

**English 341:
Renaissance Drama, Excluding Shakespeare**
Fall 2015

Instructor Dr. Kate Lechler
Classroom: TBA
Classtime: M 6pm-8:30pm
e-mail: katelechler@gmail.com

Texts¹ *Short History of Renaissance Drama*, by Helen Hackett
ISBN: 9781848856868
The Roaring Girl, Norton Crit. Edition, ed. Jennifer Panek
ISBN: 9780393932775
The Revenger's Tragedy, New Mermaids Edition, ed. Brian Gibbons
ISBN: 9780713682847
The Alchemist and Other Plays, Oxford World Classics, ed. Gordon Campbell
ISBN: 9780199537310
Women on the Early Modern Stage, New Mermaid Edition, ed. Emma Smith
ISBN: 9781408182314

Description and Goals

Welcome, students, to ENG 341: Renaissance Drama, Excluding Shakespeare. This course aims to introduce students to some of the early modern playwrights who often get overlooked in favor of The Bard. My opinion is that all of the writers we shall study in this class were geniuses, equally deserving of our attention and admiration. We shall read and discuss texts such as Jonson's *Volpone*, Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*, and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Through the interrogation and analysis of these texts, we shall learn about the authors' agenda, style and technique, as well as the cultural contexts in which these works were produced. We will also be looking carefully at the messages about women and women's bodies embedded within the plays and their performance history.

Weekly lectures will involve the analysis of one or more literary texts, in combination with student presentations on other historical, artistic, and popular culture materials linked to those texts, as well as several scene presentations. Class time will include space for discussion and workshop-style analysis and will always seek to place the literary works in their social and historical context. Students will also learn how to use major research tools to assist their reading, how to formulate research questions in relation to literary texts, and how to evaluate texts through close reading.

Objectives

¹ Note on the texts: You must get the editions I specify here, unless they are absolutely unavailable to you by any means. I have chosen the paperback editions and, in most cases, you can find used copies easily. They should also be available through the university bookstore and through Square Books, Oxford's indie bookstore (which charges no tax on school books).

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

- a. read and understand early modern English drama with sensitivity and nuance;
- b. comment effectively on the major themes and authorial techniques of particular passages of the selected literary works;
- c. locate and evaluate source materials in relation to the relevant social, historical and cultural frameworks
- d. Respond to literary texts with writing that analyzes, synthesizes, interprets, and assesses meaning and significance.
- e. Produce finished papers which conform to the guidelines of a documentation style manual (MLA) and which conform to standard written American English.

Feedback designed to foster students' writing proficiency will be provided.

Grading

Quizzes (one every week): 20%

Presentations: 30% (15% each x2)

Midterm Essay: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Quizzes

Every week of the semester, I will give a quiz. These will be unannounced and will usually consist of two questions in the form of a short writing prompt. One will be about the previous lecture or presentation, and the other about the day's reading. If you skip class, you cannot make up a quiz. If you skip the previous class, you are still responsible for getting notes on the lecture from a classmate so that you can take the next day's quiz.

Presentations

You will present twice this semester.

1) After researching in at least 4 reputable academic sources, you will present on your own for 10 minutes on a pre-assigned topic such as "power," "clothing," or "city comedy." In this presentation, you will define and explain the term or topic for the class, and apply it to the text(s) we are studying. Then you will provide us with two or three questions to foster discussion in the next class period. You will have a chance to choose the date and topic of your presentation, and I will model this kind of presentation for you a few times before you begin.

2) With a group, you will present a scene from one of the plays. You should present this scene in at least 2 different ways, making changes in your presentation according to text-based interpretation (we will discuss what this means in class).

Essay Description and Format

The Essay (rolling due dates starting Monday, Sept. 28) will be a 1,500-2,000 (six to eight pages) word literary analysis and interpretation of a text from our semester's reading.

Your paper will rely heavily on close reading and several appropriate secondary sources. I will work with you through the semester to make this paper a resounding success and a piece of scholarship you can be proud of.

Final versions of all essays due must be typed (double spaced), with one-inch margins, using Times New Roman 12 point font. Resist the urge to include a cover page; simply follow MLA essay format.

Exam

The final exam will consist of a quote identification section; a short answer section; and a short essay section asking for sustained analysis, interpretations, and application of major themes and literary critical viewpoints we cover during the semester.

Advice from Former ENG 341 Students:

“Quite honestly the best activity was acting out scenes from the plays. At first I was nervous about having to perform, but entertaining the class and expanding on what our interpretations were was priceless.”

“Chances are you’ve never heard of any of these plays—but that’s okay. You’ll make it through. My main tip is to read the plays. Seriously. Do it.”

“Works such as *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and *The Duchess of Malfi* keep the reader on their toes, dying to flip to the next page. These plays are quite teachable, mainly because they are so exciting. The play to watch out for is *Bartholomew Faire*; it is not as student-friendly as other options.”

“Another way you can get the most out of this class is by reading synopsis of the play and even look at reviews of recent performances of this play. This will give you a better idea of how the play was performed because sometimes the embedded stage direction is not a lot to go on. Honestly, the only thing unclear at the end of the semester is why we do not study the works of Marlowe, Jonson, Dekker and Middleton as much as Shakespeare.”

“I would also recommend finding a friend in class so if you do miss, you have someone to grab the notes from. The notes from class discussion play a vital role in what you are expected to know when completing down the course.”

“The real learning experience comes from the presentations and performances you get to do. I was able to research and create a presentation about the author Thomas Dekker, which fed my interest in his play because I was able to gain insight into the man he was. Performance days were fun (and a little nerve-wracking, but they allowed us to delve deeper into the characters. My favorite moment was playing Ferdinand from *The Duchess of Malfi*, which became my favorite play.”

“The most important aspect of the class is attendance. Attending class is an easy way to ensure a decent grade on at least the quizzes. Also, being in class for the lectures helped me prepare for the final. It’s not a class you can teach yourself.”

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

M Aug 24 Syllabus, How to Read Early Modern Drama; Hackett, Ch. 2: How Plays Were Made

M Aug 31 Revenger's Tragedy; Hackett Ch. 6: Sex and Death

Labor Day

M Sep 14 Revenger's Tragedy; performances

M Sep 21 Tamer Tamed; Hackett Ch. 8: Playing with Gender

M Sep 28 Tamer Tamed; performances **Paper Outline due**

M Oct 5 Roaring Girl; article TBA

M Oct 12 Roaring Girl; performances [Midterm Grades Due]

M Oct 19 Volpone; Hackett Ch. 5: Jonson

M Oct 26 Volpone; performances **Paper Draft 1 due**

M Nov 2 Duchess of Malfi; article TBA

M Nov 9 Duchess of Malfi; performances

M Nov 16 Witch of Edmonton; Hackett Ch. 7: Playing with Genre **Final Draft Paper Due**

Thanksgiving

M Nov 30 Witch of Edmonton; performances

Final Exam