

**Theorizing Shakespearean Adaptations  
Course Study Questions / Mid-Term and Final Exams  
ENGL\*6412 and/or DRMA\*6100**

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Please note that, as stated in class and on the course outline, these study questions will play a crucial role in course evaluations, especially in relation to seminar work. Keep these questions in a folder along with your course outline and course notes and take some time each week to read the questions and think them through in relation to course materials. Questions generally will relate to the intellectual content of each week's lectures/classes/discussions.

## **Week 1: Developing a Critical Vocabulary / Shakespeare and Adaptation**

1. Is it possible to distinguish the writer Shakespeare from the writing effect that is Shakespearean?
2. If power and empire are transacted through language (as well as other means, of course), how important is it to understand Shakespearean language as a marker of linguistic achievement and thus of access to power?
3. How possible/desirable is it to detach Shakespeare from the category inscribed as ‘dead white male author’? Is it possible/desirable to rewrite Shakespeare as a political, literary, cultural effect via adaptation into different national, political, and cultural sites? Is such an act of potential resistance meaningful? How? Why?
4. Is it possible to conceive of Shakespeare as a purely aesthetic entity, detached from all ideology? What is the value of a Shakespeare conceived of as above politics?
5. Why have early modern studies been a fruitful site for critical theory? How does Shakespeare factor into the mix?
6. What are some of the reasons Shakespeare is used in advertising?
7. How would you define adaptation via the seemingly contradictory definitions offered up in Hutcheon and Fischlin and Fortier? (see Hutcheon p. 9 for the main locus of contradiction.) Give examples.
8. Why does adaptation matter as a theoretical construct? How does it fracture/conform to theoretical orthodoxies?

## **Week 2: Davin, Nationalism, First Nations, and the Ideology of Adaptation**

1. Consider notions of aboriginality, indigeneity, and First Nations in relation to the ideologies traditionally associated with Shakespeare. What do Canadian adaptations tell us about these words and how they signify?
2. How has the definition of "race" changed or developed over time? What is Shakespeare's connection to ideas of race, or to relations between different races/cultures? Locate this discussion in specific examples drawn from Shakespeare's work.
3. Discuss the connection between the establishment of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and Canada's elite industrialists in 1953?
4. Define and comment on the sublime object of ideology and/or the transcendental signifier in relation to the Shakespeare effect. Give examples. How are these terms useful theoretically when considering the colonial, the "post"-colonial and the neocolonial?
5. Shakespearean affiliations cut across history and cultures. How does the example of Nicholas Flood Davin's adaptation *The Fair Grit* exemplify the way in which Shakespeare circulates historically?
6. How does the Shakespearean original *Romeo and Juliet* compare to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Canadian adaptation *The Fair Grit*? How does the sense of adaptation as 'this is and is not Shakespeare' work when thinking about what Davin "does" to Shakespeare via his reshaping?

### **Week 3: Lorca's *The Public*: Eros, Thanatos, Duende**

1. What's the connection between Shakespeare and nationalism? How does this figure in Lorca's *The Public*?
2. What's the role of *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Public*? How does this relate to modernism? Are other Shakespearean plays figured in *The Public*? Name them and discuss how they are used.
3. Consider erotic moments and language in *The Public*. Give examples. What is their connection to Shakespeare?
4. Define the following with relation to Shakespeare generally and *The Public* specifically: the inexpressibility *topos*; modernism; nationalism. Why are these terms useful in discussing Shakespearean adaptations. Give examples.
5. Lorca describes *The Public* as “impossible theatre”. Discuss in relation to how he adapts Shakespeare.
6. How is the erotic energy of Romeo and Juliet converted into knowledge of *death* and thanatos and *duende* in Lorca's play. Define *thanatos* and *duende* and relate to specific moments in *The Public*. How does Lorca's critique of erotic reductionism manifest itself? How is this critique and adaptation of or a response to similar strategies evident in Shakespeare?

## **Week 4: Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*: Popular Culture and Shakespearean Adaptation**

1. Define intertextuality. How is it used in Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*? What types of meaning are produced? Use either other films or other texts that the Luhrmann film points us toward.
2. Baz Luhrmann: "Let's make this movie rambunctious, sexy, violent, and entertaining the way Shakespeare might have if he had been a filmmaker." What connections are there between Luhrmann's film and Shakespeare's early modern theatrical world? Give examples.
3. What are some of the connections between real and/or signified violence and religion? How do religion and violence relate to ideas of *eros* and *thanatos* in the film? How would you connect these ideas to the notion of the sublime object of ideology.
4. Consider some of the ways race, ethnicity, and sexuality are represented in the film. Give examples.
5. Define parody and pastiche. Give examples of how each works in Luhrmann's adaptation.
6. Discuss how the language of film adaptation differs and/or is similar to written adaptations? What occurs when texts are adapted to a visual medium that has a specific connection to mass media and popular culture? Use specific examples from the Luhrmann film.

## **Week 5: *This Island's Mine* / Queer Adaptation**

1. How is *The Tempest* appropriated in Osment's *This Island's Mine* and Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* into discourses of gay, lesbian, and queer pride and empowerment? Situate Osment and Jarman in relation to discourses of queer empowerment via Shakespeare.
2. Explore the hidden identities within *This Island's Mine* and *The Public*. Focus specifically on the connections of these identities to the idea of the theatre beneath the sand.
3. Consider Stratford's representations of Ariel and Caliban in the production you saw. How do they relate to some of the other topics discussed this week?
4. What's the significance of the title, "*This Island's Mine*"? Explain with examples from the text.
5. Discuss Clause 28 in relation to artists (The Smiths, Boy George, Philip Osment, etc.) who sought its abolishment via their art: how would you situate Rufus Wainwright's interpretation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 in relation to these earlier artists? Do a reading of the sonnet from Wainwright's interpretive perspective.
6. *This Island's Mine* situates itself in relation to a number of different histories, including the appearance of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, the Labour movement, the history of transnationals' irresponsibility with regard to the majority world, and the rise of fascism. Identify key moments in the text where these histories get figured.
7. A particular focus of *This Island's Mine* is on ethnicity and gender. Selwyn, the gay black actor is cast as Caliban in the play within the play that is so important to the overall structure of Osment's work. Comment on the play as meta-theatre (theatre about theatre) and on what you think the play is doing by situating Caliban as a gay black male.

## **Week 6: *Forbidden Planet* / Adaptation and Science Fiction**

1. Consider how Altaira, the Miranda character in *Forbidden Planet*, is represented in terms of 1950s gender politics. Compare her to other representations of Miranda we've seen. What is the significance of her being named after the planet her father colonized?
2. Also consider how Ferdinand is re-imagined as Commander *Adams*. What's the significance of his name? (In *Battlestar Galactica*, Canadian Shakespearean actor, Lorne Greene, plays Commander *Adama*. Can you think of other examples?) What's the connection between Science Fiction, colonial narratives, and the Genesis myth?
3. Compare the “Caliban” monster and Robby the Robot to other representations of Caliban and Ariel. How does this change the power relationships in the film?
4. What are the relations among the following key terms: Science Fiction, magic, technology? Discuss in relation to *The Tempest* and *Forbidden Planet*. How do these texts address issues related to colonialism and empire via these key terms?
5. *The Tempest* figures inverted, incomplete family relationships: Prospero and Miranda (no mother) and Caliban and Sycorax (no father with Sycorax only mentioned twice in the play, Acts 1 and 3, scene 2). Discuss these relations in relation to how *This Island's Mine* and *Forbidden Planet* deal with family relations. Use specific scenes to focus your discussion. What kinds of family power dynamics occur in the adaptations and how do they mirror what goes on in *The Tempest*?
6. In all of *The Tempest*'s adaptations Miranda's comments about a “brave new world” are amplified. Discuss this with specific examples from specific adaptations.
7. Comment on Miranda as a symbolic figure—the only visible woman in Shakespeare's final play. How do adaptations play with this symbolism and do new things with it?

## Week 7: Shakespeare and Cultural Literacy Mid-Term (40%)

Please note that grammar, proper punctuation, and spelling will be factored in to how the mid-term is marked. No email attachments will be accepted and all submissions should be typed.

Short Answer (worth 20%): Answer **10** of the following 12 short questions. Explain or define, and comment briefly (no more than one paragraph) on the following. Use examples derived from class lectures and notes and the CASP website. Be sure to make connections between the examples and the content of your answer. Every answer should be situated with regard to at least one Shakespearean text or adaptation.

1. Duende
2. Selwyn and Caliban
3. Buffy and the St. Crispin's Day speech from *Henry V*
4. "Why don't you go ahead and kiss me like everyone else does?"
5. Shakespeare and the Family Compact
6. "O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you."
7. Utopia and Dystopia.
8. Adaptation and ideology.
9. What is the Shakespeare effect?
10. The sublime object of ideology and/or the transcendental signifier.
11. "Theatre beneath the sand."
12. Define the difference between cultural materialism and historical materialism.  
Cite examples from Shakespeare texts studied over the term.

Long Answer (worth 20%): Answer **5** of the following longer answer questions. Answers should be one to two pages long. Be concise. Check grammar and spelling. Make sure you perform at least one close reading of a key passage in each answer. Don't be afraid to follow your own interests or to put a personal spin on your answers.

1. Explain how Shakespeare has been re-articulated in the interests of gay, lesbian, and queer rights in *Romeo + Juliet* and *This Island's Mine*.
2. What is the relationship between erotic energy (*eros*) and death (*thanatos*) in *The Fair Grit*, *Romeo + Juliet*, and *The Public*?
3. How is Caliban represented in the following: *This Island's Mine*, *Forbidden Planet*, Stratford's *The Tempest*, and David Garneau's painting? What are the significances? Why do these representations matter?

4. What are some of the meta-theatrical or post-modern elements in *Romeo + Juliet*, *This Islands Mine*, and *The Public*? What is their effect?
5. Branagh's *Henry V*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Shakespeare and the arms industry: comment on the connections.
6. How are empire, Shakespeare, and adaptation connected terms? Argue for or against the relationship between Shakespeare and empire? Cite at least one example.
7. Discuss how the language of film adaptation differs and/or is similar to written adaptations? What occurs when texts are adapted to a visual medium that has a specific connection to mass media and popular culture? Use specific examples from the Luhrmann or Wilcox films.
8. *This Island;s Mine* situates itself in relation to a number of different histories, including the appearance of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, the Labour movement, the history of trans-nationals' irresponsibility with regard to the majority world, and the rise of fascism. Identify key moments in the text where these histories get figured.

Bonus Questions: (do any **one** of the three—marks for creativity, ingenuity, and low [or high] cunning)

1. “And now our bodies are oh so close and tight  
 It never felt so good, it never felt so right  
 And we're glowing like the metal on the edge of a knife  
 Glowing like the metal on the edge of a knife  
 C'mon, hold on tight  
 C'mon, hold on tight  
 Though it's cold and lonely in the deep dark night  
 I can see paradise by the dashboard light”  
 --Meat Loaf “Paradise by the Dashboard Light”

How does this lyric apply to **three** texts or performances covered so far in this course?

2. Describe what a Shakespeare video game might look like based on a plot adaptation and using innovative game features. How would you deal with gender? Politics? Literacy? Historical context? Describe your audience and what your game design does to attract that audience.
3. Do an abridged adaptation of a Shakespeare play aimed at Canadians, about Canadians.

## **Week 8: Auteur Theory: Welles and Kurosawa: *Macbeth*, *Throne of Blood*, and Wartime Adaptations**

1. Define the following key terms and discuss their usage in Welles's *Macbeth*: chiaroscuro, bravura, *auteur*.
2. In the period immediately after Auschwitz, the Holocaust, the Atom Bomb, the horrors of the Second World War, the conditions for making art changed. Discuss this change in relation to Welles's *Macbeth* and what the film says about war and the human condition.
3. *Auteur* theory is based on a conundrum: the individual "genius" of the author gets fore-grounded at the expense of the collaborators who make that author's vision possible. Discuss how Welles addresses this conundrum in *Macbeth*. What techniques does he use to undercut his own position as *auteur*?
4. Why is Shakespeare's "original" play *Macbeth* such an effective vehicle for adaptation, especially in relation to issues of power, kingship (leadership), and war? Give examples from Welles and Kurosawa.
5. Discuss the use of Noh theatrical techniques in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* adaptation of *Macbeth*. Why is this technique aesthetically effective? How does it parallel what Welles achieves in his own adaptation.
6. Discuss and compare the immediate historical contexts for Welles's and Kurosawa's adaptations of *Macbeth*. How are they similar/different? How do they reflect on the historical conditions surrounding the writing of Shakespeare's "original"?

## Week 9: Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* and Msomi's *uMabatha*

1. Discuss the two main influences on Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*. How are these influences relevant to Kurosawa's adaptation of Shakespeare?
2. Msomi's *uMabatha* is important because of its historical position in relation to apartheid. Discuss.
3. Discuss briefly the history of "doing" Shakespeare in South Africa and relate to Msomi's work.
4. Elaborate on what are the key points of intersection and difference with Shakespeare in Msomi's play.
5. Colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and resistance are all figured in Msomi's play and the historical contexts that it speaks to. Discuss using specific examples.
6. "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." (Nelson Mandela *Long Walk to Freedom*)

"Education is the most powerful weapon ... you can use to change the world."

How do these comments relate to the Shakespearean contexts of Msomi's play—especially in relation to earlier *Macbeth* adaptations we have studied?

**Week 10: Billy Morrissette's *Scotland, PA* (2001; Sundance Festival): Fringe Shakespeare / Made in America**

1. Both *uMabatha* and Welles's 1936 voodoo version of *Macbeth* point to the revolutionary ways in which the play has been used in emancipation struggles. Comment on this use with particular attention to the specific historic circumstances surrounding the play's stagings.
2. Compare the way in which Morrissette's adaptation works as a low culture, white trash version of other versions of *Macbeth* we have studied. What is coded in the way in which white trash culture is represented by the film? How does this reflect on 'adapting Shakespeare'?
3. What features of *Scotland, PA* make it a successful/failed adaptation? The movie is set in 1970s and as such is connected to the Nixon presidency. Do you see the movie commenting in any significant way on the historical moment in which it is set?
4. In *Scotland, PA*, the three witches are figured as hippies. Other forms of parody exist in the film (including Christopher Walken's hilarious take on McDuff as a vegan detective) and the film seems to be based on a satiric representation of "adolescent approaches to the Bard and his consumption by the American high-school curriculum" — Shakespeare dumbed-down. Shakespearean adaptation as cultural narcissism. Agree or disagree?
5. The film was Morrissette's first and it was shot in Nova Scotia. Comment on how this setting transposition to Canada (and Canada's only province with a direct name connection to Scotland—Nova Scotia means "New Scotland") further alters the adaptive/interpretative contexts. Is Morrissette saying something about what it means to "make" Shakespeare in America?
6. Parodic comedy that it is, *Scotland, PA* presents *Macbeth* adapted as the progenitor of Macdonald's fast food and drive-through restaurants. What is the connection between fast food and literary cultures of consumption that the film seems to imply?

