Forging Shakespeare
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Abstract
This micro-seminar encourages students to think broadly about three humanistic issues: what constitutes "authenticity" in relation to an author's work (Shakespeare's in this case, but the conclusions can be broadened), how the relationship between an author and his text has been historically understood, and why, finally, Shakespeare seems to be such an active platform for thinking through these questions. Our first day's lecture addresses these questions by getting students to think about "forging" Shakespeare in the sense of "making" Shakespeare: we discuss how the Shakespeare we know today is a product of many editorial and cultural collaborations. To this end, we examine textual variants of famous Shakespearean speeches, early biographical descriptions of Shakespeare's life, and multiple artistic interpretations of how Shakespeare looked. The second class addresses issues of "forging" Shakespeare in the sense of "faking" Shakespeare: we discuss some of the famous Shakespeare forgery cases and do close readings of Shakespeare-imitations. No pre-circulated reading is required.

Faculty Biography
My area of specialty is eighteenth-century British literature and culture, and within this rubric I work on a range of topics: the eighteenth-century novel, drama, and the connections between them; actors, actresses, playwrights, and the emergent celebrity culture of eighteenth-century theater; and the impact of theatrical performance on theories of personal identity, memory, and time. I explore these interests in my most recent book, "Shakespeare and the Legacy of Loss." This book tells the story of how eighteenth-century actors, novelists, and artists, key among them David Garrick, struggled with the questions posed by our micro seminar through their re-enactments of Shakespearean plays. This research connects with my broader interest in what motivates us, as writers, thinkers, or scholars, to return to artistic or literary models from the past, and how these choices respond to anxieties about personal or literary obsolescence.