reading of *Othello*? Now that you read Neely's argument, do you recognize the issues, and if so, do her points make sense?

Neely's commentary tends towards a view of man as the oppressor and the avenger, and woman as the oppressed yet ever harmonious peacemaker. She asserts that men's sense of identity is dependent on their relations, not only with women, but also with men: "Vanity, rivalry, and dependence characterize the relations among all the men in the play"(Neely 102): 'Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard, / jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel, / Seeking the bubble reputation / Even in the cannon's mouth" (2.7.149-52). According to Neely, men achieve the reputation and manliness they covet through competition. The jealousy and violence between men and in their treatment of women is sharply contrasted with the relationships of women: "The women, in contrast, are indifferent to reputation and partially free of vanity, jealousy, and competitiveness" (Neely 106). In reading this essay, students see each character and angle of the play through the interaction between men and women.

This is a place where additional lecture or explanation about the theory and its main arguments might assist students in grasping Neely's essay. In order for students to interrogate the theory and possibly apply it to their own life experiences, they must first understand it. Neely's observations and arguments are extreme and passionate, and consequently, students reactions are likely to be the same. The challenge will be in inviting those reactions into the discussion. Encouraging students to articulate their reactions, regardless of the nature of their views may be a difficult task. In some situations, professors will struggle to convince students to share their reactions, and in others, the instructor might participate in or mediate a debate.

Throughout Neely's essay, students will read surprisingly little about Iago, the character around which Auden builds his essay. Neely's only mention of Iago is in terms of his perception, interaction, or treatment of women: "Like the others, he is careful not to contaminate his fantasies about women with facts . . . yet even protected as it is from reality,

Iago's cynicism/misogyny has cracks"(Neely 99). Her discussion of him serves to further degrade the poor state of the men in this play and to clear him of any thematic importance before she returns her attention to the discussion of the gender relationships. It might be interesting to add further commentary to this discussion by citing a critic of the critic: "No objection the reader thinks, until we see that this shift focus again minimizes Iago, virtually writes him out of the play. Neely briefly judges Act II 'a repetition of Act I' without having discussed either . . . Neely's fastidious aesthetic judgements seem to prevent her from actually noticing what happens in the play" (Vickers 356). In this way, students are able to gain a sense of the extensive and heated debates over meaning, interpretation, and thematic importance, in which critics engage in writing. While placing Auden and Neely's approaches side by side allows students to investigate differences, observing direct conflict, even in writing, brings the issue into greater focus. It also will better inform their investigation of Neely and Auden's contradictory essays. At this point, the instructor might propose questions that ask them to consider the debate: Who is right? Which argument makes better sense to you? Creating a dialogue amongst the different theories invites students to consider their own perceptions of the theories and the experiences that affect their perceptions.

Auden, as opposed to Neely, places Iago at the centerpiece of any study of *Othello*. His entire discussion centers on Iago's possible motive and his mastery of manipulation as Auden deems him a remarkably powerful and important villain. He cites Iago's incredible ability to deceive each of the characters in the play and perhaps even himself. Like Neely, Auden also gives attention to other characters in the play only to dismiss them as weak and unimportant so that he may return to a discussion of Iago, "the sole agent of the play" (Auden 88). Each critic

remains one-sided in his or her view. Auden discusses every aspect of Iago's character as he deems him, not the evil villain, but rather, "the joker in the pack." It might also be interesting to cite a critic of Auden's essay: "Auden, in one of his most puzzling critical essays, found in Iago the apotheosis of the practical joker, which I find inexplicable (Bloom 435)." Observing that even the experts' cannot agree on the right answer encourages students to dismiss the idea that there is only one "right" answer. This activity invites students to share their perceptions of the text, both similar and contradictory, and their perceptions of the critic's argument.

In order to take a more detailed look at the differing approaches and to push students to evaluate and read the lines each critic cites, it makes sense to compare Auden and Neely's observations of one character, for example Desdemona. Auden's picture of Desdemona completely contrasts that of Neely's: "Everybody must pity Desdemona, but I cannot bring myself to like her. Her determination to marry Othello seems the romantic crush of a silly schoolgirl rather than a mature affection . . . her deception of her own father makes an unpleasant impression" (Auden 88). Auden views Desdemona as a weak, destructive female with a serious lack of character.

Neely sees Desdemona as strong, realistic, compliant and as the picture of a loving wife: "She loves Othello for his body and mind, for his reputation and actions; she consecrates herself to him spiritually and practically" (Neely 101). Neely claims Desdemona's spirit, clarity, and realism do not desert her in the second half of the play, but rather are taken from her by Othello: "Her inability to defend herself is partly the result of Othello's refusal to voice his suspicions" (101). Like Farwell, Neely sees Desdemona as a brave woman, who rebels against her father and society in order to be with the man she loves, a young woman who refuses to let society and patriarchy control her life.

These two comparisons will place students on either side of the fence, as they will open the door to their own personal experiences. The instructor might ask them challenging questions: Do you think it is valid to apply these ideas to your personal experiences? Is it valid to evaluate gender in the context of this play? What do you think of the character of Desdemona? Why? What lines and scenes support your idea? As they struggle through specific lines and words to make their points, they will develop and expand their understanding of the character of Desdemona.

This activity will provide students and the instructor with an idea of how the course will progress and what will be required of them. In reality, we cannot know how the Inquiry-Based Approach will look and feel until we are actually in the class. Each class will demand a slightly different approach and will follow a unique direction. In the course of a term, students would read approximately three plays in addition to outside readings. These additional readings would vary, but have as their goal to encourage students to consider a multitude of issues in association with a given play. Further, the reading should assist students in developing productive seed questions. For example, the instructor might assign a historical essay outlining women's roles in Elizabethan England, cross-dressing in Shakespeare performances, or Shakespeare's biography. The readings should enable students to draw parallels between the text, history, and today. However, explanatory lecture will be necessary to field both historical and literary questions that arise throughout the course. The instructor will need to provide whatever background or explanation is unaccounted for in readings or unclear to students. However, discussions ignited and developed by student seed questions will be the foundation of a course guided by this approach.

Part III Conclusions

This section has been the hardest to write because in essence it seems to contradict my project as a whole. I began with a question and then examined that question from every angle I could identify. I approached this project from an Inquiry-Based Approach, and I have undoubtedly progressed in my understanding of my own personal experience in England and the question of gender in the classroom. Further, I have an idea of elements an ideal class might include. However, I do not have the slightest idea how to get there. There are a number of approaches, styles, and specific activities that bring Shakespeare to life for students, both academically and personally. There are approaches faithful to the text and students. Determining the best approach depends on a number of factors, all of which change constantly: students, social issues, class size, etc. Therefore, to outline a specific approach and articulate how it would play out in the classroom is impossible. Yet, the Inquiry-Based Approach is one specific approach that I believe could change the nature of the classroom.

Regardless of the specific activities, readings or class structure, I believe each Shakespeare course is obligated to provide certain things for students. I also believe that structuring the class as an inquiry rather than an information exchange is a powerful and effective way to invite students into Shakespeare and the process of a literary analysis. It is also one of the only ways to approach gender or any other mildly controversial topic that includes all students and sets the tone for an investigation that seeks, not to prove an argument, but rather to find truth. An inquiry demands student participation, in class and out; it forces students to embrace conflict and instructors to consider perspectives other than their own; it invites students to believe they are capable enough to make an inquiry of their own; it grants the conflicts in

literature and students' experiences a dialogue in one classroom; it requires students to do more than show up for class, take notes, and meet the requirements; it demands they read, think, and struggle to understand and communicate their ideas. It promises to make a class an experience, rather than a requirement for students and instructors.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

In the midst of writing my thesis, and as I completed my investigation of approaches to teaching Shakespeare at the University of Oregon, I found myself almost ready to answer my initial question about how Shakespeare should be taught in terms of gender. I reached the culmination of my planned research and needed to wrap up my project with an answer to the question I set out to investigate. At the precise moment in which I began to type my “answer,” I had a frightening realization that there was no answer. This realization ultimately helped me to understand the value of my project and my education, and fortunately, I wrote the experience down on paper. Originally intended to be a journal entry for my reflection only, this excerpt of sorts now serves as the honest narrative that ties my project together.

Following is this excerpt:

<< How could I, a 23 year-old student without a college degree, let alone a day of experience as a teacher, presume to answer a question that professors who have lived, breathed, and studied nothing else for decades cannot answer. With all the different issues facing professors and educators today, how could they begin to decide on the most effective way to teach Shakespeare, if such a way even exists. There is no best way to teach literature. Somehow, as I reach the end of my project, I find myself filled with doubt, uncertainty, and the fear that there is no answer to my question. But before I fall to the ground with the devastating realization that I have wasted a year on a project I am not even qualified to begin, I remember the most exciting thing about education-----the simple fact that there is no single answer, that the

possibilities are unlimited. As I have become a good student and learned to write an effective persuasive paper, I almost forgot the point of my project. It was not to ask a question, research all the possibilities, pick the best answer and then prove its correctness. The purpose of my project was to evaluate questions that resulted from my own personal experience, and to progress forward, to propose questions and ideas that might bring some new or different light to an old problem. The pure fact that I find myself at a place of uncertainty somehow gives me much greater clarity. I have progressed forward in my attempt to understand my own experience and in my greater project.

