**CURS SUMMER SCHOLARS 2019**

**Adapting and Scripting John Gardner’s *Grendel* for the Stage**

**Principle Researcher and Professor:** Dr. Researcher

**Participating Students:** Person 1, Person 2, Person 3

**Required Texts (Provided):**

Gardner, John. *Grendel*, Vintage Books, New York: 1971.

Anonymous. *Beowulf*.

Breen, Robert. *Chamber Theatre*. Evanston, IL: Wm Caxton, 1986.

Bowman, Michael. “‘Novelizing’ the Stage: Chamber Theatre After Breen and

Bakhtin*” Text and Performance Quarterly* 15 (1995): 1-23.

O’Meara, Melanie Kitchens. “Activating Minor Pedagogy in an Adaptation and

Staging of ‘The Little Prince.’” *Text and Performance* Quarterly 39 (2019): 37-55.

**Project Description:**

We will adapt John Gardner’s novel *Grendel* for the Theatre AUG fall 2019 main stage theatre production. Drawing on Robert Breen’s chamber theatre methods and Michael Bowman’s concept of novelizing the stage, we will create and finalize a full-length script for the production. In addition to scripting, we will work on ideas for staging the production, including blocking and costume and set plans.

**Objectives and Significance:**

The objective of the project is to work with students from the page to the stage in analyzing and adapting John Gardner’s *Grendel* for a theatrical performance. As a result of participating in this creative research project, students will be more informed of the choices they are making when adapting literature for the stage. Students will use theatre and performance techniques to realize and create new ways of engaging literature. They will sharpen their critical thinking skills, as well as, their skills of analysis and composition.

**Educational Goals:**

The project will provide students with theatre and performance research tools, which they will apply to the adaptation of a literary text. The students will learn how to create a proper theatrical script. The script we create will be used for the Theatre AUG fall production. In the fall, the students will have the opportunity to perform in, co-direct, or work behind the scenes on the production.

**Research Method:**

Robert Breen’s chamber theatre is a method for adapting literary texts that “shows” the “telling” of a story by maintaining and staging “the narrative elements of the literature” (Breen 4). Featuring a narrator or multiple narrators who engage in epic discourse to show and tell a story, chamber theatre adaptations require a close reading of “the structure, the theme, and the tone of the literature” in order to understand the narrator’s point of view and maintain his or her style of storytelling (Breen 6). Breen was influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre and drew specifically on his concept of estrangement to discuss how the narrator, like Brecht’s actor, should perform a character by means of presentational techniques like “quotation” or demonstration “to create distance and a sense of strangeness” (Breen 44). Breen claimed such distancing would “alert the audience to new values in an otherwise too familiar occasion.” (44).

In “’Novelizing the Stage: Chamber Theatre After Breen and Bakhtin,” Michael Bowman draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the novel to reinvigorate Breen’s chamber theatre. For Bakhtin, the novel draws on multiple and diverse forms, styles, and discourses to create narrative that is dialogic. Hence, meaning making and interpretation of the novel are unfinalized or negotiable.

While Bowman celebrates the impact of Breen’s chamber theatre on group performance of literature, he also recognizes the importance of critically engaging the tradition by means of “experimentation and revision” (17). For Bowman, novelizing the stage by means of chamber theatre “adopt[s] a more ‘producerly’ orientation toward adapting and staging texts” (14). Rather than remain in servitude to the literature and literary analysis, as was Breen’s intention with chamber theatre, adaptors and performers write and rewrite the literature through performance. In doing so, Bowman suggests we engage “a functional transformation in our staging techniques” with a focus on “performing difference” by “a willingness to perform differently” (14). Ultimately, novelized chamber theatre performances are open-ended and unfinalized as they “welcome and accommodate other voices, other values, other points of view besides ‘their own’” (Bowman 15).

Utilizing Breen, our task will be to create a narrator or group of narrators to tell Grendel’s story. Bowman will help us figure out surprising and interesting ways to represent a monster on stage. My hope is that our plan for staging will incorporate the drawings from the source text, and the students will help me figure out how and to what end.

**Student Expectations:**

In addition to the provided reading materials, students will be expected to research *Grendel*. They will be given prompts, inspired by Breen, for analyzing the text in terms of character and plot. Together we will develop the narrator(s) and adapt the novel into a play. Students will create a poster illustrating their understanding of the methodology and process of a chamber theatre adaptation.

***Tentative* Schedule:**

Week One (May 20-24): Introduce Students to Breen and Bowman and Read Grendel and Beowulf

Week Two (May 28-31): Analyze Grendel using Breen and Develop Narrator(s)

Week Three (June 3-7): Begin Scripting and Discuss Staging

Week Four (June 10-14): Continue Scripting and Discuss Staging (how will we be “novelizing” the stage?)

Week Five (June 17-21): Continue Scripting and Develop Ideas for Costume and Set

Week Six (June 24-28): Finalize Script

Week Seven (July 1-5): Read Script Together Making Notes for Changes and Work on Symposium Poster

Week Eight (July 8-12): Incorporate Changes into Script and Finalize Poster

Week Nine (July 15-18): Practice for the Symposium and Present Poster