

Final Project, Option 5  
Shakespeare's Sources

Due: May 5, 2014

For this 5-7 page essay, you will examine how Shakespeare uses sources to write his plays. As we have discussed in class, Shakespeare almost always drew on source texts—often several at a time—as he created plays for the stage. Your job is to discuss how Shakespeare works with his materials.

**Goal:** The goal of this assignment is thus to make and defend an interpretive claim about how Shakespeare adapts his source text(s). In other words, your task is to give a strong, argumentative answer to the question, "What is Shakespeare doing to these sources?" To do so, you must address what Shakespeare is adapting, how he's adapting it, why he's adapting it that way, and what it means that he's adapting it that way.

**Choosing a source:** The first step is to choose a source text and a play for which it acted as a source. There are plenty to choose from. Several books and websites will help you:

- <http://catalog.lib.ku.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?bbid=60546> (This is Geoffrey Bullough's multi-volume set titled *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. It contains the texts of Shakespeare's sources.)
- <http://catalog.lib.ku.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?bbid=7455423> (This is Stuart Gillespie's *Shakespeare's Books*, a helpful dictionary of all of Shakespeare's sources. This book is available in print and electronic book.)
- <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/sources.htm> (This website is confusing but helpful for locating specific sources.)

Feel free to talk with your professor about good options. It may help you to choose a play you like, then find that play's sources. You must inform your professor that you're choosing this option by **April 23<sup>rd</sup>**, and you must choose your play/source and inform your professor by **April 28<sup>th</sup>**.

**Next steps:** Once you have chosen your play and source, you should read them both. If we've read the play in class, you should reread it. After reading and extensive notetaking, you should begin to construct your essay. It may help you to consult some of the scholarly conversation about Shakespeare's use of particular sources; the Gillespie book cited above is the best place to turn for that information. (You can also ask your professor.) You may also want to look at what the actual book looked like that Shakespeare used. In that case, you can use the EEBO database (Early English Books Online), available through KU Libraries. The key as you think about the film and its sources is to consider what the adaptation is *doing* to Shakespeare and what it stands to gain by doing those things. You must think critically about the act of re-creation. What changes does Shakespeare make, and why? How does he resituate the sources in a new context, and why, and how does that change how we see the play? How do Shakespeare's dramaturgical choices in adapting his sources relate to the play? In sum, what does Shakespeare *do* to his sources, and why does it matter?

**The Paper:** A strong thesis will constitute a compelling, argumentative claim about the source and play in question. Often the best way to write a thesis for this kind of paper is to let your syntax embody the relationship you want to express. For instance, don't just write that "Shakespeare made Hotspur and Henry the same age." Instead, write that "Shakespeare's choice to change Holinshed's *Chronicle* and make Hotspur and Henry the same age creates the central dramatic conflict of the play."

In doing so, Shakespeare both defers to and deflects the authority of Holinshed's account." (This may not be a great example, except that its syntax reflects the claim being made.)

**A note on cultural and historical evidence:** make a point to avoid with excited fastidiousness using generalizations about Shakespeare's time and culture to make your argument. If you find yourself writing something like "people in Shakespeare's time believed...", you are making a generalization, but more importantly you are letting that generalization think for you. If you want to use broad-based statements to make a point—such as "Shakespeare's audience would have known what to expect at the end of *Henry V*"—you must find resources that demonstrate that fact.

A very successful paper will:

- be properly formatted
- be free of grammatical errors and stylistic unclarity
- address the central questions of the assignment clearly and cogently
- have a strong, clear thesis that unifies the paper into an interpretive claim about Shakespeare's use of his sources
- be thoughtfully organized into a paragraph structure that most persuasively articulates the paper's argument
- have paragraphs that contain discernible topics, transitions, and a cogent structure
- marshal appropriate evidence and analysis to advance the thesis
- cite all sources appropriately

Format: the essay should be between 5-7 pages long and should follow MLA formatting guidelines. If you are not familiar with MLA formatting, see me. Late papers will not be accepted. **Do not hesitate to contact me with questions or problems—especially in the early stages of writing, when you are choosing and researching a topic. Past students have described paper consultations with me as "F%&\$, that was awesome!" "my face melted again!" and "I'll probably graduate."**