***Valuing Shakespeare, Valuing Literature***

**1 hr. 15 min. session**

**General Goal:** This assignment asks students to evaluate the critical evaluations made of Shakespeare during his time, through *Shakespeare Documented*. By examining colleagues’ responses to his work, students uncover vocabularies of value and definitions of the “good” in literature to consider and reflect upon.

**Specific Objectives:**

* Students confront some of the earliest forms of literary criticism in England
* Students contextualize Shakespeare within a wider, competitive reading and writing culture
* Students identify what makes literature “of value” in early modern England, and how those values have changed over time

**Pre-assignment:** read selections from Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie*, Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, and Simone Weil, “Morality and Literature”; get to know *Shakespeare Documented*([**www.shakespearedocumented.org**](http://www.shakespearedocumented.org))

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**10 Minutes**

* Ask students to describe what defines literature, or what makes literature “good”; put pressure on the terms they use
* Direct students towards the “Contemporary accounts and critical responses to plays” under “Playwright, actor & shareholder” (<http://shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/playwright-actor-shareholder/contemporary-accounts-and-critical-responses-plays>)

**20 Minutes**

* In small groups, students explore critical responses, find two in particular, and pull out key terms and methods of value, like comparison, hyperbole, metaphor, hyperbolic language, and situating in literacy history

**25 Minutes**

* Groups share their findings while instructor groups terms of value on the board

**20 Minutes**

* General class discussion about early modern literary value, and comparison with today

*Required Resources*

Access to [www.shakespearedocumented.org](http://www.shakespearedocumented.org)