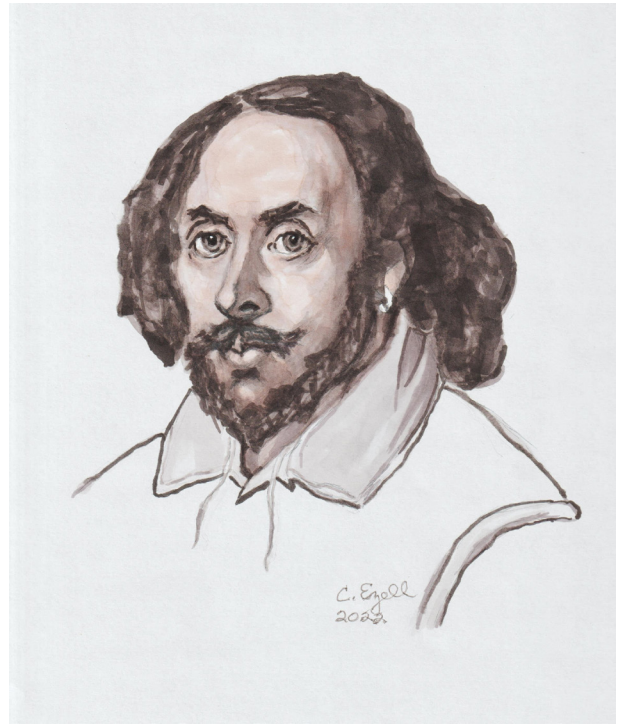


Sound & Fury: Shakespeare Reading Group

According to a famous Scottish king, life “is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.” If life meant nothing to this Scottish king, it is only because those words were given to him by a writer for whom words had significance. For William Shakespeare, words were intended to be voiced aloud and dramatized. Through the spoken word, the actions and drama on the written page leap to life, embodied through the voices and actions of the speakers.

This past year, through AAI’s *Sound & Fury: Shakespeare Reading Group*, students brought to life Macbeth and King Lear, Cordelia and Desdemona, Prospero and Iago, among many other characters in the bard’s plays. In a series of intro sessions, participants received guidance on reading Shakespeare from two members of the Harvard English department, Dr. Leah Whittington and David Nee, who provided a foundation for appreciating the Bard. From there, students launched into dramatic reading of the play, which was conducted with enthusiasm and flair. For the participants, Shakespeare’s words meant *something*, even if it was just a pun or period joke (understandable only through footnotes) and the group honed in on the meaning of the words used to describe the dramatic action and the motives of the characters to answer a slew of questions. Did Caliban really deserve Prospero’s cruel treatment? Was Macbeth simply a tool of the witches? And how on earth did *everyone* regard Iago as a trustworthy man? No definitive or unanimous conclusions were reached, but the fight to interpret and understand was nearly all the fun. The combination of dramatic reading and spirited debate made for engaging evenings, away from the tumult of papers and exams, and AAI looks forward to many more sessions to come.



Emma Towne

Sound & Fury provides a great way to experience Shakespeare for everyone, whether a beginner or a longtime fan of his works. Spending three weeks on each play, we had a perfect amount of time to discuss each work. Harvard PhD David Nee visited during the start of each play, helping to introduce relevant background and facilitate interesting discussions, which was fantastic.

I really enjoyed seeing the plays come to life as we read select sections from the plays and being challenged to think deeper about the social issues presented, many of which are still quite relevant in today’s society. Getting to share this experience with a group bringing their own diverse perspectives was the icing on the cake!

Jennifer Gao

Among the many things I have yearned for during my COVID exile has been a physical reading group—a place where friends can gather and have a fruitful discussion not hampered by a computer screen. The *Sound & Fury* Shakespeare program at AAI has been just that.

The three plays selected for the term—*King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *Macbeth*—gave participants a broad taste of Shakespeare, from his most well-known scenes to his more obscure but highly entertaining work. Each session featured lively, dramatic readings of scenes, which for me constituted the most enjoyable part. Additionally, the analysis conducted amongst peers lent me new insights into scenes I thought I had studied endlessly. The group was a wonderful addition to my weekly routine, and I keenly look forward to its resumption next semester.

Loren Brown

Drawing Hamlet

Cindy Chopoidaló

My earliest influences as an artist were the classic cartoons—Disney, Warners, and numerous others—I grew up watching, many of which I still enjoy to this day. I would trace images from picture books and comics to familiarize myself with the artists' styles, or draw my own interpretations of the characters using illustrations, photographs, and even dolls or stuffed animals as models.

As an undergraduate student I began applying the techniques I had learned from my efforts at producing comic/animation fan art to Shakespearean characters, particularly those of *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and the history plays. Approaching the plays and characters in this manner came partly from discovering and appreciating Shakespeare's influence as a storyteller on many of my childhood favourites, and partly from observing that, with their combinations of written text and illustrations, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts can be seen as ancestors of modern-day comics and graphic novels.

The earliest known illustration of Hamlet the character appears in *Icones Regum Daniae* (*Pictures of the Danish Kings*, 1646), and is attributed to the engraver/printmaker Albertus Haelwegh. In *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet* (1983), his translation of the Hamlet story as it appears in Saxo Grammaticus' *Historiae Danicae* into English, William F. Hansen comments on the resemblance of the illustration to common depictions of the Shakespearean Hamlet. Indeed, it was this image that inspired me, on the completion of my PhD thesis on adaptations of *Hamlet* in 2009, to produce two different yet complementary renditions of my envisioning of Hamlet. One is in my usual cartoony style calling back to my formative influences; the other is in a relatively more realistic style that allowed me to experiment with crosshatch shading.



I have continued my experimentation with variations in my art styles in my depictions of two well-known examples of women playing Hamlet that also serve as early examples of *Hamlet* on film. As Tony Howard notes in *Women as Hamlet*, “The first Hamlet on film was ... Sarah Bernhardt,” in an enactment of Hamlet’s final duel with Laertes (V.ii. 224-360) captured on screen from her 1900 production in Paris. My interpretation was inspired by another iconic image from that production: a postcard photograph now in the British Library and viewable on its website. The first film of *Hamlet* to survive in a complete form, Svend Gade’s *Hamlet: The Drama of Revenge* (1920), featuring Danish actress Asta Nielsen, goes beyond Bernhardt’s production in presenting not only a woman as Hamlet, but Hamlet as a woman disguised as a man, based on Edward Payson Vining’s reading of the character in *The Mystery of Hamlet* (1881). The film is available for viewing on the *MIT Global Shakespeares Project* website, and a still from that production inspired my re-creation.