**Week 11: Djanet Sears, *Harlem Duet*\* (1996): “Hear My Train a Comin’”: *Othello*, Jimi Hendrix, and Racism**

1. Identify other cultural texts in which the trope of miscegenation is active? How does *Harlem Duet* adapt its own reading of racism in culture via its re-reading of Shakespeare?
2. D. W. Griffiths’ *Birth of a Nation* and Welles’s *Othello* are linked via filmic techniques and readings of race that re-play fears of attacks on national purity via ethnic difference and otherness. Discuss how Shakespeare’s role as a sublime object of ideology is used to reinforce and/or subvert the racist ideologies that are at the core of both films.
3. Queen Elizabeth’s 1601 edict ejecting “negars and blackamoors” from England is consistent with scapegoating strategies that are evident in *Othello* in images like that of the Black ram tugging a white ewe. Discuss how these are complicated by *Harlem Duet*’s adaptation of the play.
4. For what reasons are Ira Aldridge and Paul Robeson important to the history of playing *Othello*?
5. Jimi Hendrix’s “Hear My Train” tells what familiar story that can be linked to *Othello*. How many degrees of separation are there between the history of slavery and the struggle for emancipation and the story of *Othello* and how does *Harlem Duet* make this story all the more explicit?
6. *Harlem Duet* is a black diasporic adaptation of Shakespeare that reclaims all sorts of lost and marginalized histories. Discuss these with specific reference to the play’s production history in Canada and with specific reference to examples of key passages from the play.

## Week 12: Final Assignment

This exam has 3 sections—complete 4 of the eight short paragraph questions and ONE each of the close reading and comparative essay questions (Sections B and C). The exam is based on materials taught during the second half of the term and should use examples taken from that portion of the course (*Macbeth* and *Othello* adaptations).

Please do not overlap materials in Sections 2 and 3 of the assignment. Make sure your assignment is typed and carefully proofed.

Section A (20%): Explain or define, and comment briefly (no more than one paragraph) on the following. Use examples derived from class lectures and notes, the CASP website, or any texts we have covered in the second part of the course. Be sure to make connections between the examples and the content of your answer. Every answer should be situated with regard to at least one Shakespearean text or adaptation. Choose 4 of the following (5% each).

Chiaroscuro

Anti-war Shakespearean adaptations (holocaust)

Macbeth

Apartheid and Shakespeare

Miscegenation and Shakespeare

auteur theory

Nostalgia and film Voodoo

Noh theatre

Welles and Shakespeare

Globe-alization

Section B / Close Reading (10%): Do a close reading of ONE of the following passages. Your close reading should: situate the passage within the play from which it is taken, explain the passage's importance, analyze the passage's content and structure (that is, its language) for how these shed light on the larger issues the play addresses. Does the passage have its equivalent in the Shakespeare original? Finally, your close reading should demonstrate how your own critical voice is activated by the process of close reading—do not be afraid to speak your mind via close attention to the passage you choose for analysis.

1. The wise warrior strikes swiftly  
If he waits to smell out the danger  
The moment will pass away with this blow  
I kill all my fears and bury them in the dust.  
But out of the dust  
May rise more shadowy imps  
Who will seek to stain the earth with my blood ...

2. No, no. In America, this race shit is classic behavioural disorder. Obsessions. Phobias. Delusions. Notions of persecution. Delusions of grandeur. Any one or combinations of these can produce behaviours which categorize oneself as superior and another as inferior. You see, this kind of dysfunction is systematically supported by the larger society. Psychology only sees clients who can no longer function in society. We're all mad. We just appear to be functional.

Section C / Comparative Essay (10%): Answer one of the following making sure that your answer is comparative: you must use examples from at least two texts that allow you formulate a response. Your answer can compare, among others, historical context, close readings of similar/different passages from the works, adaptation techniques, ideological content, characters, writing techniques, and possible interpretations. Feel free to slant the answer in ways that suit your own interests.

1. Compare the way in which Billy Morrissette's adaptation works as a low culture, white trash version of other versions of *Macbeth* we have studied (Kurosawa and Welles). What is coded in the way in which white trash culture is represented by the film? How does this reflect on 'adapting Shakespeare by comparison with other adaptations studied in the second half of the course? Feel free to explore how the different visual languages of the various films create meaning.
2. Colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and resistance are all figured in Msomi's and Sears's plays and the historical contexts that they speak to. Discuss and compare using specific examples. Address the political implications of literary adaptations in your answer. Where do these two adaptations overlap in terms of deep structure? Where do they differ? Be sure to discuss issues of gender and historical circumstances that are relevant to these two adaptations.