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"Not For An Age, But For All Time:" Autobiography and a Re-origin of Shakespeare Studies in Canada

Abstract: Despite independence as a country, Canada belongs to the Commonwealth and has deep colonial roots and the British educational system was key in creating Canadian curricula. Given the centrality of Shakespeare's work in the British literary canon, it follows that it would also figure heavily in the academic requirements for Canadian students. At the dawn of the Confederation (1867), the high school curriculum used Shakespeare to emphasize a "humanist" approach to English literature using the traditional teaching methods of reading, rhetoric, and recitation. Presently, Shakespeare continues to be the only author in the high school curriculum to whom an independent area of study is dedicated. The origin of Shakespeare in Canada through curriculum and instruction is, thus, a result from the canonic tradition imported from Britain.

This traditional model no longer fits the imperative of multiculturalism, as reflected in the Canadian Constitution Act (1982). Yet, with the appropriate methodology Shakespeare's texts can be a vehicle for multiculturalism, social justice, and inclusivity. In light of recent disillusionments concerning the relevance of Shakespearean texts in high school curricula, this paper proposes an alternative pedagogical approach that envisages changing this paradigm and fostering a re-origin of Shakespeare studies in Canada through an intentional pedagogical process grounded in individual experience.

Scholarship has highlighted the importance of autobiographies in the learning process and curriculum theorists William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet designed a framework that prioritizes individual experience. Our approach to teaching Shakespeare's works aligns with the four steps of their *currere* method, presented as: (1) contemplative, (2) translational, (3) experiential, and (4) reconceptual, fostering an opportunity for self-transformation through trans-historical social themes present in the text.

The central argument is that Shakespeare's text can undergo a re-origin when lived, given its initial conception as embodied, enacted narrative in the early modern period. In this method, students immerse themselves in Shakespeare's text through films and stage productions and then manifest their interpretations by embodying the literature

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based on their autobiographical narratives. To undergo a re-origin in the Canadian secondary curriculum, current pedagogical approaches to teaching Shakespeare require a paradigm shift.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Shakespeare studies, Autobiographical theory, Canadian English curriculum, Secondary school, Literature

Shakespeare studies in Canada was based for decades on an inherited British curriculum. This paper examines the disillusionment with the applicability and relevance of these works for the contemporary classroom, along with the implications of retaining Shakespeare's oeuvre as essential literature in the Canadian curriculum. We begin with a historical account of the Canadian English curriculum, with special attention to the role of Shakespearean texts within a school system that has been transformed dramatically as the nation embraces a new reality—nearly unrecognizable from its colonial roots. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of Canadian constitutional decisions regarding diversity and multiculturalism that necessitate new approaches to Shakespeare. Although Shakespeare studies are normally connotative of a post-secondary discipline, we identify the origin of Shakespeare in Canada as situated within broader educational endeavours. Before it was established as a field of undergraduate and graduate studies, Shakespeare studies originated in the secondary classroom. It is in this broader educational sense that we approach Shakespeare studies in this paper.

We continue with an examination of autobiographical theory—an alternative educational approach that envisages retaining Shakespeare's work with the intent of imparting to students the inherent artistic value of his text, yet without compromising on social change. We conclude with a consideration of how this theoretical framework may be used to engage Shakespeare's texts in a transformative way and thus aid students in understanding the social issues embedded in the plays. In short, we advocate new opportunities for teaching Shakespeare to a diverse Canadian population, and suggest possibilities for reintroduction and a re-origin of Shakespeare studies in Canada.

For many, Shakespeare and his works are often connotative of white supremacist, heteronormative, colonialist, and patriarchal ideals due to the canonized representations of his plays. In reconceptualizing the origins of these texts, we endeavour to present them in the new light of autobiography and consequential education—an approach to curriculum and instruction that does the exact opposite of the stereotypes commonly associated with Shakespeare's works. Autobiography supports transformational goals such as decolonization, reconciliation, queer equality, intersectional feminism, accessibility, and mental health awareness, among others. As educators implement effective pedagogical

strategies, the process of reading, studying, and performing Shakespeare can once again become "not of an age, but for all time" (Ben Jonson).

