

THESIS

TEACHING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA THROUGH *THE SECOND SHEPHERDS'*

PLAY: A GUIDE TO INCREASED STUDENT MOTIVATION

Submitted by

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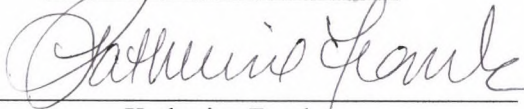
Spring 2010

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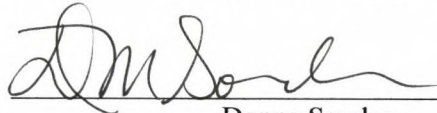
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MISTY MICHELLE COLGROVE ENTITLED TEACHING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA THROUGH *THE SECOND SHEPHERDS' PLAY*: A GUIDE TO INCREASED STUDENT MOTIVATION BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

Committee on Graduate work



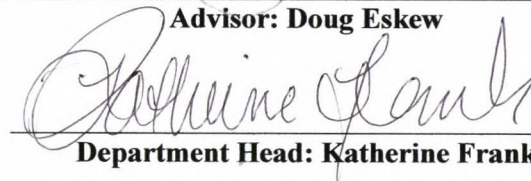
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

TEACHING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA THROUGH *THE SECOND SHEPHERDS'* *PLAY*: A GUIDE TO INCREASED STUDENT MOTIVATION

In this thesis, I discuss two types of theories currently used to direct literary curriculum in secondary English/Language Arts classroom. One group of theorists argues for the classics, while another argues for young adult literature. The traditionalists assert that the classics are rich enough to engage any student's interest and to challenge the student to think critically. Advocates of young adult novels assert that teaching works above a student's developmental level, like some classics may be, damages the student's engagement with the text. Such damage, these theorists maintain, has in part caused the United States to largely be a non-reading society. They argue instead that young adult novels provide literature that is engaging and encourages enjoyment of reading.

While there are instructional strengths to both sides of the argument, a middle ground between the two is needed in order for students to remain challenged and to enjoy reading. I argue for using companion pieces to aid in student motivation in the high school English/Language Arts classroom. A companion piece is a high-interest work that must have many of the same attributes as the classic work—the same plot, themes, symbols, allusions, settings, ideas, real world connections, humor, etc. Specifically, I argue that *The Second Shepherds' Play* should be used as a companion piece to Shakespearean drama because both share common themes, genre, literary techniques,

settings, etc. *The Second Shepherds' Play* is a fifteenth century mystery play that combines the nativity story with a farcical story of a sheep stealer, Mak, who deceives shepherds into believing that he has not stolen their sheep. However, the shepherds realize after visiting Mak and his wife, Gill, that their newborn child is actually the stolen sheep wrapped in cloth. The shepherds must then decide how to punish Mak. The play ends with a surprising shift to the announcement of Jesus' birth and the nativity scene.

While *The Second Shepherds' Play* is not traditionally taught in secondary classrooms, it is a beneficial play for secondary teachers to incorporate into curriculum because it will help students to engage in the text itself through such research based strategies as humor, real life connections, and interdisciplinary connections. The critical thinking students engage in while studying *The Second Shepherds' Play* will also help prepare them to engage in a study of Shakespearean drama where critical thinking is also needed in order to interact with the text in a more meaningful manner than just knowing plot details. While I assert that *The Second Shepherds' Play* should be used as a tool to prepare students for a study of Shakespearean drama, the focus of this thesis is on highlighting the benefits of *The Second Shepherds' Play* through research based strategies. Shakespearean drama will not be discussed in great detail. However, introducing *The Second Shepherds' Play* into the curriculum and facilitating student exploration of the text through research based strategies will help students to engage more deeply in Shakespearean drama and to be more motivated in the classroom.

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Teaching Shakespearean Drama through *The Second Shepherds' Play*: A Guide to Increased Student Motivation

One of the most difficult obstacles teachers face is student motivation. Many times, students fear language arts classes for stereotypical reasons: the English teacher is a grammar tyrant, she forces students to read long boring classics, and she makes essays bleed with her devilish red pen. Although there has been some merit to these stereotypes in the past, they are like all stereotypes largely untrue. Language arts teachers must find ways to effectively refute these stereotypes; otherwise no one will enjoy English classes. Perhaps the best way to refute the stereotype is for language arts teachers to motivate students to love reading, interpreting, and interacting with literature. Obviously, English teachers love doing these things, but sometimes teachers become so bogged down in teaching to the standards or covering all the curricular demands that they forget to instill a love of literature in students. Many of the current ways of teaching English must be changed if we want students to love literature. Teachers must re-examine the literature curriculum used in high schools in order to begin the reconstruction of the language arts image.

There are two main theories of what types of literature to teach in the secondary classroom. The first group of theorists is traditional; they favor the classics over all other types of literature. One of the greatest proponents of this theory is Charlotte Mason (1842-1923); Mason's ideas have recently begun to gain popularity among more conservative private schools, charter schools, and home school organizations. While

some schools continue to use her ideas within the religious parameter she sets up, many other schools, especially public charter schools, take a more secular approach to her theories. Mason supported “living books,” or books that she describes as well written, containing literary language, enjoyable, not too easy or direct, and able to work well with narration (where a student reads a selection aloud in class and then the teacher calls on individual students to verbalize what was just read) (St. Cyr, *Distinctives* 125-126). Most followers of Mason, like Maryellen St. Cyr, director of Charlotte Mason Schools International and teacher at Ambleside, specify that the classics, or “the best thought of the best writers,” most effectively meet Mason’s criteria for living books (“Curriculum Coursework”).

However, Mason never agreed that a certain list of books was the way to approach education. In fact, she disagreed with the idea when she wrote, “The right books; but that is just the question—which *are* the right books?—a point upon which I should not wish to play Sir Oracle. The ‘hundred best books for the schoolroom’ may be put down on a list, but not by me” (Mason 241). Her approach to books was to choose living books where students were searching for knowledge. She maintained that teachers were too ready to supply students with all the answers and what to think. She wrote,

The boy who gets a single idea, notion, material for an opinion, out of a big book has his reward. But in order to get this reward he must read for himself and must read *to know*: his teacher’s main business is to see that he knows; all the acts of generalization, analysis, comparison, judgment, etc., the mind performs for itself in the act of knowing. (Cholmondley 118, Mason’s emphasis)

It is important to understand that although it appears like Mason said that any book is okay for a student as long as he or she is searching to know, in reality, she wrote that books must fit a certain criteria. Mason insisted that appropriate books were living; they

inspire students and naturally create student motivation through the breadth of ideas and strength of language. While she did not agree with using a list of books, I contend that she would have supported the idea that classics give students the best opportunity to see “the best thought of the best writers,” as the Ambleside curriculum describes them (“Curriculum Coursework”).

One classic writer that Mason definitely supported was Shakespeare. She wrote of Shakespeare that “there is enough to satisfy the keenest intelligence,” and she insisted that every child in every grade in every quarter (or term) of the semester read Shakespeare (St. Cyr, *The Teaching of Shakespeare* 158). In addition, she instructed that the first and final term conclude with the performance of a Shakespearean play (St. Cyr, *The Teaching of Shakespeare* 158). Followers of Mason, like Olive Norton, headmaster and teacher at a Charlotte Mason school in England, support Mason’s ideas of teaching Shakespeare at each grade level. St. Cyr describes a visit to Norton’s classroom:

Children from ages five to twelve held an unabridged text in hand and reviewed and memorized lines varying from fifty to over five hundred. The spirit and pride of the children in their work was exemplified through their practice and eagerness to recite on and off stage. (St. Cyr, *The Teaching of Shakespeare* 159)

Mason and her followers value teaching Shakespeare to all ages of children and insist that his work can stimulate their minds. They definitely hold a traditionalist view of teaching literature where the classics are prized over other literature.

Young adult novel advocates strongly disagree with the traditionalists. This group of theorists speculates that the United States’ society is a non reading one largely because students in high school do not like reading the classics. They also claim that this lack of love for reading extends through many students’ entire lives. John H. Bushman

and Kay Parks Haas argue that forcing students to read the classics in high school creates a negative attitude towards reading: “This literary elitism encourages students to have an unhealthy, negative attitude toward their ability and, as a result, leads to nonreading when they leave school” (Bushman and Haas 4). Intrigued by the idea that most students do not enjoy reading, G. Robert Carlsen and Anne Sherrill researched what makes English teachers different. They asked English teachers why they chose their profession and were surprised to find that most respondents enjoyed reading until something during their public education “disrupted their reading pleasure” (Carlsen and Sherrill 143).

Young adult novel advocates argue that reading books that are above students’ developmental level only damages student interaction with the text, and instead students are forced to learn only about the text (Bushman and Haas 3). For example, when students have difficulty understanding a text, classroom instruction focuses more on lower level understanding—either plot summary or lectures on why the author is using symbolism or a particular theme. And because teachers are pressed for time to meet all the curricular demands, often there is no time at the end of a work for students to engage in higher level thinking or discussions. Therefore, students are only learning about the text instead of interacting with it. This is a particular problem with the classics.

Bushman and Haas write, “Most students cannot read classical literature well (i.e., they cannot have personal involvement with it). Students think of the literature as something they cannot understand; therefore, they think they are not intelligent individuals” (4).

Young adult literature is the answer, in their opinion, because these novels by their very definition interest students. Bushman and Haas define such literature as “literature written for or about young adults” that have common characteristics such as conflicts

consistent with young adult experiences, themes of interest to young adults, protagonists and main characters that are young adults, and language that is similar to what young adults use (2). According to young adult novel advocates, these novels encourage student motivation because they are focused specifically on meeting the needs and interests of teens.

A middle ground between the traditionalists and young adult advocates is needed. Teachers need to both challenge and encourage enjoyment of reading. There are times when challenging classic works should be studied, and times when more age appropriate literature should be. A natural pairing of young adult literature to classic works will help teachers to achieve both goals. Specifically, using companion pieces to teach the classics will help students to engage in texts that both challenge as well as interest students. A companion piece is a young adult novel or another high interest work that will easily engage students and can be used as a prerequisite to covering a classic. Naturally, the companion piece must have many of the same attributes as the classic work—the same plot, themes, symbols, allusions, settings, ideas, real world connections, humor, etc. There are many young adult novels that have already been paired with classics. For instance, Bushman and Haas have an entire chapter devoted to discussing natural pairings between classics and young adult novels. The chapter has suggestions in prose for *The Scarlet Letter*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Walden*; the prose section is followed by a chart listing fourteen other popular classics to teach along with young adult pairings. Much research has already gone into successfully pairing young adult literature with classics. However, young adult literature is not the only pairing to consider.

There are many other genres of literature that may have been overlooked in traditional high school settings that should be paired with the classics. For instance, an overlooked classic is *The Second Shepherds' Play*, an English mystery play from the late fifteenth century. The play is included in *Norton's Anthology for English Literature*, and as such, could be labeled canonical. However, this play is rarely studied in college, and to my knowledge, not studied in high school at all. *The Second Shepherds' Play* could be paired with Shakespearean drama as a companion piece. *The Second Shepherds' Play* is a shorter work, with only 1087 lines and no act divisions. The play combines the traditional announcement of Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds and the nativity scene that follows with the story of a sheep stealer named Mak who deceives the shepherds into believing that he has not stolen their sheep. However, the shepherds realize after visiting Mak and his wife, Gill, that their newborn child is actually the stolen sheep wrapped in a cloth. The shepherds then must decide how to punish Mak. The play ends with a surprising shift back to the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth and the nativity scene. The play works well as companion piece to Shakespearean drama because it engages students in discussions of humor, real life connections, and interdisciplinary connections that can also be traced in Shakespearean drama. My purpose is to elaborate on how humor, real life connections, and interdisciplinary connections can be traced throughout *The Second Shepherds' Play* so that other teachers may see the benefits of pairing this play with Shakespearean drama. Using *The Second Shepherds' Play* as a companion piece may be one of the ways English teachers can motivate students to enjoy and be challenged by literature.

Section 1: Humor

When discussing student motivation in reading classic works, humor is very important. Studying classic works is challenging and can lead to teacher and student burnout, but coupling a study of the classics with a study of humor in the classics may help to decrease burnout, as experienced teacher Maureen McMahon suggests: “Learning to laugh with others and to laugh at ourselves enlivens the class, brings students and teachers together, and is often a good antidote for burnout” (70). Coauthors of *The Laughing Classroom: Everyone’s Guide to Teaching with Humor and Play*, Diane Loomans and Karen Kolberg agree that teaching through humor is important. They have found that “techniques that include laughter and play encourage learning” (Loomans and Kolberg xii). They also suggest that “although learning always requires effort, we discovered that whenever we included humor, learning occurred without fear, struggle, or self deprecation” (Loomans and Kolberg xii). According to these teachers and authors, humor makes learning enjoyable and safe. Including more humor in the classroom will help students to have a more favorable outlook on English classes. In addition, humor helps students to not only enjoy class but to also understand complex ideas and texts. McMahon explains that her students “learn that humor is an important means of discovering profound truths” and that students are often “fascinated to see that some of the most serious works, in particular Shakespeare’s dramas, contain so many funny scenes” (70). *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, like Shakespearean drama, contains many “funny scenes.” In fact, the play is known for its humorous qualities, and although the

play is very religious (and by nature, religious matters are often thought to be very serious), it is argued by some that it is even more humorous.

Discussing the play's two main types of humor, farce and parody, will help students to engage in the complex text of such a classic work. The farce in *The Second Shepherds' Play* makes the play light-hearted, fun, and unique. According to Bedford/St. Martin's, farce is "a form of humor based on exaggerated, improbable incongruities. Farce involves rapid shifts in action and emotion, as well as slapstick comedy and extravagant dialogue" (*Bedford/St. Martin's Glossary of Literary Terms*). Some of the exaggerated, improbable incongruities in *The Second Shepherds' Play* include the shepherds allowing Mak to interact with themselves and the sheep and most notably, the shepherds' punishment of Mak. The shepherds allow Mak to interact with them, even though they know he is a notorious sheep stealer. They even allow Mak to spend the night with them. With such harsh language when the shepherds first see Mak, Daw telling the other shepherds to look after their possessions lest Mak steal them and Coll telling Mak he does wrong by putting on such airs as he approaches, it seems absurd that they would let Mak spend the night with them and their most valued possessions, the sheep. The inconsistent actions of the shepherds continue as they punish Mak. When they find out that he has in fact stolen the sheep, the reader expects the shepherds to severely punish Mak. Daw even claims that both Gill and Mak deserve death for their theft. Surprisingly, Coll suggests that Daw and Gib listen to his advice and quickly cast him in a blanket. No reason is given for tossing Mak in a blanket, and critics can find no historical evidence that this "punishment" has some other meaning. Mak's punishment is

indeed improbable and incongruous with the shepherds' previous feelings of strong dislike.

The play is also farcical because of the rapid shifts in action and emotion, the extravagant dialogue, and the slap-stick comedy. The above examples attest to the rapid shifts in emotion, but the action is also constantly changing. The opening scene seems to be longest and most developed, with 273 lines devoted to the shepherds sharing their woes and cheering up each other by singing a song. The scene in which Mak is introduced, the shepherds agreeing to let him spend the night with them, and Mak stealing the sheep is only 150 lines long. Mak running home to share his stealing adventure with his wife, Gill, and running back to appear as though he has spent the whole night with the shepherds encompasses seventy-seven lines. The rapid shifts in action continue in the same manner throughout the entire play. No time is given to deep development of plot or characters except in the opening scene. This swift change in action helps establish the farcical nature of the play. The play also contains farcical elements of extravagant dialogue. Despite the quick actions throughout the play, there are a few moments of extravagant dialogue, especially at the beginning. The playwright spends much time setting the scene of the shepherds, allowing them to describe their woes in detail. Coll has seventy-eight lines in the beginning of the play devoted to his woes, whereas sixty-four lines are devoted to the entire nativity scene. The extravagant dialogue is focused on human woes instead of the heavenly birth. The playwright is also extravagant in his use of slap-stick comedy. Slap-stick comedy may refer to absurd physical interactions or more loosely, to absurd situations. The most apparent slap-stick comedy in the play is Mak's random use of magic. The play has a fairly religious or

pastoral setting with shepherds tending to their flock and singing to God. However, in the middle of this pastoral setting, Mak draws a magic circle around the shepherds and recites a spell. This absurd action is not explained at all; it merely happens. Mak's magic does not fit in within the larger context of the play.

The entire play has warranted many comments from critics on the amount of time the playwright devotes to the farcical nature of the play. Gerald Eades Bentley claims,

Among medieval religious plays this one is unique, for in no other does the secular interest of the playwright seem so completely to overshadow the religious function of the cycle: 636 lines are given to the farce of Mak and the shepherds, and only 116 to the Nativity. (21)

The farce throughout the play is interesting as it seems to contradict the didactic nature of most mystery plays. It is also interesting because it provides an opportunity for teachers and students to study the use of humor and engage in higher level discussions about the effectiveness of the playwright's humor. But farce is only one type of humor used in the play. The playwright also uses parody as a technique.

In *The Second Shepherds' Play*, the parody is easy to recognize: the comedy of Mak's and Gill's "newborn" is in direct contrast to the birth of the Christ-child, and the tone of each scene is drastically different. In the scenes with Mak and Gill, the tone is farcical and meant to be light-hearted and humorous. As the shepherds enter Mak's and Gill's house, they hear Mak singing a lullaby. The lullaby sung so loud and out of tune helps sets the tone of the farce for the scene. The farce continues as Gill promises that she and Mak have not tricked the shepherds. "Ah, my middill," Gill begins her tirade. "I pray to God so mild, / If ever I you beguiled, / That I eat this child / That lies in this cradill" (*Norton* 771-775). In an effort to authenticate her vow, Gill promises to eat her

child if she and Mak turn out to be liars. What should be a sweet moment begun with Mak's lullaby to a newborn child has become a farcical scene, and Gill's absurd statements only add to the comical nature. No new rational mother would offer up her child in a cannibalistic manner to prove her innocence, especially if she knew she was in fact not innocent. However, the scenes with the angel and the nativity produce a completely different tone. As the angel directs the shepherds to the Virgin's newborn, the tone is reverent. The angel sings to the shepherds of the Christ-child's birth, and the shepherds respond with awe and songs of worship. This reverent tone continues as the shepherds travel to Bethlehem and enter the stable. Each shepherd begins his words of encouragement to the Virgin and the newborn in imitation of the angel, with words full of awe and worship: "Hail, young child! Hail Maker," "Hail sovereign Saviour," and "Hail, darling dear, / Full of Godhead" (*Norton* 1024-1025, 1036, 1049-1050). The scenes with the nativity are much more joyfully reverent than the absurd farce that involves Mak.

The comparison between the parodied scene of Mak and Gill and the reverent scene of the Nativity continues with the lullabies that are sung. Mak is so desperate to successfully pull off the sheep stealing incident that he makes his wife wrap the sheep in blankets and rock it to sleep as he sings lullabies to it. His lullaby is not gentle and sleep-luring as lullabies are intended to be. Instead, he sings out of tune and very loudly. Daw and Coll describe the sounds they hear as they approach Mak's house. Daw exclaims, "Will ye hear how they hack? / Our sire list croon" (*Norton* 685-686). Coll replies, "Heard I never none crack / So clear out of tune" (*Norton* 687-688). Mak's lullaby is strident, whereas the lullaby sung to the Christ-child by the angel is beautiful. The shepherds describe the song as "marvelous," without one missed note and lacking

nothing (*Norton* 932-950). The lullaby appears to be so perfect that the shepherds are inspired to imitate it as they travel to Bethlehem to see the child. The lullabies once more contrast the reverent and absurd scenes within the play.

The gifts given in each scene are also very different. The gift given to Mak's child becomes a laughing matter, although the shepherds are sincere in their actions. To the audience, Daw mistakenly kissing a sheep instead of a baby is comical, and his reaction adds to the comedy. The scene begins with the shepherds distraught that they forgot to give Mak's and Gill's newborn a gift. They run back into the house, and Daw says, "Give me leave him to kiss, / And lift up the clout" (*Norton* 841-842). Daw's reaction as he lifts the cover is comical. He exclaims, "What the devil is this? / He has a long snout!" (*Norton* 843-844). The dramatic irony is finally uncovered. The gift of a kiss becomes a laughing matter among the audience because of the dramatic irony and Daw's outburst. However, the gifts given to the Christ-child create a reverent scene. Before the shepherds enter the stable, Daw offers a prayer for them, pleading, "Lord, if thy wills be— / We are lewd all three— / Thou grant us some kins glee / To comfort thy wight" (*Norton* 1019-1022). Then, each shepherd addresses the child with words of worship as they offer him gifts of cherries, a bird, and a ball. It is a scene of reverence and respect for the newborn, as opposed to the comedy of Mak's and Gill's newborn.

Finally, the parody continues as the newborn is described in each scene. In the scene with Mak and Gill, the newborn is described as smelling like a ram, as having a long snout, and as a "horned lad" (*Norton* 789-792, 844, 866). In contrast, the newborn in Bethlehem is described as a tiny laughing baby with a sweet face (*Norton* 1032, 1045,

1053). The comparison of the tones, lullabies, gifts, and babies in each scene sets up the parody between the fraudulent birth of Gill and the sacred birth of the virgin.

Studying humor in *The Second Shepherds' Play* will help to create an environment that is safe, enjoyable, and encourages learning. The humor studied does not have to be laugh-out-loud funny. Instead, studying humor in the play should show that the author is playing with language and allow students an opportunity to engage in similar playful activities. Playing with language might produce those laugh-out-loud moments that will further entertain as well as engage students. This opportunity to engage in the text is important because while the play is shorter and less complex than most Shakespearean dramas, it is still challenging for many of today's students because of its unfamiliar language as well as its historical and religious setting. If teachers can integrate studying humor in the play with understanding the language and settings, students will more likely be motivated to not give up on studying a complex piece of literature. Teachers can encourage learning despite the challenges students might face. And approaching humor in a shorter and less complex play, like *The Second Shepherds' Play*, where teachers can scaffold learning, will help students to avoid burnout in the middle of a Shakespearean play. Using a companion piece in such a way will also help teachers to revamp the idea that English classrooms are where long boring classics are studied. Instead, students will begin to see that classics are still complex works, but they are approachable, understandable, and entertaining works.

Section 2: Real Life Connections

Students are interested in texts that apply and appeal to them. For this reason, *The Second Shepherds' Play* should be used as a companion piece because it will engage

students in discussions of real life issues. One of the strongest arguments for young adult literacy is to find texts that engage students in deep conversations. Kimberly Hill Campbell argues for teachers to include alternate texts besides the classics in the classroom for greater student engagement and learning. Campbell suggests teaching less literature is more; in other words, not all texts have to be two hundred page novels. By covering less literature, the teacher is able to focus more in depth on understanding and engaging with a text. Students will learn more when they are fully engaged in a shorter text because shorter texts allow time for students to think critically about the text instead of just learning the plot. Campbell noticed in her classes that participation during discussions of longer texts like novels and Shakespearean plays was significantly less than when discussing shorter texts. She describes student responses when asked about participation in discussions of longer texts:

they were candid in sharing that they had read the text but could not retain all the details, so they did not feel comfortable talking in class . . . Students were frank about the sense of frustration they felt as they read; they were overwhelmed by the complexity of multiple characters, settings, and plot twists. (Campbell 3)

Campbell adds that not only were students frustrated, but they also cultivated an “intense dislike” for texts, a dislike that “grew in intensity the longer we worked with the text” (3). Teaching *The Second Shepherds’ Play* provides teachers with an opportunity to teach a shorter text where they could cultivate an intense *interest* in a play that only grows the longer students worked with it.

One of the greatest benefits of using *The Second Shepherds’ Play* as a companion piece is that it is a shorter and, therefore in terms of length, less complex text when compared to most Shakespearean drama. When compared to *The Merchant of Venice*,

for instance, *The Second Shepherds' Play* has 1087 lines versus 2734 lines, seven characters versus twenty-six, and three settings (the fields, Mak's house, and a stable in Bethlehem) versus six definitive settings (the streets in Venice, Portia's estate in Belmont, Shylock's business, Shylock's house, meeting place near Shylock's house, and the court in Venice). The plot in *The Second Shepherds' Play* is fairly simple: there are shepherds and a sheep stealer. The confusing part is the integration of the Nativity scene; still *The Second Shepherds' Play* has far fewer plot twists than *The Merchant of Venice*, where three love stories are interwoven with the story of Shylock's and Antonio's business arrangement, the tension between Christians and Jews, and the system Portia's father has arranged for her marriage. Besides the differences in length and complexity, Shakespearean drama and *The Second Shepherds' Play* have much in common.

The Second Shepherds' Play works well as a companion piece because it contains characters students can relate to. Teri Lesesne argues for young adult literature, claiming that today's young adult authors "now give readers characters who reflect the people and conflicts of today" (71). Young adult novels reach beyond the often stereotypical characters of fiction into a world of real life characters that are unique because of color, location, interest, religion, or sexual preference. Lesesne observes that

This explosion of characters . . . means that more and more teens have the opportunity to use books as a mirror (here's a character who looks like me, thinks like me, worries like me) or as a window (here's a character who offers me a different way of seeing the world). (72)

Young adult literature is not the only source of real life characters, though.

Daw, in *The Second Shepherds' Play*, is an example of a real life character. He is the quintessential teenager. He is working a job as a shepherd, a job not familiar to many

students, but the circumstances of the job are. He is surrounded by adults who complain about their wives and the weather. While Daw shares similar complaints about the weather, he is still treated as subservient, a condition many students feel adults assign to them. Coll's first interaction with Daw is to call him "Christ's curse" and a lazy servant (*Norton* 213-214). Gib also demeans Daw as he suggest that he must be crazy. In return, Daw exhibits a lack of maturity as he takes on a defiant attitude, promising to work only as a much as he is paid: "But here my troth, master, / For the fare that ye make / I shall do thereafter: / Work as I take" (*Norton* 235-237). Students may relate so well to Daw that they find his bad attitude justified. After all, as the youngest, he is stuck doing the dirty work, commanded by Coll to keep watch over the sheep as the other shepherds sleep. Students can relate to Daw because they understand the situation that he is in: he is the youngest, unfairly treated, and responds with a bad (yet justified, perhaps, in their opinion) attitude. Daw is a character that mirrors many of their own experiences, as Lesesne would relate. However, Daw is a character from literature that dates back to the late fifteenth century. I would add older pieces of literature with real life characters like Daw to Lesesne's list of works that engage students.

We live in a world where new is constantly changing and the pressure to stay up-to-date is intense. This idea seems one that young adult novel advocates have adopted. The literature we use in class must be up-to-date and new in order to engage students, they claim. While new literature is engaging, older literature can be as well. It is very important that students see that the past is relevant; otherwise, they become so caught up in the present and future that they miss opportunities to discover what our ancestors did. They also miss opportunities to see how literature from a long time ago is still relevant to

our lives and opportunities to investigate how alike humankind is, despite what era a man may be from.

Another real life connection *The Second Shepherds' Play* provides is an opportunity to teach character growth. Incorporating character education into curriculum is now considered best practice. William Damon discusses the trends in character education. He maintains that for the first hundred years or so of public schooling, character education was part of the curriculum. Between 1836 and 1922, *McGuffey Reader* was the mostly widely taught text in U.S. schools. The reader included “the code of values that virtually all parents and teachers believed essential for all students to learn: respect, honesty, diligence, kindness, fair-mindedness, temperance, and so on” (Damon n.pag.). However, in the mid to late twentieth century, the trend became more emphasis on academic pursuits of the three Rs than on character. Recently, U.S. schools have seen a serious shift in thinking as a result of the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings as well as an increased problem with cheating and substance abuse incidents (Damon n. pag.). Now schools are not ignoring character education but instead incorporating it into classroom instruction and school-wide assemblies. Character education is defined by Rita Combs Richardson, Homer Tolson, Tse-Yang Huang, and Yi-Hsuan Lee as teaching social and emotional skills (71). They claim that character education is necessary for a democratic society because a democratic society is based not only on social equality, but also on the ability of its citizens to “behave responsibly, respect other people’s diversities, accept what is fair and just, and show concern for the common good by helping others” (Richardson et al. 71). They go on to write that character education includes the affective and cognitive qualities of a person because emotions play a crucial

role in making “final decisions between good and bad choices” (Richardson et al. 71). Richardson et al. maintain that “children need to be guided as they mature in their social and emotional development” (71). Teachers can use *The Second Shepherds’ Play* as one way to guide students in their own character development.

Throughout the play, the dramatic character Mak provides students with several opportunities to examine right and wrong behavior. Mak’s first lines in the play present his problem; he has too many children crying all the time, children that need to be fed. Mak has a problem, and he has a choice whether or not to act morally. His reputation is that he will act immorally. When Daw first sees Mak, he warns the other shepherds to look after their possessions, lest Mak steal them. Mak chooses wrong over right and begins his immoral actions by pretending to be someone important, someone who would not need to steal in order to provide for his family. Coll acknowledges Mak’s immoral behavior and claims that “Mak, ye do wrang” to act pompous (*Norton* 301). Mak’s immorality continues as he steals a sheep after the shepherds fall asleep. Stealing is not the end of his bad choices, though; in order to cover up the stealing, he has to lie. When Mak brings back the stolen sheep to his wife, he admits his immoral actions, though claiming to be worthy of the sheep: “I am worthy [of] my meat, / For in a strait I can get / More than they that sink and sweat / All the long day” (*Norton* 447-450). Gill soon discovers the truth and decides to also engage in immoral behavior as she devises a plan to hide the sheep. To continue his and his wife’s lie, Mak returns to the sleeping shepherds and pretends to have slept all night beside them. When they awake, he manipulates the situation, asking the shepherds to inspect him before he returns to his family (and stolen sheep) to ensure that he has not stolen from them. Even when Mak is

caught in his lie, he tries to continue it by insisting that the sheep really is his begotten child. Gill also tries to continue the lie, claiming that the sheep was stolen by a fairy. Mak and Gill choose wrong over right repeatedly. The consequences for their lying are continuing to have a bad reputation and Mak getting tossed out in a blanket. Perhaps the worst consequence is that they are not invited to see the Christ child, as the shepherds are.

Mak's and Gill's immoral behavior is in direct contrast with that of the shepherds and the nativity story. The shepherds struggle to keep a positive attitude through the play, complaining about the weather and wives, suspecting Mak of stealing before he does anything wrong, and being quick to suggest that Mak deserves death as his punishment. However, the shepherds are morally good. There are many times when their actions exhibit grace. For instance, after investigating Mak's house for the stolen sheep and not finding it (at first), they decide to leave. As soon as they get out the door, though, they worry that they have not given Mak's and Gill's "newborn" any gifts. The shepherds seem to have forgotten Mak's reputation and are now focusing on the child.

Coll. Gave ye the child anything?

Gib. I trow not one farthing.

Daw. Fast again will I fling.

Abide ye me there. (*Norton 824-827*)

Daw leads the way back to Mak's house to bestow gifts on the child. After the shepherds discover that the newborn is actually the stolen sheep, they also exhibit grace by only tossing Mak into a blanket instead of punishing him to death, like they originally discuss. All of the shepherds' moral behavior seems to be rewarded when the angel appears. The angel first addresses the shepherds as gracious. The angel also mentions that God is a friend of the shepherds. Daw seems to recognize that they are being

rewarded when he exclaims, “Be merry and not sad; / Of mirth is our sang: / Everlasting glad / To meed we fang” (*Norton* 962-965). Having good morals appears to not only reward the shepherds by being the first humans to see the Christ child, but it also appears to give them much joy. Gib claims, “Lord, well is me,” Coll says, “What grace we have fun!” Gib answers: “Come forth, now are we won,” and Daw responds, “To sing are we bun: / Let take on loft” (*Norton* 1079, 1084-1086). The play ends with the three shepherds singing because of the joy they experience as a result of their moral decisions.

The play lends itself well to discussions of good and bad decisions and the consequences or rewards of each. Students may debate in class whether or not they agree with the playwright who seems to suggest that Mak is immoral. Some may claim that he is just trying to provide for his family, while others may think he is providing for his family in immoral ways. Having students debate the moral or immoral qualities of Mak’s decisions will help them to think critically about the text as well as character choices. Students might also debate whether or not the shepherds were really graceful in their actions towards Mak. To make a real world connection, students might debate whether or not there should be consequences or rewards for actions. These types of questions and activities ensure that students are learning more than just the plot of the text.

But besides these obvious discussions, there is also an opportunity to discuss society. As the shepherds wake up from their night’s sleep, Daw admits that he thought Mak was lying, confessing, “Methought he was lapped / In a wolfskin” (*Norton* 529-530). Coll then takes their discussion of Mak’s immoral behavior to a higher standard, making a remark about society. Coll replies to Daw’s comment, “So are many happed / Now, namely within” (*Norton* 531-532). His statement raises many questions: To what

exactly is Coll referring? Within what are there many wolfskins? The shepherd community? The church? Society? Coll's statement is odd because the shepherds do not elaborate on the point at all; instead Daw reveals his prophetic dream. Although Coll's statement seems a bit out of place, it provides a welcome opportunity for students and teachers to engage in discussions of society. Is society really immoral? Is there a trend, like so many suggest, that the United States' society is becoming more immoral? These questions should open up many debates among students and give them a genuine chance to engage in ideas brought up in the text.

Analysis of the dramatic characters will also provide students and teachers with another real life connection, the opportunity to observe a teenager grow in maturity as Daw becomes a leader throughout the course of the play. As has already been established, Daw begins the play as the quintessential teenager. However, throughout the course of the play, he begins to take on more leadership qualities until finally Daw is showing more maturity in his decisions than his older counterparts, Coll and Gib. He first takes on a leadership role as an initiator. The speaking order in the play is established from the first page: Coll, Gib, Daw. Daw's position as the last to speak suggests his role in the group as the youngest and least experienced. However, he exhibits his growing maturity as he interrupts the speaking order several times. In the first occurrence, he exhibits superior knowledge to that of his fellow shepherds in a prophetic dream he has: "When we had long napped, methought with a gin / A fat sheep he trapped; but he made no din" (*Norton* 533-536). His prophetic dream becomes a reality as the older shepherds discover that in fact, a sheep has been stolen. In the second occurrence, he exhibits confidence as he accuses Mak of stealing the sheep. The fellow

shepherds scold Daw for making such an accusation but soon value his wisdom when they realize that Mak is in fact the sheep stealer. In the third occurrence, Daw shows maturity as he offers grace to Mak. Daw encourages the other shepherds to not dwell on Mak's bad behavior and instead get some sleep. Although Daw is the youngest, the least experienced, and treated as a servant by his fellow workers, he still shows greater maturity. Teaching *The Second Shepherds' Play* provides an opportunity for student discussion of two important ideas: the qualities that make a person have good character and the qualities needed to grow in maturity to become a person of better character.

Perhaps the best character education (and real life connection) in relation to these dramatic characters is to give students an opportunity to consider what type of people they want to be. Damon discusses the importance of character education and the student motivation that can come from it. He argues that schools need to do a better job of explaining how the skills students learn in school will help them accomplish their life goals (Damon n. pag.). In his opinion, this is the only effective way to motivate students, and in order for students to understand how school will help them accomplish their goals, they must be given opportunities to "reflect on what they want to do with their lives" (Damon n.pag.). For Damon, "Good schools can provide students with rich historical and literary knowledge about how such questions have been addressed by thoughtful people throughout the ages," questions like *What kind of a person do I want to become* and *What is my ultimate concern or purpose in life?* (n.pag.) These questions are addressed in *The Second Shepherds' Play*, and discussion around these questions can lead into discussion of Shakespearean characters that are known for lacking good character, especially in the tragedies that are so often taught in high school. By discussing these

ideas of character in a shorter and less complex play, students might be more likely to engage in Shakespeare as they reencounter these themes.

In addition, themes of justice and mercy are important in both *The Second Shepherds' Play* and in Shakespearean drama, especially in the tragedies commonly taught in high school. Justice and mercy are two themes students seem to value greatly—just think of all the times students say “it’s not fair”—and students are eager to talk about how justice and mercy can be relative in a given situation. They are likely to understand Mak’s plight throughout the play. It’s not fair that his wife is pregnant every year, it’s not fair that he cannot properly feed his family, and it’s not fair that the shepherds will not lend him a sheep. Mak feels justified in stealing the sheep because the world has treated him unkindly. This attitude provides an opportunity for the class to engage in discussions of how justice and mercy are relative. Ask students: Is it right that Mak stole the sheep considering his situation? Are justice and mercy relative? How so? When? The mercy that the shepherds display raises another opportunity to discuss justice and mercy. They let Mak go with relatively no punishment, except being thrown out in a blanket. In class, students can discuss an array of questions: Why do the shepherds show mercy? What does the paring of the nativity story and the sheep stealing story suggest about mercy? Is mercy important, to whom, when, why? These questions will help to engage students in the themes of justice and mercy, themes that Shakespeare also seemed to value greatly in tragedies like *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Although both the playwright of *The Second Shepherds' Play*, the Wakefield Master, and Shakespeare use themes of justice and mercy in their plays, each has a different perspective on which is more important. The Wakefield Master seems to

suggest that mercy is more important than justice. The entire play, in fact, is centered around the idea that God sends mercy through Jesus. The shepherds know from prophecy that Jesus has come to save them from their sins. Perhaps this is why the Wakefield Master allows the shepherds to lightly punish Mak instead of giving him the justice he deserves, the justice that The Old Testament, the laws the shepherds were well versed in demands. While the Wakefield Master privileges mercy, Shakespeare focuses on what justice means. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet becomes obsessed with seeing justice executed on his uncle and his mother. They do see their end come in due course, but so does Hamlet. It seems as though Hamlet's obsession with justice overtakes him. *Julius Caesar* also provides many opportunities to discuss the theme of justice. Is it justice that leads Brutus and others to kill Caesar? Is it justice that leads Marc Anthony to defend the honor of Caesar? In *Romeo and Juliet*, the theme of justice is not as important to the main characters but to the feuding families. If the families can be seen as a collective whole, their tragic flaw might be the need for justice, a need that leads to the death of a child from each family. Shakespeare doesn't argue that justice is necessarily bad, but perhaps he is suggesting that when people become obsessed with something their perceptions of what's happening can become clouded, and their obsession can lead to their downfall. While both the Wakefield Master and Shakespeare use thematic ideas like justice and mercy in their plays, it seems as though the former focuses on mercy more than the latter. It is likely that students will also disagree on which theme is more important. Discussing the importance of themes can lead the class into meaningful critical thinking that connects to real life situations as well as character education.

While there are many supporters of character education, there are some, like Alfie Kohn, who disagree with how character education is currently taught. Kohn argues that “What goes by the name of character education nowadays is, for the most part, a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make children work harder and do what they’re told” (430). He begins refuting character education with a quote from John Holt: “Teachers and schools tend to mistake good behavior for good character. What they prize is docility, suggestibility; the child who will do what he is told; or even better, the child who will do what is wanted without even having to be told” (Kohn 429). Kohn continues his argument by asking five questions that should, in his opinion, be asked of any character program: At what level are problems addressed? What is the underlying theory of human nature? What is the ultimate goal? Which values are promoted? How is learning thought to take place? Kohn finds in most answers to these questions that character education programs have been designed to be “distinctively conservative,” not teaching children to make good choices but praising them for following rules and being obedient (434). Kohn suggests instead that character education programs should engage students in “deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being” (430). He offers a very different view of effective character education:

Character education, or any kind of education, would look very different if we begun with other objectives—if, for example, we were principally concerned with helping children become active participants in a democratic society (or agents for transforming a society into one that is authentically democratic). It would look different if our top priority were to help students develop into principled and caring members of a community or advocates for social justice. To be sure, these objectives are not inconsistent with the desire to preserve certain traditions, but the point would then be to help children decide which traditions are worth preserving and why, based on these other considerations. That is not at all the same as endorsing anything that is traditional or making the preservation of tradition with our primary concern. In short, we want to ask character education

proponents what goals they emphasize—and ponder whether their broad vision is compatible with our own. (Kohn 434)

Although Kohn has been labeled as a voice against character education, I completely agree with his views. Teachers should not be instilling in children that rules should be followed or that they cannot question such rules. Instead, teachers should provide students with an opportunity to question and form their own opinions. Kohn agrees, saying “we might suggest holding regular class meetings in which students can share, plan, decide, and reflect together” (442). One of the strongest techniques for providing students an opportunity to question is using literature. Kohn agrees with this idea but claims that using literature often times is troublesome because “many programs use simplistic little morality tales in place of rich, complex literature” (443). *The Second Shepherds’ Play* works well with building character because it is a rich and complex piece of literature, not a simplistic little morality tale.

Besides offering up questions to use in class to help students discuss ideas of character, I would like to present the work of Peter Smagorinsky as an example of how to more extensively use literature in developing character education. Smagorinsky discusses using themes in literature as a technique to build character education and suggests that a reflective approach, an approach Kohn would likely agree with, to studying themes emphasizes student engagement and is much more productive than a didactic approach. To Smagorinsky, a reflective approach to thematic character education is where “students consider situations and moral codes and are called on to develop and live by standards that they generate through careful and considerate contemplation of problematic situations” (65). Smagorinsky suggests that the best way to

teach thematic character education is to develop a unit where “the process of instruction would emphasize the students’ engagement with the issues and the resolutions they come up with for considering moral dilemmas” (65). As a unit long activity, Smagorinsky proposes having students write an extended definition of the thematic term being explored. In order to write a successfully extended definition, students need to be able to “generate a set of criteria that state the principles behind the concept” and “illustrate each criterion with examples that meet it and contrasting examples that appear to meet it yet lack some fundamental element” (Smagorinsky 67). Smagorinsky recommends that students need to consider a wide range of examples of justice and mercy and that literature can provide these examples. Students can also build on their own knowledge and use contemporary examples of people exhibiting justice and mercy, thereby apply their knowledge to real life connections. Students will be more likely to engage in meaningful character education because they are reflecting on the themes instead of the teacher giving them the black and white descriptions of justice and mercy.

In *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, students can consider the following moral dilemmas: Is it right for Mak to steal sheep if his family is starving? Is it right for the shepherds to punish Mak, even if it is not a serious punishment? Is it right for the shepherds to leave Mak and his family without any food or any money to buy food? These questions do not have black and white answers. There are some students who would agree that each action is right and others who would think at least some are wrong. It would be interesting for students to write their own definitions of justice and mercy and compare them to what a fifteenth century Englishman might have described. It would also be interesting for students to think like a fifteenth century Englishman as they

answer the above moral dilemmas. Like Smagorinsky suggests, this type of activity would definitely be a reflective approach to teaching the themes of justice and mercy. In addition, by using *The Second Shepherds' Play* as a companion piece to Shakespearean drama, teachers can create a whole unit of study (as opposed to one unit that focuses on one play and another that focuses on another play) where students can engage in reflective discussions about making morally right decisions, qualities of a good character, methods to becoming a person of better character, and themes of justice and mercy. When students are engaged in discussions about literature they can relate to, they are more motivated to read, write, and think.

Section 3: Interdisciplinary Connections

The Second Shepherds' Play also works well as a companion piece to Shakespearean drama because it is ripe for interdisciplinary connections. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) defines interdisciplinary teaching as applying “methods or language from more than one academic discipline to examine a theme, issue, question, problem, topic, or experience” (NCTE). Sandra Mathison and Melissa Freeman state that interdisciplinary learning is best for students and question why it is seen so seldom in modern schooling (5). Mathison and Freeman cite Stember who gives three arguments to support interdisciplinary teaching: the intellectual argument, which suggests that any field is enriched by ideas or methods from other fields; the practical argument, which suggests that the real-world of knowledge is connected and new ties are formed every day; and the pedagogical argument, which suggests that learning is seriously hindered by the current fragmented system (16-17). Mathison and Freeman also maintain that through an interconnected, theme-based approach, “teachers will have the flexibility

to address the needs of the whole child” (17). They propose that

As a pedagogical strategy, individual and cultural differences, self-esteem, and rapidly changing information are seen as natural parts of the interdisciplinary process, not as ‘units’ that need to be added on as in traditional approaches. (Mathison and Freeman 17)

According to Mathison and Freeman, interdisciplinary teaching allows for a more natural teaching process.

In addition, Barbara St. Clair and David Hough argue that “by focusing the curriculum on a problem or topic rather than on a discrete discipline, there is an increased opportunity to formalize the process of problem solving” and because of this, “students are exposed to more information and more views, providing them with the raw material needed to construct understanding” (17). Not only does interdisciplinary teaching allow for a more natural teaching process, it also allows for students to be exposed to more information across disciplines and therefore provides more opportunities for students to construct meaning. Mathison and Freeman list the following as positive educational outcomes for students involved in interdisciplinary studies:

- increase in understanding, retention, and application of general concepts
- better overall comprehension of global interdependencies, along with the development of multiple perspectives, points of view, and values
- increase in the ability to make decisions, think critically and creatively, and synthesize knowledge beyond the disciplines
- increased ability to identify, assess and transfer significant information needed for solving novel problems
- promotion of cooperative learning, a better attitude towards self as a learner and as a meaningful member of a community
- increased motivation (17-18)

Despite all the other positive qualities of using interdisciplinary teaching, I argue increased motivation is the most important. It is important for students to see connections between fields and to be given opportunities to study those connections,

especially the ones they favor naturally or enjoy more. The natural problem with interdisciplinary connections, though, is that not all schools support or allow the time for integrated curriculum across all subjects.

Because of this, I try to integrate other disciplines as much as possible into my English classroom. The way I like to approach interdisciplinary connections is to give students a choice of which field they would like to investigate more. This allows for students to have some ownership in their learning and provides an opportunity for them to choose a field that is personally interesting. Since Gardner's study of multiple intelligences in 1983, teachers have been aware that students learn through a variety of intelligences. Generally, the language arts classroom focuses heavily on linguistic learning, but including various interdisciplinary connections can help students who have other intelligences feel successful in the English classroom. I prefer to give students choice instead of directing the entire class to learn about all the various multiple-intelligences because I know giving students choice leads to greater motivation. If a student is not interested in a particular field, why make them study it during a language arts class? Instead, interdisciplinary connections should be used in conjunction with student choice so that English teachers are using their time wisely in gaining student interest and knowledge.

One of the main proponents of choice is Jeffrey Wilhelm who writes that it is "a most excellent thing because it moves our students toward independence, towards agency, towards exercising their will, finding and loving their own questions, interests, answers, and pathways" (41). Many other advocates of literacy, like Penny Kittle, agree that choice is paramount for student motivation. However, too much choice can be

damaging. Wilhelm claims that “in providing too much choice we renege on our adult responsibility to lend children our expertise and to assist students in ever more competent performances and widely considered experience” (41). Wilhelm suggests that we need “an intelligent balance and negotiation” between “guidance, preparation, and opportunities to fly on one’s own” (41). Choice within teacher-set parameters is best for student learning, and using interdisciplinary connections in class provides an opportunity for student choice.

The Second Shepherds’ Play lends itself well to the following interdisciplinary fields: music, religion, history, and drama. Likewise, these specific interdisciplinary fields can be traced through many Shakespearean plays, but for the purpose of this discussion, I will limit my focus to *The Second Shepherds’ Play*. For the following section, I will present how each field is applicable to the play, discuss why students would benefit from such a study, and give several examples of how to use this interdisciplinary connection in class.

Part I: Music

There are numerous references to music in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*. Many scholars infer that the unknown author was likely a cleric who “had an especial fondness for music” and “found it especially apt for serving various functions in his play” (Carpenter 696). The specific arrangement of songs sung is not mentioned in the stage directions, only the words: “They sing,” “he singing a lullaby,” “An Angel sings Gloria in Excelsis,” “Sings,” and “They sing” (Norton 399, 409, 415, 416, 419). One of the first functions of music within the play begins with the shepherds’ soliloquies. The shepherds enter the play one at a time, imitating a musical cannon. Regula Meyer Evitt argues that

“Canonic imitation, flourishing and multifaceted during the fifteenth century, is, I suggest the musical structure most applicable to the opening section of the *Second Shepherds’ Play*” (309). The second function of music within the play is in the type of songs sung. *The Second Shepherds’ Play* is a vernacular medieval religious drama. The problem with vernacular drama is that there are only a few cases where a score or specific song title is given in the English manuscripts. In *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, the shepherds sing two unnamed songs. Mak, the thief, sings an unnamed lullaby, and when the angel sings, the type of song is given, a Gloria, but the score remains unknown. It is impossible to know exactly what songs were sung, but it is easy to see that the playwright was familiar with music.

The music in the play also seems to indicate the difference between good and bad characters. Carpenter writes,

Music is a somewhat subtle means of pointing up the ‘bad’ character of Mak. For the shepherds’ sharp criticism of Mak’s musical inabilities stressed the differences in character between him and the ‘good persons’ in the play, the very musical shepherds. (697)

Mak’s poor singing is in direct contrast to the singing of the Virgin. Wallace H. Johnson parallels Mak’s song to the shepherds’ and the Virgin’s, which occurs later in the play. He insists that the “Bad singing is done by Mak in mockery of the shepherds’ singing. At a later point, Mak even sings to the stolen sheep in what was probably a raucous parody of traditional lullabies of the Virgin to the Christ child” (Johnson 52).

Finally, music functions in the last section of the play, the Nativity scene. Besides the angel and shepherds singing a Gloria, the entire structure of the last section is in Gloria form. The Gloria begins with the angel singing, as is indicated in the stage

directions: “An Angel sings ‘Gloria in Excelsis’ and then speaks” (*Norton* 415). The Gloria continues into the second element as the angel and Daw praise God. Daw also begins the third element of the Gloria, the invocation, as he pleads to God for something to say and to give to the child. The final lines of the play contain the last element of the Gloria, the doxology, or a hymn of praise to God. The shepherds begin the doxology, and the Virgin Mary, in her only spoken lines of the play, finishes it. The Gloria is not the only reference to music in the last section, though. The shepherds also discuss the performance of the angel’s hymn that begins the third section of the play, discussing the angel’s use of ornamentation, a trill. Carpenter argues that the shepherds are impressed with the angel’s colorful singing style because these rustic shepherds are more accustomed to hearing and performing music in an unsophisticated style (698). Music is definitely an important element in *The Second Shepherds’ Play* and one worthy to be studied by students.

Some might ask, why focus on the interdisciplinary connection of music in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*? Many advocates of interdisciplinary teaching push for less division between the core departments, including language arts, social studies, math, and science. While I greatly value more connection between core departments, I also maintain that it is important for teachers to connect core disciplines to elective disciplines, such as music. Gardner identified seven intelligences important for learning. Among those intelligences is music. Many of the core classes focus mostly on one or two intelligences. In language arts, for instance, it is easy for teachers to reach students who are gifted linguistically. But by incorporating more intelligences into the classroom through interdisciplinary connections, teachers are increasing the amount of student buy-

in and knowledge. If teachers of language arts want students to enjoy reading and to become lifelong learners, it is imperative that we give students an opportunity to enjoy learning about literature and writing, and since not all students are linguistically minded, we should look to multiple intelligences. Using music in the play provides an opportunity for students who are musically gifted to interact with the text in a way that is unique to the traditional language arts classroom and in a way that will allow them to make connections between two disciplines, and in the end, learn more about each.

Students who pick a musical interdisciplinary connection to the play might debate the following questions: What purpose does the music serve in the play? Why would shepherds, Mak, and an angel sing so much? What is the purpose of music in general? Why do people sing? Students might also be interested in conducting research on the role of music in literature. After researching the role of music in the fifteenth century, students could present songs from that era to the class. Or students could research authentic playing techniques of the fifteenth century and present the techniques through a concert given to the class. Students might also research the form of a Gloria in more detail and imitate it in a song they write. There are many other activities that students could engage in to help bridge the gap between the music and literature departments. What is most important is that students are able to make connections between separate fields where they are learning more and thinking more critically. Giving students, especially those who are musically intelligent, an opportunity to study literature through music will only increase learning and motivation.

Part II: Religion

The Second Shepherds' Play can also connect to students who are interested in religion. The play is by an anonymous playwright. It is widely accepted, though, that the playwright was likely a religious clergymen. A.C. Cawley states, "The Wakefield playwright was no doubt a cleric or a man with clerical training, judging by his use of Latin and his biblical knowledge" (xxx). Peter Happé argues that not only the Wakefield Master but all the mystery cycle authors were clerics with a conservative outlook. He notes that the authors "had for their primary objective not a literary intention so much as a religious and didactic one," and that this objective is conservative in the fact that "[t]here appears to be little attempt to break new ground, the intention being to present the essential truths of Christianity, with the implication that these were settled and apparent" (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 9, 30). In this regard, Happé also contends that the plays can be considered an act of worship as the authors "aim to reveal the Divine," celebrating truths and showing how "divine promises are made and kept" (*English Mystery Plays* 31).

In addition to the authors' occupation and purpose in writing the plays, the authors also choose interesting subject matters. It is very unique that the four English mystery play cycles include the same subject matter because other cycle plays, like the French, do not. Happé claims that the subject matter of the English mystery plays "is determined by the intention to represent the important episodes of scriptural history which prefigure the life of Christ" (*English Mystery Plays* 25). He insists that the subject matter that is chosen is done so "to illustrate the central theme of Christ's sacrifice and the redemption of man" (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 25).

