

ENL 3334-03: Introduction to Shakespeare

Summer 2013

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Texts *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Texts and Contexts*, eds. Paster/Howard (Bedford)
The First Part of Henry the Fourth: Texts and Contexts, ed. Hodgdon (Bedford)
Macbeth: Texts and Contexts, ed. Carroll (Bedford)
Antony and Cleopatra, ed. Bevington, (New Cambridge Shakespeare)
The Tempest, eds. Vaughan and Vaughan (Arden Shakespeare)

Description and Goals

Shakespeare was not the greatest writer ever. He probably wasn't even the greatest writer to produce work in the English language. (How do we compare him to, say, William Faulkner or Emily Dickinson?) He certainly didn't invent feminism, rap, or "the human."

What he did do was write popular entertainment (think *Saturday Night Live* or *True Blood*) retelling famous stories (think *Snow White and the Huntsman* or *Lincoln*) using funny, startling, complicated, beautiful language (think Bob Dylan or Nicki Minaj). He was primarily a writer-for-profit, churning out new works to make some money, not necessarily to make a statement. If you imagine him as a tortured, lonely artist in an attic, spinning works of genius out of thin air, you've got it wrong. He was a hustler, an improviser, a collaborator, and (in the opinion of some of his colleagues) a hack.

But Shakespeare remains famous today because he went a step beyond just entertaining the masses. He pushed boundaries, experimenting with language and genre. He played with characterization and used the format of popular entertainment to ruminate about important themes like honor, love, power, and mercy. And he continues to have an abiding influence over most artistic works produced by Western culture.

This course will introduce you to Shakespeare's work as a poet and a playwright. We will explore the poetic aspects of his language choices and the performative elements of his plays. For our reading, I have chosen five plays that represent the scope of Shakespeare's writing in various genres: tragedy, comedy, history, and romance.

The texts will also provide us with opportunity to discuss gender relations, sexuality and sexual identity, race and ethnicity, religion, and class.

Objectives

After successfully completing this course, the student should be able to:

1. Identify major concepts, themes, and trends in the works and plays of Shakespeare, and gain an extensive awareness of the important qualities that characterize Shakespeare's plays.
2. Generate an informed interpretation of a work of literature.
3. Produce scholarly writing that analyzes both textual and performative elements within a chosen work (upon request, feedback designed to foster students' writing proficiency will be provided).

Grading, Assignments, Etc.

Quizzes: 25%

Topic/Scene Presentation: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Final Project: 25%

Attendance and Participation

Your success in this class depends on your own participation and engagement. If you want an A, you should do following:

- Do the assigned reading and attend class.
- Plan to be on time to class, with paper, pencil, and the required reading in hand.
- Refrain from distracting others or yourself by using phones, personal organizers, mp3 players, or surfing on the Internet.
- Add something meaningful to the class discussion each day.

Furthermore, you are allowed **2 class periods** to be absent for any reason you like. After you have used your absences, I reserve the right to drop your final grade 5% for each subsequent absence. Excessive absences will receive a failing grade. **Keep in mind** that it is always your responsibility to let me know if you will be absent or late. I am very good about checking my e-mail; that is my preferred method of communication if we can't meet face-to-face. Students who show initiative and who communicate well are much more likely to receive help from me if classes must be missed.

Quizzes

At the beginning of each week, you will be held accountable for completely reading one play. I will ask you to answer ten questions about the assigned work. These questions will not cover Shakespeare's poetic or linguistic choices; the historical background of the play; or thematic interpretations of the play. They will be strictly about the play's plot, characters, and character relationships.

Topic/Scene Presentation

During the semester, you will present one ten-minute class segment. These presentations will take two forms.

The Topic Presentation: For this assignment, you must present 10 minutes of material on a chosen topic relating to Elizabethan/Jacobean culture. Your presentation may take the form of a PowerPoint, a Prezi, a handout, or a short lecture/activity. You must tie the information into the play we are studying that week. Each topic has been scheduled because it relates to a particular play; I'd like you to make those connections clear. Tell the class how a deeper knowledge of your topic can help us interpret the week's play. I will give you a list of appropriate sources to research your topic. I also suggest that you use the textual apparatus (notes, Introductions, Texts and Contexts material) that accompanies the assigned edition of your Shakespeare play as potential sources.

The Scene Presentation: For this assignment, you (and your group) must present two versions of a short scene from the week's play. I will assign you a scene and suggest casting. For your scene, you must 1) identify two different acting choices that affect the interpretation of the scene. For instance, you might have your characters speak quietly the first time and then speak loudly; or stand close to each other and then stand far apart, etc. 2) You must rehearse your selection at least twice before your class presentation. Keep track of when those rehearsals are and who attends. 3) Finally, you each must send me a short e-mail explaining what choices you made and what aspects of the texts motivated those choices.

I will create a sign-up sheet with dates and specific assignments, and we will sign up for these on Tuesday, May 14.

Exams

The final exam will be comprised of: a quote explanation section asking you to analyze and explain the significance of important quotes from the plays we read; a short-answer section asking questions about historical and cultural contexts of the plays; and a short essay section asking for sustained analysis, interpretations, and application of major themes and literary critical viewpoints we cover during the semester. *All of the material on the exam will come from in-class presentations and lectures*, so it is imperative that you attend class and take good notes.

Final Project Description and Format

The Final Project (due Friday, June 21) will be a 6-8 page research paper. For this assignment, you will write a 6-8 page research paper analyzing a narrowly focused aspect of one Shakespearean play. Your research paper will be written according to the standards of *The Explicator*, a literary journal that accepts short works of literary criticism and often publishes work by students (Author instructions included on Bb). After the semester is over, I encourage you to submit your final paper to *The Explicator*, especially if you are an English major.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

This schedule may be altered as the semester progresses. Also, additional readings will occasionally be posted on Blackboard and assigned in class. Readings are to be completed on the date listed.

Week One:

M 5/13 Syllabus, How to Read a Shakespeare Play
T 5/14 Shakespeare's Cultural/Historical Background
W 5/15 Shakespeare's Stage
R 5/16 Shakespeare's Language

Week Two:

M 5/20 *Midsummer Night's Dream* *quiz
T 5/21 *Midsummer Night's Dream* (presentation topic: the humors)
W 5/22 *Midsummer Night's Dream* (presentation topic: Elizabeth I)
R 5/23 *Midsummer Night's Dream* performance day

Week Three:

M 5/27 *I Henry IV* *quiz
T 5/28 *I Henry IV* (presentation topic: Machivelli)
W 5/29 *I Henry IV* (presentation topic: Carnavalesque)
R 5/30 *I Henry IV* performance day

Week Four:

M 6/3 *Macbeth* *quiz
T 6/4 *Macbeth* (presentation topic: Magic in the Renaissance)
W 6/5 *Macbeth* (presentation topic: usurpation, lineage)
R 6/6 *Macbeth* performance day

Week Five:

M 6/10 *Antony and Cleopatra* *quiz
T 6/11 *Antony and Cleopatra* (presentation topic: gender in the Renaissance)
W 6/12 *Antony and Cleopatra* (presentation topic: East vs. West)
R 6/13 *Antony and Cleopatra* performance day

Week Six:

M 6/17 *The Tempest* *quiz
T 6/18 *The Tempest* (presentation topic: Colonialism)
W 6/19 *The Tempest* (presentation topic: art vs. nature)
R 6/20 *The Tempest* performance day
F 6/21 **Final Exam**