Our paper advances autobiographical theory as a transformative collection of pedagogical exchanges that hold the potential to reintroduce and foment a re-origin of Shakespeare studies in Canadian curriculum and instruction. As historical texts become part of individual experiences and are intentionally framed as vehicles for social change, they can promote a cultural paradigm shift within the secondary and post-secondary contexts. Application of autobiographical theory to the curriculum and instruction of Shakespeare's narratives can, therefore, gradually reshape his texts to reflect contemporary social justice movements and thereby achieve consequential objectives inside and outside the classroom.

The Origins of Shakespeare Studies in the Canadian Curriculum

Despite independence as a country, Canada's colonial roots meant that the British educational system was key in developing Canadian curricula. This system still influences and is embraced by Canadian education due to Canada's position in the Commonwealth. Other British colonies, such as the United States of America, broke away from this model of teaching Shakespeare through wars of independence and created their own educational models. Given the centrality of Shakespeare's work in the British literary canon, it follows that it would also figure heavily in academic requirements of Commonwealth students, including those in Canada. At the dawn of Canadian Confederation (1867), the academically rigorous high school curriculum used Shakespeare to emphasize a "humanist" (Colarusso 219) approach to English literature using the traditional teaching methods of reading, rhetoric, and recitation. Shakespeare's works were also used to prioritize unity across Canadian provinces by using his allusions to Greek and Roman societies—both considered cradles of Western epistemology. In addition, Shakespeare continues to be the only author in the high school curriculum referred to as an independent area of study.

In reimagining curriculum and instruction in a much-changed nation, educators find themselves facing similar challenges to those experienced by social reconstructionist theorists in the second half of the twentieth century. Among these challenges is an issue that was never eradicated with the vigorous educational reform observed in North America in the last century: the disciplinarian tendency to regard certain canonized texts and the pedagogical methodologies involved in teaching them as final and immutable. This reluctance in promoting immediate change has often rendered curricula inflexible and learning outcomes either unmet or undesirable. While much of this tendency is a direct consequence of the inability to transcend the reductionism

and mechanistic perspectives of the Newtonian-Cartesian worldview as a society, education and its subfields have been actively deconstructing this paradigm.

The legacy of English playwright William Shakespeare is a prominent example of such a paradigm. His work has long been studied in the secondary classroom as a significant, and often unrivalled, specimen of English literature. The quality of Shakespeare's narrative and language demonstrates his keen ability to observe human nature and recreate it on stage. However, this ability has been shrouded by centuries of rigid pedagogies and overall treatment of children as nothing more than empty "vessels […] ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they [are] full to the brim" (Dickens 4), as described in *Hard Times*. Although this quotation depicts the average classroom in the Victorian era, ultimately this is the pedagogical model of repetition, memorization, and recitation that was inherited to teach Shakespeare at the turn of the twenty-first century and is still used today. Consequently, Shakespeare's work is often regarded as intimidating, inaccessible, and convoluted.

From Canada's infancy, less than thirty years after Confederation, Shakespeare held a prominent place in the Canadian education system. In his position as the Minister of Education for Ontario, The Honorable George W. Ross names the pinnacle of English literature multiple times in his publication, *The School System of Ontario (Canada): Its History and Distinctive Features* (1896), as a necessary and distinctive part of Canadian curriculum. During this time, to receive a first-class standing in secondary school students were to master texts from "the best English and American writers [including] The Ancient Mariner, from Coleridge; Evangeline, from Longfellow; The Merchant of Venice and Richard II, from Shakespeare [sic]" (Ross 76-77).

In the middle of the twentieth century, during the time Canada and the rest of the world were experiencing the horrors of World War II, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation decided to air original half-hour adaptations of Shakespeare's plays—in 1944 and 1945. The reason for this decision was due to "the perception that Shakespeare was appropriate broadcast material for Canadian youth" (Straznicky 94) that could bolster their educational experience and implicitly contribute to the war effort. These adaptations focus on Shakespeare's poetry and prose, not the plot, and all of the plays selected to be adapted and aired in this form were part of the secondary school curriculum. These included *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *Henry IV: Part One*. These abridged plays were aired during school hours on a show called *National School Broadcasts*, "Readings from Shakespeare," and had a small but very specific demographic. Although it is understandable that Ross and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation would promote British and American literature in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries—since Canada and its literary scene were both in their formative stages—it does not explain why these texts are still

foregrounded in the Canadian secondary curriculum. Today, Canada has a rich and diverse literary scene, but most students are not exposed to the breadth of Canadian literature until university.

The famed Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye, does connect the British-born bard to an element of Canadian nationalism. Published in 1957, Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* had an enormous impact on genre studies and utilized examples from Shakespeare to clarify his points. Frye continued to use Shakespeare "to work through his theories about literature […] and numerous essays have made him a towering figure in Shakespearean and in Canadian Cultural studies" (Makaryk 18). A notable figure in Canadian theoretical and literary studies, Frye's impact on Shakespeare's use in the classroom has a direct link to his writings, popularity, and a sense of Canadian nationalism. Frye is still hailed as a hometown hero in his birthplace of Moncton, New Brunswick, where students will study up to four Shakespeare plays at the secondary level, and his "central critical insights are easy to summarize and share with students" (Hawkins 132) in both secondary and post-secondary classrooms. The claiming of Northrop Frye as a paragon of Canadian literature and criticism means that Shakespeare is also central to the Canadian literary national framework.

Almost one hundred and thirty years after Ross's recommendations were published, the texts he references are still taught in secondary schools across Canada. Most notably, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is still routinely taught as the Shakespeare selection for grade twelve in the Canadian province of Alberta but is recommended by the *Alberta Authorized Resource List* (2004) to be taught in grade ten classes. In secondary school, Shakespeare is either recommended or required to be taught both at the university prerequisites levels—10-1, 20-1, and 30-1—and in classes that do not qualify for university entrance—10-2, 20-2, and 30-2 (Province of Alberta). It is not only *The Merchant of Venice* that makes the list, but every other play adapted and aired by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation from 1944-1945 remains in the secondary school curriculum—with the exception of *Richard II*.

Other than *The Merchant of Venice*, three other works from Shakespeare's oeuvre are included for grade ten instruction—*Julius Caesar*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. In grade eleven, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, and *As You Like It* are recommended for the 20-1 and 20-2 classes. In grade twelve, the recommended offerings are *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Henry IV: Part One*, and *The Tempest*. Furthermore, according to the current *English Language Arts Curriculum* (2003), Alberta students are required to complete a twentieth-century play—by the likes of Samuel Beckett or Arthur Miller—or a play by Shakespeare in 10-1, 10-2, 20-2, and 30-2 classes. In 20-1 and 30-1 classes, students are required to complete one Shakespeare play per year at a minimum (Province of Alberta). Since many university English

programs are shutting down across Canada, it is unlikely that many of these students will study Shakespeare again in their lifetime due to a move away from incorporating Shakespeare's plays into first-year English courses at the university level. The belief that students need to learn Shakespeare to thrive in university is no longer valid and, therefore, brings into question the need for studying Shakespeare at the secondary level—especially if it is not being used as a vehicle for social justice and change. It is not only the curriculum, however, that is to blame for the entrenched bardolatry in secondary classrooms.

Teachers also contribute to "'Shakespearituality'—a unique regenerative energy which they strive to pass on to their young students" (Colarusso 215) in the name of tradition. The bardolatry is not, however, entirely the fault of the teacher. From the ease of access to teaching aids to parents knowing what to expect in the classroom, there is an appeal to teaching Shakespeare using the same plays and the same methods. When inquiring students question the value of learning Shakespeare, it is common to reference his "[i]nimitable poetry, universal themes, empathy for the human condition, and [his] profound influence on language and culture" (Colarusso 216). Instead of addressing the root of why Shakespeare still permeates the curriculum, in an age of change partially instigated by The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), Canadian educators need to decolonize classroom texts, the Canadian educational system, and their own positionality. In their efforts towards reconciliation and decolonization, educators must first critique who decides that Shakespeare's poetry is "inimitable". Then they must examine if "universal themes" exist in a multicultural Canadian context and for which "human condition"—British, African-Canadian, Indigenous, etc.—Shakespeare creates empathy. Finally, they must consider the language and culture on which he has a "profound influence" and if that language and culture are representative of the multicultural mosaic Canada claims to be.

