Our Shakespeare:

Re-discovering classic works through persistant performance

By Professor of English Mark Muggli

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
(Sonnet 116)

2. As a group, the 154 sonnets are even
greater than any one of the individual sonnets.
They are as important a work of art as “Hamlet”
or “Much Ado About Nothing.” Their topic
is love, and they explore its every complex,
tortured, rapturous angle.

3. A public reading in the middle of campus
at 12:05 daily will reach some passers-by who
probably wouldn’t otherwise be exposed to a
sonnet that day.

4. Reading poetry aloud—even if no one
is listening—is a public affirmation of the
importance of beauty and art. That’s what
makes it a “ritual performance.”

5. But isn’t it a little weird to just be standing
out there reading, even if no one is listening?
Yes, that’s what makes this a “Happening.”

6. No concessions? There is no such thing
as bad weather—just inadequate clothing. But,
yes, over Fall Break and Thanksgiving I’ll
read the poems aloud to my wife at home. And
maybe, just once or twice, I’ll have a substitute
reader.

7. Pure whim? No, this performance is part
of a larger project. As the 2011-13 Dennis M.
Jones Distinguished Teaching Professor in
the Humanities, I am working to create “Our
Shakespeare: Renewing Connections.” The
project aims to nurture our community’s
re-discovery of the range, power and
wisdom of Shakespeare’s art. The project
title alludes to the individualistic language
of the internet (“My Cart,” “My Luther”) to
suggest our common investment in the
creation, appreciation, distribution and
adaptation of individual artists’ work. The
word play in the subtitle suggests both that
we can renew our connections, and that the
connections themselves are renewing. In the
words of the general Jones Professorship
description, this project emphasizes that
“the traditions of the humanities can speak
clearly across boundaries of individual
lives and of periods in history, and that
preservation and examination of cultural
traditions is an important part of our
history.”

8. Whew! And what might some of these
opportunities be? This summer, forty-five
faculty from Africana Studies, Art, Biology,
Chemistry, Classics, Economics, Education,
English, Environmental Studies, German,
Library, Music, Paideia, Physics, Political
Science, Philosophy, Religion, Social Work,
Spanish and Theatre/Dance participated
in workshops discussing and seeing
performances of “Henry IV, Part I” and “The
Tempest.” Maybe some of these profs will
allude to Shakespeare in one of their classes or
conferences this fall. There will be occasional
Shakespeare film showings. On Nov. 16, my
class “Shakespeare Performed” will perform
“Henry IV, Part I” for the students in Paideia I
and the whole campus community. And some
faculty have included some Shakespeare in
their syllabus this fall as a way of drawing on
cultural heritage that cuts across academic
disciplines. Watch Chips and other venues for
information on more to come. Also see http://
www.luther.edu/english/ourshakespeare/,
which will soon include a calendar of events.

9. The year 2011 is the 150th anniversary
of Luther’s founding, but it is also the 447th
anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth.