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Amanda Arp
Iowa State University

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Shakespeare and Teaching Rhetorical Technique in the Speech Classroom

Part of the journal section "Forum: Shakespeare Alive Cluster"

Amanda Arp, "Shakespeare and Teaching Rhetorical Technique in the Speech Classroom"

1. Shakespeare's artistic communication within the speeches of his plays has the potential to augment student learning in college speech communication courses. Studying Shakespeare is appropriate in college speech communication courses because students could achieve improved rhetorical skills. Studying Shakespeare could even fulfill learning objectives of speech communication classes. For example, at Iowa State University, one of the learning objectives of the speech communication foundation course, SP CM 212, is to "select appropriate language to communicate ideas vividly, accurately, and respectfully" (LeFebvre 3). William Shakespeare's plays have thrived because of his vivid, rhetorical language. Therefore, by studying the language of several key speeches from Shakespeare's plays, college students could learn by way of example how to communicate their ideas through rhetorical devices like oxymoron and repetition.

2. In order to teach Shakespeare in a speech communication classroom, professors need a way to incorporate his works. Edward Rockin, in *Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare*, provides a performance-centered approach to learning through the works of Shakespeare (Rocklin 82). This model would be ideal to use in a speech classroom because, in many ways, giving a speech is giving a performance. Indeed, in this model, "through lending the text their energies so that it can exert its power ... students are in turn also empowered, since they become free to re-create the playtext using their own creativity to invent new possibilities" (Rocklin 76). In his performance model, Rocklin focuses on having students perform Shakespeare's works and then analyze Shakespeare's work from three different perspectives: conception, enactment, and reception (Rocklin 78). In this model, conception refers to "composing the play, anatomizing the composed design" (79), which I would argue is like the rhetorical concepts of author and invention. In comparison, enactment refers to "rehearsal, discovery, and performance" (80), which is akin to the rhetorical concept of speaker. Similarly, I would say that the performance model's reception, which Rocklin describes as "the spectator's dance with the performance" (81), is reminiscent of the rhetorical concept of audience. Were a speech professor to focus on leading students in examining the rhetorical devices in Shakespearean speeches through these three perspectives of the performance model, students would not only have the chance to learn

about rhetorical devices within Shakespeare's inventive and inspiring language, but also to study rhetorical devices in relation to the important rhetorical roles of author, speaker, and audience.

3. A professor could utilize any Shakespearean speech and any rhetorical device to focus on desired areas of improvement, but for the sake of this article, two speeches, the prologue from *Romeo and Juliet* and Shylock's speech from *The Merchant of Venice*, and two rhetorical devices, oxymoron and repetition, will be examined as examples.

4. Students could learn how to communicate through oxymoron by engaging with the prologue (Prologue 1-14) to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Additionally, analyzing the prologue can also help students understand the importance of the early part of their speeches since speech communication students must also introduce their speeches.

5. For the activity, the professor should provide the definition of an oxymoron and then encourage the students to read the piece aloud to perform it. The students should then begin to analyze the work to identify as many examples of oxymoron as possible. The professor could use questions or suggestions to get students to consider the prologue's conception, enactment, and reception, which the professor could explain as the author's invention, speaker, and audience, respectively. Analyzing the examples of oxymoron could, therefore, help the students understand how the oxymorons work within the prologue and the play.

6. Several examples of oxymoron in the prologue include "civil hands unclean" (Shakespeare *Romeo and Juliet* 4) and "from ancient grudge break to new mutiny" (3). The civil hands unclean line is an oxymoron because civil, while it can refer to towns, often refers to kind or at least tolerant behavior. Civil hands, then, would typically not be unclean. The other example, "from ancient grudge break to new mutiny" (3), is an oxymoron because it too is comparing distantly unlike ideas—that of old and new as well as passive grudge and active mutiny. These two oxymorons are significant, as their meaning ripples through the play. Civil hands, such as the hands of Romeo and Juliet, are tainted by the blood of their families' feud. Romeo kills Tybalt and himself, and Juliet kills herself. Similarly, the ancient grudge, represented by the multiple verbal threats and violent encounters between the Capulets and the Montagues, is transformed into new mutiny, such as the death of Tybalt and the deaths of the lovers. In these ways, the meanings of the oxymorons reverberate throughout the play.