A New Educational Model

Transformations in the economic, political, and social landscape of Canada that have largely occurred over the last half century have frequently posed challenges for traditional models of education. Consequently, the standard literary texts belonging to the Western canon no longer fit the priority for multiculturalism, as reflected in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982. The Constitution of Canada is the overarching document that provides the legal basis for laws, bylaws, and institutional policies within national and provincial territories. The passing of the *British North America Act* of 1867 by the British Parliament (later retitled

Constitution Act, 1867) coincided with Confederation—a process through which Canada was officially established as a country. This document outlined the foundational approach to what was understood as the basis for social justice. Like other analogous official stances with a democratic political agenda inside and outside the Americas, the Constitution Act of 1867 results from the emerging sense of nationality felt in the nineteenth-century Western world. Despite its egalitarian aspirations rooted in Enlightenment philosophies of social justice, the first constitutional draft failed to account for a growingly nuanced social milieu in what would later become one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world.

Due to its lack of specificity regarding multiculturalism, the original Constitution Act of 1867 was reconceptualized as a new act in 1982. In its first portion—also known as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*—The Constitution Act of 1982 outlines a top-down initiative targeting less privileged social groups and demographics in the country that were not accounted for in 1867. Notably, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was also constitutionally entrenched with this amendment, unlike its predecessor, the *Canadian Bill of Rights*. This means that "the rights and freedoms of the Charter would be superior to infringing legislation" (Tarnopolsky 167), protect Canadians at a federal level, and be subject to judicial review. Not only did this second act further protect the general rights and freedoms of visible and invisible minorities but it also impacted various specific aspects of life and living for these populations, such as policy making and education. The document also proposes that laws which are inconsistent with these new propositions should have no legal effect (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms).

One element of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms stands out as particularly important in addressing the diversity of Canadian society. With regard to equality, the Charter has led to the recognition and enforcement of the rights of a number of minority and disadvantaged groups (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms). This element from the second Constitution Act not only targets diversity, but specifically addresses populations lacking the accessibility and privilege observed among those who still benefit from colonizing efforts. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms also targets specific areas:

> The Charter protects those basic rights and freedoms of all Canadians that are considered essential to preserving Canada as a free and democratic country. It applies to all governments—federal, provincial and territorial—and includes protection of the following: fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, the right to live and seek employment anywhere in Canada, legal rights (life, liberty, and personal security), equality rights for all, the official languages of Canada, minority language education rights, Canada's multicultural heritage, and Indigenous peoples' rights. (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms)

This section of the 1982 Constitution Act points to the need for intentionality in the implementation of diversity as well as to multiculturalism as a foundational principle of democracy.

With the intent to decolonize, and capitalize on the promise of The Charter, Canadian educators at various levels of instruction have had to reimagine pedagogical approaches, methodologies, practices, and theoretical frameworks to continue reaching all segments of the Canadian population. Education holds a significant potential for social transformation in the complex social fabric of Canadian society. The prospect of decolonizing Canada through education thus depends upon an intentional pedagogical endeavour rooted in intra- and inter-curricular shifts. This endeavour should necessarily differ from the traditional methods used to teach classical texts. While radical curriculum reconceptualizations were witnessed in various North American contexts and spanned a wide array of disciplines, the study of English literature has often been overlooked at the expense of meaningful student understanding of the material.