Redemption is a key theme in the mystery plays. Happé writes:

The Redemption implies the corruption of man, a theme which is elaborated throughout. . . Indeed the corruption of man is much emphasized. We see jealousy, pride, wrath, ambition. Man appears ignorant, lost, wrongheaded. (*English Mystery Plays* 31)

This theme of redemption is key in *The Second Shepherds' Play*. Mak represents the corruption of man. He is jealous of the shepherds' ability to have food; he's prideful when he confronts the shepherds; he appears ignorant, almost a buffoon throughout the story; and he is in direct contrast to the shepherds who extend grace to him and to the angel who offers reassurance and hope to the shepherds. The Wakefield Master's choice of themes seems to fit the description common to religious mystery cycle authors.

There are, however, several areas where the Wakefield Master differs from the characteristics of the other playwrights. His ability as a writer seems far superior to the other authors. If the purpose of the plays is to merely instruct, the Wakefield Master goes beyond his contemporaries in creating a writing style unique to himself. Happé says of the Wakefield Master's writing ability:

The mock nativity, the sheep in the cradle, which is a punning reference to the Lamb of God, and the scene in which the sheep is discovered are beautifully plotted, and written in a language which exploits the poetic possibilities of everyday speech. The speech is sharpened and concentrated by irony and proverb, and is essentially dramatic in its peculiar appositeness to the apparent and the symbolic meaning of what is enacted. (*English Mystery Plays* 33)

Not only is the Wakefield Master's writing ability far superior to his counterparts, his play is more humorous than others. As has already been established, the purpose of the plays is to instruct, and Happé infers that the plays themselves are an act of worship; however, the Wakefield Master's play is almost too humorous to be an act of worship. Usually, worship is thought to be reverent. Connotations of reverent might include

solemn, thoughtful, and humble. A scene that makes the audience laugh is not solemn. Although a humorous play might induce great thoughts, it is probably not inducing religious thoughts, and a parodied version of the nativity seems anything but humble. Although the Wakefield Master is a cleric, he seems to diverge from the characteristics of his counterparts when he uses humor in *The Second Shepherds' Play*.

Another distinction of the Wakefield Master is his use of non-Christian elements. He brings in elements of folk as Mak draws a magical circle around the sleeping shepherds. Happé suggests that the use of folklore is not unique in the cycle plays but the development in the Wakefield Master's work is "particularly strong and persistent and it naturally raises curiosity about why it is done" (*Cyclic Form* 270). He cites the elaborate development of Mak's story as an example of the folklore in the Wakefield Master's work and argues that this use of folklore "existed separately" and was incorporated into the play "with the effect of making clearer the folly and sin of the characters" (Happé, *Cyclic Form* 271). This last statement seems to justify the Wakefield Master's actions. He isn't trying to corrupt the original intention of instruction; instead, he is trying to bring out the folly and sin of the characters by using the folk tale.

While his use of folk is justified, critics also question why so much of the play is about a secular story instead of the nativity. More than eighty-five percent of the play is about a fictional secular story, the story of Mak and the sheep stealing, while only fifteen percent of the play focuses on the actual announcement of Christ's birth and the nativity scene. Happé suggests that the Wakefield Master is more concerned with "the substance and the difficulty of human experience" (*Cyclic Form* 270). He is more concerned with

man showing qualities of grace within the difficulty of human experience than making sure the audience is familiar with the nativity story.

The Wakefield Master is also unique in that many critics argue that his plays are more accessible to the modern reader. Happé concedes that this is because he offers an individual's view: "His embittered social criticism and his dramatic use of symbols and parallels make him a powerful voice" (*English Mystery Plays* 33). In addition to presenting the story of the shepherds hearing of Jesus' birth and the nativity, stories that are well known to most Christian audiences, the Wakefield Master also presents the feelings of the individual. The play begins with the three shepherds sharing their personal woes and then Mak sharing his. The audience sees that these characters are real people with problems the audience can relate to.

Despite all these distinctions from his counterparts, the Wakefield Master is still a conservative cleric. Bentley argues that though the play was funny to the medieval man it was not sacrilegious (22). Happé agrees that the Wakefield Master's writings are very much "within the orbit of his fellow authors" (*English Mystery Plays* 34). He claims that

Though he may have seen the world more sharply and responded to it with greater literary subtlety, his world is the same as that of the other authors. The power of Christ's Incarnation is expressed in his work, and the vitality and variety of life are seen in the light of the Redemption. (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 34)

It is important to realize that though the Wakefield Master differed from his counterparts, he is still a product of his time, a time where religion was the center of everything.

Exploring the religious elements in the play will be significant to students who have an intrapersonal intelligence. Because the United States relies heavily on the idea of separation of church and state, many times secondary teachers do not feel comfortable

discussing the religious elements of literature for fear of reprimand. This is unfortunate because religion is key to understanding literature and the thought processes of a group of people from a certain time period. Using *The Second Shepherds' Play* as a companion piece will allow students who are interested in religion to have an opportunity to study it more. Students might trace the Wakefield Master's biblical knowledge through the thematic ideas of justice, mercy, love, and salvation. They might research songs that the Wakefield Master uses from the Catholic worship service or question the playwright's motives: Was the play intended for didactic purposes? Why would a cleric have written a farce? Why did the cleric combine two stories—one religious, one secular—into one play? Students might also enjoy investigating how the Christian religion has changed over time. Students who enjoy creative writing could pretend to be the Wakefield Master as he wrote a religious document, backing up their ideas through religious elements found in the play or through research of common beliefs of clerics during the medieval period. There might not be time or support from administrators for the entire class to research the religious elements in the play, but small groups of students who are interested in religion may find such studies interesting, and when students are interested in what they are learning, they are more likely to learn more.

Part III: History

The mystery plays have a unique history. They were performed in medieval towns; some performances were of entire cycles, while others were of individual plays for special occasions. The earliest known mystery play existed in about 1375, and *The Second Shepherds' Play*, part of the *Towneley* cycle of thirty-two plays that come from Wakefield in Yorkshire, is speculated to have been written about 1450 (Happé, *English*

Mystery Plays 12-13). Not a lot is known about these plays, although the *Towneley* cycle contains many complex revisions (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 12). The only references to performances at Wakefield are for 1554 and 1556, and it is clear that these plays were craft plays as the manuscript mentions the names of several guilds (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 12).

Happé argues that there are two significant factors that helped produce the mystery plays: the existence of liturgical plays in many churches and the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi by the Council of Vienne in 1311 (*English Mystery Plays* 18-19). During the medieval period, plays were performed in churches, although there were many who insisted that such performances during church were sacrilegious. When Corpus Christi was founded, Happé argues that many medieval people naturally wanted to celebrate through dramatic performances (*English Mystery Plays* 18-19). Perhaps moving the plays outside of the church building helped bridge the gap between those who agreed with plays in the church and those who did not. At any rate, the cycle plays usually were performed on the day of the Feast of Corpus Christi, and it is inferred that the writers of the plays were “working within the orbit of the Church” (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 20). The earliest plays contained no extraneous material; however, later plays, like *The Second Shepherds’ Play* do and seem to suggest more worldly influence.

According to Happé, the guilds made the most contributions to the mystery plays because “[t]hey were often rich, and it seems that the fourteenth century was a time when they rose in civic importance” (*English Mystery Plays* 20). The mystery plays did not begin with the guilds influence, but by 1422, plays were being performed by guilds (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 13). There were eight guilds producing plays by 1467,

and the number of guilds rose to twenty-four by 1500 (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 13).

The guilds are largely responsible for the changing states of the cycles because they themselves “were not stable institutions” (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 11-12).

The mystery plays slowly became less important as the Reformation began because the cycles were contrary to the new doctrines. Happé mentions that in the last years of Henry VII and the reign of Edward VI there were revisions being made to the plays, especially the omission of plays on the assumption and coronation of the Virgin (*English Mystery Plays* 23). During Queen Mary’s reign, there was a return to the mystery plays, but Elizabeth I’s reign made it more difficult for plays to be performed. Many times, it was the church itself that tried to suppress the performance of the plays. The last recorded performance of a cycle play was in 1580 in Coventry (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 23-24).

It is fascinating that the plays seemed to have begun and ended with connections to the church. Students who enjoy history might enjoy researching the influence of the church in the middle ages and especially the influence of the church on literary publications and performances. This research could easily lead the entire class into a discussion of literature as a product of societal ideas, a discussion that can easily be broadened into an analysis of today’s popular literature. Students who are linguistically and/or interpersonally intelligent would enjoy this interdisciplinary connection because they are interacting with the text as well as other students.

Part IV: Drama

The Second Shepherds’ Play is an interesting dramatic work because of its relationship to the cyclic form. As has already been established, most English mystery

plays are very similar in content and form. In fact, some critics imply that the citizens of Wakefield borrowed the *York* cycle and made it their own because the *Towneley* cycle greatly resembles the *York* cycle. Both are written in fifteenth century Yorkshire dialect and six of the plays in each cycle are virtually the same. However, some of the plays in the *Towneley* are less sophisticated than those of the *York* cycle, while others are more sophisticated. Many, including Happé, suggest that there was one main reviser for the *Towneley* cycle, the Wakefield Master, who wrote in nine-line stanzas and had “a fine sense of dramatic effect, especially comedy” (Happé, *English Mystery Plays* 13). It seems as though the writing of the plays can be traced with much research and a little speculation, but the performances of the plays require much more speculation.