7. Knowing, then, that a rhetorical device, such as an oxymoron, used so early in a play can have ramifications later could help students realize that rhetorical devices could lend power and impact to the introductions, bodies, and conclusions of their own speeches.

8. Shylock's speech from *The Merchant of Venice* would also provide a rhetorical lesson. In act 3, scene 1, Shylock uses the rhetorical technique of repetition multiple times within his speech. The professor could have students perform this speech by speaking it aloud, and in doing so begin to note the building power of the rhetorical device. For example, Shylock says that "He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, / laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, / thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies – / and

what's his reason?" (Shakespeare *The Merchant of Venice* 3.1.43-46). In this moment, Shylock is repeating a noun phrase structure, which increases the momentum of his anger against his debtor, Bassanio and leads to a question concerning Bassanio's behavior. This use of repetition leads into Shylock's next use of repetition, wherein he despairs, saying, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a / Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" (3.1.46-7), therein repeating both questions and nouns. In this moment, Shylock's use of repetition once again escalates the intensity of the emotion he is transmitting to the audience.

9. During the performance part of the exercise, the professor could emphasize with students that they could choose to conceptualize the emotion Shylock displays differently, which would cause them to enact the scene in distinct ways, which could affect the reception of the performance. Through the performance model, then, students could identify and analyze these uses of the rhetorical technique of repetition. Reflecting upon their use, students would be able to more easily use repetition in their own writing. For instance, in this case, students learn that repetition of noun phrase structures creates increasing momentum towards a main idea, and posing a series of questions as here creates emphasis on a certain emotion or idea.

10. After analyzing several examples of rhetorical techniques in Shakespearean speeches, the professor should ask students at the end of class to begin reflecting in writing upon what the examples of oxymoron and repetitions accomplished within Shakespeare's speeches and how they as speakers could use the same rhetorical devices within their speeches. This initial exercise could then become, if the speech course's timeline allows, an entire speech wherein students are tasked to write and deliver an expository speech that specifically emphasizes the rhetorical device they studied in Shakespeare's works. Completing a speech with this focus would aid the students in making the practical connection between the communicative art of Shakespeare and their application of that same art in their speeches.

11. The ultimate beauty, and the ultimate lesson, of the speeches within Shakespeare's plays is that their rhetorical devices, such as oxymoron and repetition, not only effectively transmit meaning, they are also artistic communication that can, through the performance model, enhance the learning of college speech communication students. Through performing Shakespearean speeches and analyzing the conception, enactment, and reception of specific rhetorical devices, students can learn that the oxymorons in *Romeo and Juliet* reverberate throughout the play through the deaths of Tybalt, Romeo, and Juliet. Students can also learn that Shylock's use of repetition caused two main effects: an increase in the momentum towards an idea and an emphasis on a specific emotion or idea.

12. The connection between Shakespeare and learning the art of communication in speech communication classrooms has more room for development. The more professors help students learn to identify and emulate the rhetorical techniques within Shakespeare's speeches, the more students will communicate their own ideas in more vivid, rhetorical, and artistic ways.