Ron Phillips (2019) suggests that provincial governments in Canada continue to have the most jurisdiction over educational matters, regardless of the imperatives contained in the Canadian Constitution. He argues that educational disparities and incompatibilities between provinces and territories work to the detriment of less privileged demographics, especially Indigenous populations (Phillips 4). Due to the misconception that the federal government has a lessened ability to interfere in educational decisions than the provincial government, local curriculum makers have taken multiple stances on curriculum development. Phillips states:

> The federal government has had constitutional responsibilities to First Nations since Confederation in 1867. However, for many years the federal government has chosen to ignore its constitutional responsibility in education because the establishment, development, and operation of an education system is expensive, requiring education structures, qualified personnel, and operating procedures. The federal government also allowed and encouraged Canadians and the international community to falsely believe that constitutionally education is exclusively a provincial jurisdiction. (Phillips 5)

This decentralized leadership poses an additional challenge for equitable efforts toward diversity nationwide. The impact of this multifocal regimen can also be felt at more rudimentary levels of instruction, such as catering for specific social contexts, lesson planning, classroom dynamics, individual needs for differentiation, etc.

Frequent changes in provincial government leadership as different political parties adopt a new mandate also pose a further complication to

educational stakeholders. Depending on the political party in power, the leadership dictates the desired outcomes of the curriculum, frequently to the detriment of minorities and marginalized populations. Budgetary fluctuations—in the form of cuts, removed support, and defunding of education within the province—are another major factor impacting the ability of curriculum makers to design feasible and sustainable outcomes, especially for Indigenous populations, high-risk urban areas, and isolated communities.

In particular, the study of literary works in Canada continues to prioritize authors in the British canon. The main reason for this perpetuation is arguably the retention of the colonizer's language along with the assumption that, since the main mode of communication has remained virtually unaltered, the traditional standards in place must still be applicable. It was not until the late twentieth century, and with the changes observed in social theories, that a need to reconceptualize curriculum approaches on a deeper level began to be more pervasively felt. In fact, some of these shifts only began impacting Canadian English curricula in the last few decades.

The widespread disenchantment regarding the validity of Shakespeare's work results in challenges to its pedagogical relevance in the English-speaking world. Some regional governments in Canada (CBC News Calgary; Simons) have opted to remove Shakespeare as a foundational text from the curriculum altogether (Brean; Province of Ontario). These pieces have emphasized the irrelevance of allegedly stagnated texts to today's classroom and have strived to overthrow them as a literary legacy that points directly to a colonizing pedagogy and is delivered in a colonial tone. This process unfortunately lies at the root of intergenerational trauma and pain for Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities. Since the origin of Shakespeare studies in Canada is thus situated, a reintroduction or re-origin of these texts into the current social context is necessary to renew and reconceptualize their intrinsic literary and artistic value.

Autobiography as a Theoretical Alternative

In light of recent disillusionments concerning the relevance of Shakespeare studies in provincial high school curricula, this article proposes an alternative pedagogical approach that envisages changing the educational scenario that circumvents meaningful teaching for diverse populations. This general discontent entails a tripartite claim, consisting of (1) the inaccessibility of Shakespeare's language, (2) the historical distance between the narrative and the present reality, and (3) the inherent biases embedded in Shakespeare's plays. Yet much of the alleged stagnation of early modern plays stems from inadequate approaches to this genre of literature, generating poor student understanding and overall challenges with the language and semantics of the text.

In advocating for the continued significance of Shakespeare's work not only as intrinsically valuable literature but its original conception as rehearsed, embodied, enacted, and performed narrative, we point to the importance of exposing students to lived experiences of these texts. Furthermore, in emphasizing its relevance as a collection of narratives that still dramatically influences Western literature, we explore the potential applicability of these works to current social paradigms. With the appropriate methodology, Shakespeare's texts can be reintroduced as a vehicle for heightened multiculturalism, social justice, inclusivity, and change.