After all my research and reading, I have realized exactly what it is was that I found so troubling about my experience at Oxford. While reading an excerpt from Gerald Graff's, "Organizing the Conflicts in the Curriculum," it hit me that Graff was describing the student I was becoming.

There is the student who took an art history course and whose instructor observed one day, "As you know, the idea that truth can be objective is a myth that has been exploded by postmodern thought." It so happened this student was also enrolled in a political science course in which the instructor spoke confidently about the objectivity of his discipline, as if the news that objectivity had been exploded had not reached him. What did you do, the student was asked?" "What else could I do?" he replied. "I trashed objectivity in the one course and presupposed it in the other." Another story concerns a history course where the teacher insisted on the superiority of Western culture in developing the ideas of freedom, democracy, and free-market capitalism that the rest of the world was now clamoring to imitate; she was also taking a course with a literature teacher

who described Western culture as a hegemonic system that had unjustly arrogated to itself the right to police the world. When asked which course she preferred, her response was, “Well, I’m getting an A in both” (Graff 129).

As I read Graff’s description of the situations that might leave some professors convinced that students have become cynical relativists who care more about grades than about learning to form their own convictions, it hit me. I was the student he was describing. I grew so confused and frustrated with the seemingly senseless contradictions between the two professors in Oxford that I lost faith not only in education, but also in my own ability to interpret the literature. I simply gave each teacher what he or she wanted. In my papers, I wrote about the female voice, men’s fear of women’s sexuality, and Shakespeare as a quasi-feminist. In my final exam essays and in the lecture, I became a traditionalist and observed nothing in the way of gender issues. I needed to do well in my abroad program; I had aspirations of going to graduate school, and I went for the grade. I wish I could say I had done the noble thing, that I had struggled with my professors and the texts to make sense of the contradictions. Instead I left the class with an A, from both the tutorial and the lecture, and a sense of disillusionment in what I loved--- education.

While I cannot bring years of knowledge and teaching experience to this project, I can bring the perspective of the student who understands precisely what it is like to experience the “conflicts” that Gerald Graff explains in essay after essay. I can also bring the voice and mind of a person who knows what it is like to be on the outside of what often feels like an exclusive academic club, the one only professors and people with numerous degrees and titles next to their names are qualified to join. I cannot say what the most effective way to teach Shakespeare in terms of gender would be. However, I can claim to know what the most effective way to reach

me and other students like me would be. Upon understanding my experience in England, I discover my own qualifications for conducting this project>>

Acknowledging my personal connection with this project and my undergraduate experience as a whole enabled me to complete my project. It also helped me to identify the most important components of education as I see them: a personal connection with the material and the educational experience; a reflection upon that material and experience; and a dialogue about it all. It is only in reflecting upon my experiences in England, this project, and my undergraduate education as a whole that all the fragments in my research and education seem to make sense. It is in struggling against my education that I discover its value. It is in searching for one answer to this confusing question about critical approaches to literature that I realize the answer exists in the conflicts themselves.

The problem is not that all the approaches to Shakespeare exist. In fact, the multitude of approaches is an incredible strength. The problem is in the way the conflicting ideas and approaches co-exist: in separate and divided courses, supported by different professors and theories. They co-exist without a dialogue to connect them. This project, in essence a reflection upon my own education, enabled me to create a dialogue amongst all of the experiences of my undergraduate education. It allowed me to bring all the ideas and conflicting theories together and to evaluate them in the context of my own experience as a student, as I see them in retrospect. It made it possible for me to put all the pieces of my education together.

But, what about all the students who never experience the challenge, frustration and unbelievable benefit of completing a retrospective analysis of their education. I have several friends who graduated from college in the past year with degrees in English or other liberal arts, and many of them share a common disillusionment about their education. They have degrees but

no sense of what a degree represents other than the completion of all their requirements. They have all the pieces, but no idea how they go together.

In retrospect, my project comes together, and my education is redeemed. Perhaps each student should write a reflection upon their education before they receive a degree. Maybe fulfilling all the requirements does not complete an education. Or maybe we should strive to create a dialogue about the conflict that exists in our educational system, our critical approaches to literature, and ourselves. If we embrace the conflict in our systems and our society, instead of running from it, we may find that the contradictions are precisely what make education and life worthwhile.

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