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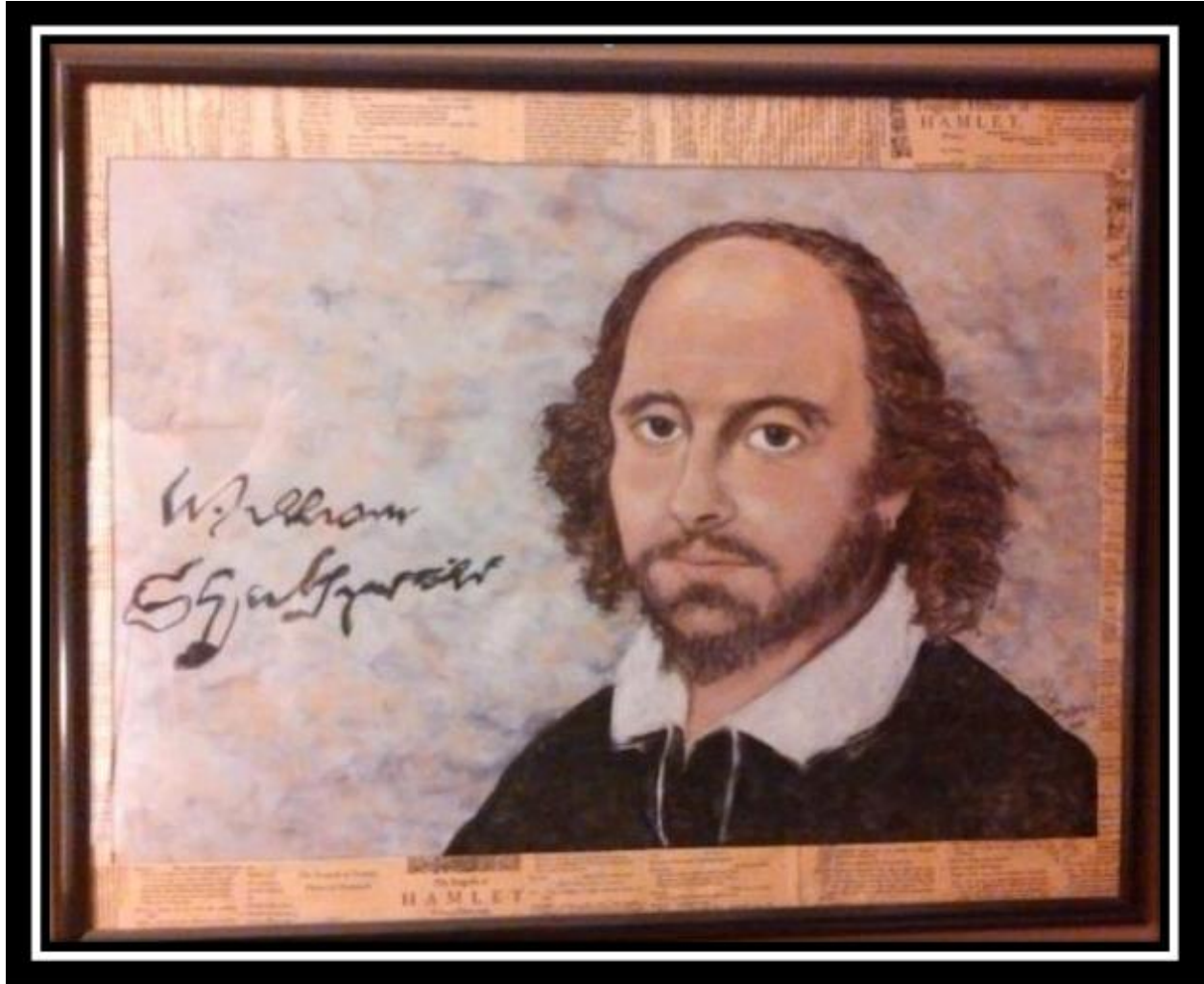
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Will the Wordsmith



“Will the Wordsmith” (2012)—Vicki Simpson—chalk pastel on 21” x 27” velour paper encased in torn book pages from *Hamlet* (Signet Classic Shakespeare, ed. Sylvan Barnet, 2006), with a provenance of Cedar Falls, IA. Operating out of my reactions to an ephemeral world around me—a world permeated with texture, chiaroscuro, and juxtaposition—I pursue an expression of nuanced articulation wherein I utilize visual, verbal, and auditory cues to create a sensual, tactile, multifaceted work. This piece investigates my interests in the mystical origins of chance, passion, beauty, and fluidity.