Reconceptualist scholarship in curriculum studies has highlighted the importance of autobiographies in the learning process. Reconceptualism, also known as social reconstructionism, is identified as one of the four waves of curriculum reform in North America and one of the most radical approaches to changing instruction. With its roots in social theories, the movement gained momentum in the mid-twentieth century and still instigates reform and change (Kliebard 154). Autobiographical theory (or *currere* method) is an all-encompassing theoretical framework that prioritizes individual experience (Miller 61). One of the hallmarks of the theory is its amalgamation of several reconceptualist social theories within and without the realm of education. It merges progressive tenets that stemmed from poststructuralism and postmodernism during the twentieth century and that are reflective of the philosophical, political, and social changes witnessed globally during this historical period with social fragmentation, cultural pluralism, and coexistence of differences. Autobiographical theory's combined use of postcolonialism, feminism, critical race theory, and queer theory, among many others, has rendered it a thorough and multifaceted framework with a priority for deconstruction and transformation. This theoretical richness and completeness is possible due to autobiography's focus on the self and its priority for the individual experience as a unique and valuable version of reality. In fostering heightened consciousness in the process of understanding external phenomena, autobiographical theory creates an opportunity for deeper, more meaningful, and lasting connections with people, events, and concepts outside the self.

Initially proposed by William Pinar (1994; 2004) and Madeleine Grumet (1981) in the 1970s, autobiographical theory incorporates four steps: (1) re-gressive, (2) progressive, (3) analytic, and (4) synthetical (Pinar 19-27). These steps entail revisiting lived experience, an estimating of prospect or future experience, a process of bracketing by means of inquiry, and repositioning oneself into the present. The theory proposes that students can grow socially and intellectually by becoming conscious and aware of their autobiographical narratives and how they inform their positionality. Since the *currere* method targets phenomenology and individual lived experiences, it enables instructors to propose intentional connections with the materials as tailored to the needs of

each student. Yet this phenomenological process does not need to be merely accidental. In carefully looking within, contemplating their individual story, and taking an intentional step toward self-awareness, students can become consciously sensitive to their biases as well as the biases of others.

The idea of consequential education can be combined with auto-biographical theory in many respects, chiefly in that both promote the teleological transformation and reconceptualization afforded by educational exchanges. Consequential learning has been defined as "an equity-oriented framework in which students create learning pathways to pursue what matters to themselves and to the communities they care about" (Kim 79). Autobiographical theory, in turn, investigates how lived experiences inform curriculum and instruction, thus impacting complex educational processes and the potential transformations therein. Hence, the two theoretical frameworks are complementary and entail a priority for individual experience as well as social transformation.

Shakespeare's work suits these goals in remarkable ways and offers a new way to situate Shakespeare studies in Canadian school curricula. First, his plays were written to be embodied and performed, rather than merely read. Students have for centuries been required to read, reread, memorize, write exams, and compose essays on Shakespeare's works without an opportunity to experience the texts thematically. Nor have they been able to discuss the social implications of the complex interpersonal relationships in them. The physicality of gesture, movement, and dialogue are powerful attributes of experience, which—in the passive, introspective reading of a text—lay dormant. Shakespeare's works do not have to be restricted to the written word but can be experienced as speech, vocalizations, and many other modes of embodied action that take place in space and time. When studying this literature, students should not only read and write about these themes and narratives, but should be encouraged to explore the text and their autobiographies in a multimodal manner.

An Autographical Approach to Teaching Shakespeare

The central argument in this paper is that Shakespeare's text can undergo a re-origin when lived, given its initial conception as embodied, enacted narrative in the early modern period. In this method, students immerse themselves in Shakespeare's text through films and stage productions and then manifest their interpretations based on their autobiographical narratives. When students embody this literature by engaging in creative adaptations, reader's theatre, and collaborative theatrical experience, they encounter a meaningful understanding of their autobiographies.

In following the first step of Pinar (1994; 2004) and Grumet's (1981) framework, a formal opportunity should be given for students to reflect on their lived experiences in relation to diegetic themes prior to encountering these as portrayed, articulated, and represented in Shakespeare's work. Virtually every play written by Shakespeare offers a variety of trans-historical themes that are paralleled in today's culture and society, such as racism (*The Merchant of Venice*; *Othello*), classism (*Much Ado About Nothing*; *Twelfth Night*), sexism (*The Taming of the Shrew*; *Antony and Cleopatra*), and ableism (*Richard III*; *King Lear*), to name a few. In creating a discussion of social norms, traditionalized behaviours, upbringing, religion, etc., the unique positionality of each student emerges. These themes can also be used as touchpoints to prior learning. Situating the current social issues of racism and sexism in the early modern period—for example, the association between dark skin and the devil or the banishment of women from the stage—allows students to gain the contextual clues needed for a well-rounded analysis.

Traditional stage productions of Shakespeare's works have evolved throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to include many forms beyond the traditional theatre of the classically trained. One of the most groundbreaking and diverse musicals to hit London's West End is the 2019 production of *& Juliet*. This musical suggests, through the characters of Anne Hathaway and Shakespeare, a possible trajectory to *Romeo and Juliet* if Juliet chose not to die by suicide. The multicultural cast also includes a non-binary actor, Alex Thomas-Smith, playing the role of May, a non-binary character. *West Side Story* (2020 Broadway revival) updates the choreography to reflect the cultural heritage of the characters and cuts problematic songs, such as "I Feel Pretty," to focus on the tragic aspects of sexual assault, gang violence, and police brutality present in the narrative. Finally, Reneltta Arluk's *Pawâkan Macbeth* (2017) is an important element of decolonization and reconciliation due to its Indigenous representation and retelling of Shakespeare's tale through Indigenous storytelling.

Educators can also use one of the many film adaptations of Shakespeare's text, such as *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (2021) starring Denzel Washington, but these should be selected carefully with the goal of using the representation present in the film to connect the secondary school audience to their autobiographical narratives through adaptation. For example, by using the Denzel Washington production, a black, male student can see himself represented in the character of Macbeth, who is usually portrayed as a white man in film productions. Film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays are released every year and there is a continuous catalogue of films to choose from. The advantage of using a production released in the last ten years is that students will be able to quickly identify with the characters and gain a general understanding of the plot.

These instances are practical examples of how Shakespeare can be retold as educators embark on the next steps of autobiographical theory.

By observing innovative productions, along with more traditional productions staged by Shakespeare's Globe or the Royal Shakespeare Company, students can analyze and understand the non-textual elements of Shakespeare's text that originate in the theatre. Educators can also access resources to accompany these productions in their classrooms, such as the *Anti-Racist Shakespeare* seminars, which are hosted by Shakespeare's Globe and include scholars from around the world for their students. Organized every few months, these seminars are connected to a current Shakespeare's Globe production in London, England. They invite the director of the current production along with Shakespearean scholars who specialize in that particular play or the themes therein to an hour-long discussion. Despite the various levels of institutionalized Shakespeare studies, including post-secondary education and academia, engaging scholarly anti-racist discourses broadens the perspectives of educators and students as to how Shakespeare's plays can be re-presented in the twenty-first century. New seminars are uploaded to YouTube regularly and they currently have recordings of seminars on *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for students to view and educators to use in their classrooms. The professional recordings of the productions—along with the directorial, anti-racist insights from the seminars—help students identify the non-textual elements of the plays while fostering the creativity of interpretation. Since Shakespeare did not include stage directions, set design, costume choices, or sheet music in any of his texts, there is considerable room for interpretation. These interpretative choices infuse meaning into the text based on diverse voices, different perspectives, and autobiographical experiences. If students observe a variety of productions, the textual commonalities between them become evident.

Next, students can interact directly with Shakespeare's text and design a character encounter that allows them to layer their analysis with an embodiment of the narrative. The space for this interaction is varied and can be adapted based on the resources available. Some instructors may only require only a classroom space. Alternatively, students can bring Shakespeare's texts to life in a theatre with costumes, lights, music, and choreography. On a smaller scale, creative adaptations are one of the most accessible ways for students to engage with Shakespeare's narrative and their individual autobiographies. For example, a student may choose to rewrite Hamlet's "Get thee to a nunnery" speech (3.1.131) from Ophelia's perspective using a feminist voice. Another student may choose to translate King Lear's grief over Cordelia's death into a photo essay as a method of catharsis to grieve the loss of their own loved one.