There is much question about the performance of the cycle plays, especially the Wakefield ones. Eleanor Prosser is frustrated by the lack of interest into the performances of the cyclic plays. She regretfully admits that “Scholars generally agree that one of the most popular forms of dramatic art ever created by civilized man cannot be analyzed as dramatic art. The medieval drama best known as the mystery...remains, indeed, a mystery” (Prosser 3). She wonders why such a revered form has not been studied more by the dramatic critic.

The little bit that is known about the performance of the mystery plays is that they were performed on pageant wagons by craft guilds. However, there is only historical documentation that this occurred in York, Coventry, Beverley, and Chester. Happé observes of the Wakefield plays:

There are some indications that the Towneley Cycle may have been done in this manner at Wakefield, but if it were, the evidence linking the plays to the guilds is somewhat shaky and rather late, and the dramaturgy of some of the individual

plays does not seem to lend itself readily to performance on wagons. (*Cyclic Form* 35)

He suggests that the Towneley manuscript of which *The Second Shepherds' Play* is a part of “is very ornate, as though it were intended for a presentation for the purpose of reading rather than for acting” (Happé, *Cyclic Form* 37). No one is really sure what happened in Wakefield. A big piece of dramatic history has been lost because of this.

Since not much is known about the performances of mystery plays, I like to imagine with Prosser a fictionalized scenario of one of the mystery plays where Chester's John Jolibody and his family busily prepare for the performance:

For days, even weeks, Chester was undoubtedly bustling with activity. John Jolibody, a member of the guild of waterleaders and drawers, was probably busy repairing the study old pageant wagon that was again to serve as Noah's ark. There would be timbers to replace, wheels to repair. Perhaps the draperies that hung around the base of the wagon, masking the wheels, needed to be painted with the colorful figures of the animals, two by two. In the meantime, his dutiful wife Gillian was probably sewing costumes while his young son Watt scurried around town on urgent errands. And if John played a part in the play, there would be the excitement of rehearsals during the last few days and those last-minute emergencies—the ripped seam, the lost prop, the sudden laryngitis—which have surely attended all plays since the beginning of time. And there would be the threatening clouds that always appear the day before an outdoor performance. At last the awaited day would dawn, brisk but miraculously sunny. The streets would buzz with excitement and tension as cast and crew hurried outside the city to their waiting wagons and the audience hustled to the best vantage points. As the first pageant wagon, the Tanners' *Fall of Lucifer*, lumbered up to St. Werburgh's Abbey, the town of Chester greeted the culmination of months of anticipation and devoted work. (Prosser 5)

It's important to read Prosser's fictionalized account of the performances because it helps the reader to realize and imagine how important the plays must have been to the original participants and audience. After all, these plays survived more than two hundred years, despite the lack of historical performance documentation that we have.

This paradox of little knowledge about such revered drama, as Prosser calls it, may be very interesting for students to investigate. Drama works well with language arts connections, but often, teachers are so pressed for time that they don't allow much if any time for dramatic performance. Making time to act out plays is important, though, because students with bodily-kinesthetic intelligences will enjoy this type of interdisciplinary connections. Students interested in drama could also research what little is known about why the plays were performed in the backs of wagons and reconstruct their own rendition of what the play would have looked like in the middle ages. They could then perform a part of the play for the class in as close to the original manner as they could establish. This type of activity, reconstructing the pageant wagon as well as directing the actors where to stand and move, would also interested students who are visual-spatial learners as they are challenged to incorporate math skills into the language arts environment.

In addition, students who enjoy drama might also enjoy analyzing the play. The play is not divided into acts and scenes. Instead, it is one long piece of 1087 lines. The form of the play can open up many class discussions: Why are there not more divisions in the play? What was the purpose of combining two stories without the formal division of acts and scenes? Would the play be more effective with more formal divisions? What is the purpose of combining two very different stories together—the story of the farce and the story of the Nativity? Perhaps the students interested in drama could debate the students interested in religion with this question. This type of debate would also reach out to students with interpersonal intelligences. By studying the interdisciplinary connections in the play, students are really learning about the text and making

connections between disciplines that will stay with them far longer than plot memorization.

Section IV: Conclusion

The Second Shepherds' Play works well as a companion piece to Shakespearean drama because of the shared characteristics of humor, real life connections, and interdisciplinary connections. Although I've focused my discussion on highlighting the benefits of teaching *The Second Shepherds' Play*, a study of this play will be more beneficial when coupled with Shakespeare. By pairing the two together, students will be engaging in discussions of similar topics for a much longer time. When students are able to get more in depth in literature, they learn more. Spending more time on a unit will also allow for more real life and interdisciplinary connections. In addition, students will realize that it is easier to remember all they've been taught because the focus is more narrow and at the same time more in depth. They will not only remember what they've learned, but they will also be challenged during the process and find themselves enjoying literature and the English classroom. If we truly want to create lifelong learners and readers, we must be willing to revamp our current approach to teaching literature. Companion pieces are one solution to the problem.

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APPENDIX: SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

***The Second Shepherds' Play* Choose-a-Project Final Assessment**

Objective: To demonstrate an understanding of *The Second Shepherds' Play* and to provide an opportunity for critical thinking about the text and between disciplines.

Directions: This project is worth 100 points. Read through the following options and choose the project that sounds most interesting to you. For several options, you may work with other students, although each member of the group will be graded separately on his/her contributions throughout the project and the final product.

Music

1. After researching the role of music in the fifteenth century, write a two-three page summary of your findings and present at least five songs from the fifteenth century to the class. You may work in a group with no more than three members. For each member added, five more songs are required for the presentation.
2. Research authentic playing techniques of the fifteenth century and present the techniques through a ten-fifteen minute concert given to the class. You may work in a group with no more than five members. With a group of four-five members, the concert should be twenty-thirty minutes.
3. Creative writing option: Research the form of a Gloria in more detail and imitate it in a song you write. Your song should have at least four stanzas, one for each part of the

Gloria. You will turn in a copy of your poem along with a one page explanation of how your poem meets the criteria of a Gloria.

Religion

1. Trace the Wakefield Master's biblical knowledge through the thematic ideas of justice, mercy, love, and salvation. Present your findings in a four-five page analysis paper. You may work with one other person on this project. Both members will be responsible for writing the paper together.

2. Choose one of the following questions about the playwright's motives to debate in a group of four-five students. Was the play intended for didactic purposes? Why would a cleric have written a farce? Why did the cleric combine two stories—one religious, one secular—into one play? After the debate, write a two page reflection (see me for more guidelines for this option).

3. Creative writing option: Imagine you are the Wakefield Master writing an unnamed religious document. Support your religious ideas through religious elements found in the play or through research of common beliefs of clerics during the medieval period. Your document should be creative (pick an appropriate genre) and at least four pages long.

You may work with one other person. Both members will be responsible for writing the paper together.

History

1. Research the influence of the church in the Middle Ages and especially the influence of the church on literary publications and performances. Present your findings in a four-five page essay. You need at least four secondary sources for this assignment. You may

work with one other person. Both members will be responsible for writing the paper together.

2. Research how the Christian religion has changed over time. Present your findings in a four-five page essay. You need at least four secondary sources for this assignment. You may work with one other person. Both members will be responsible for writing the paper together.

3. Creative writing option: Not much is known about the dramatic performances of this particular mystery play. Research the performance history of mystery plays in general and write an imagined first person account of an actor or actress on the day of a pageant performance. Use your research to back up your first person account. Whatever first person genre you choose, the document must be at least three pages long. Include a bibliography with at least three secondary sources on it. You may work with one other person. Both members will be responsible for writing the paper together.

Drama

1. After researching what little is known about why the plays were performed in the backs of wagons, reconstruct your own rendition of what the play would have looked like in the Middle Ages. Then perform a part of the play for the class in as close to the original manner as you can establish. Include a bibliography with at least three secondary sources on it. You may work with a group of five-six members for this option.

2. Creative writing option: Write your own mystery play. Research common characteristics between mystery plays and write your own (shorter) version. Your play needs to be between five-six pages long. You may work with one other person.

Next Steps:

1. Initial work day to choose a project and plan course of attack: Wednesday, January 6
2. Two research days in the library and/or computer lab on Thursday, January 7, 2010 and Tuesday, January 12, 2010.
3. Conference with Mrs. Colgrove about next steps for the project: Friday, January 8, 2010, Wednesday, January 13, 2010, and Friday, January 15, 2010. (Rubric will be agreed upon during one of these conferences.)
4. Work day in class or computer lab: Tuesday, January 19, 2010.
5. Final project due date: Wednesday, January 20, 2010. Presentations will begin on Wednesday, January 20th and continue through Friday, January 22nd.

*Note that while none of the options directs you to use technology, you are encouraged to do so.