Another method of analytical interaction is reader's theatre, which allows students to interact with the play without having to read the daunting early modern text on their own. In being assigned a role, each student steps into a character and portrays the character's voice as their own. This amalgamation of student and character can lead to a disparity between the character's language and the student's positionality. It is in these teachable moments that the instructor can address and discuss difficult topics such as racism, sexism, ableism, etc., and ask students to analyze why they may be uneasy. Students must decide how to *re*-present the problematic language and topics ingrained in the play based on their own autobiographical narratives. While standardized pedagogical techniques allow for these experiences only through reading and writing assignments, reader's theatre engages students visually, auditorily, and kinesthetically, thus creating a stronger reconnection to the material and the themes therein.

This analytical process is indispensable to all performance-based activities and may include the preparation of monologues, scene work, or a full production experience. Cross-curricular collaboration with educators in the fields of drama, art, history, and English can create an even more well-rounded, well-informed production experience for students. These performance-based activities are a far more intimate engagement with the text than creative adaptations and reader's theatre. Students are able to fully embody not only a character's voice, but also their movements, dress, and interpersonal interactions. This lived experience allows students to face the biases in the world as well as their own. In order to portray their character with purpose and interact with those around them, they must address these biases, synthesizing their autobiographical narratives with the text to reconceptualize the character in a unique way.

The synthetical step in the *currere* method, which denotes the process of reconnection with the immediacy of one's surroundings, is understood in phenomenology as the living present. After the analysis and embodiment of the text, students re-enter the present with a new perspective and "recognize […] the role played by the individual as well as the individual's social environment in the knowledge production process" (Horn Jr. 507). Shakespeare's text is not only reshaped by students' autobiographical experiences but becomes a deliberate and intentional part of their autobiographical narrative. This is demonstrated as a reconceptualized living present and can be displayed in either the private or public sphere.

From a theatrical perspective, students may choose to engage in the public performance of monologues, scene work, or theatrical productions. These options allow a broad audience to enter into the students' reconceptualized narratives and gaze upon their choices in a collective living present. For example, gender may be addressed by gender-swapping a character, by the

character being embodied by a person of a different gender, or by creating a non-binary role. At the current socio-historical juncture in Canadian society, the *re*-presentation of Shakespeare would not only allows students to discuss ubiquitous themes such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism in the classroom but also carries the potential for conversations regarding these important societal issues among an extended audience.

Conclusion

To survive the changes in the Canadian socio-cultural context over the last several decades and the implications they have generated for curriculum, current pedagogical approaches to teaching Shakespeare need to undergo a paradigm shift. In the specific Canadian context and the role of colonialism in shaping traditionalized curricula, his plays are increasingly irrelevant to many Canadians when taught by means of traditional pedagogies imported from the British educational system. The retention of Shakespeare as a foundational text in Canada also hinges on deeper issues of identity and belonging that may only be appropriately understood through the lenses of a postcolonial undertaking. Autobiographical theory offers a pedagogy based on individual experiences as a means for students and instructors to reconnect with these texts and promote a new origin of Shakespearean studies in the Canadian curriculum. The impact of colonialism on the canonizing of texts and the crystalizing of pedagogical methods has also rendered the engagement with Shakespeare's works sterile and passive—a genre of literature that can be holistically understood only when lived rather than read, repeated, memorized, and recited.

Jacques famously states in *As You Like It* that "[a]ll the world's a stage, / and all the men and women merely players" (2.7.146-147). The same principle proves true in secondary classrooms. Students and educators are the storytellers of their autobiographies and it is only through intentional contemplation, translation, experience, and reconceptualization of narratives that transformation is possible. In contemplating the origins of Shakespeare studies in Canadian education and allowing for its re-origins, teachers are invited to re-engage his work. When Shakespeare's plays continue to be taught as read, stagnated text and without intentional autobiographical connections, the relevancy of his work to a postmodern classroom becomes a matter for educational concern. This traditional approach only solidifies and perpetuates the biases contained within a foundational text in Western literature. Alternatively, the autobiographical and consequential approach to curriculum and instruction can support social justice goals in classrooms and communities, thus promoting a trans-historical understanding of society with attention to change and healing. As Canadian educators implement autobiographical theory as a method of learning Shakespeare,

the process of reading, studying, and performing his works re-originates his legacy in a way that transforms both instructor and student, thus achieving consequential objectives inside and outside the classroom.

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