

English 2220 Introduction to Shakespeare

MW 11:10-12:30

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to the life and works of the best-known writer in the English language, and one of the biggest figures in world literature. Through study of his time and context, and above all, close attention to some of his plays, we shall collectively explore what Shakespeare means to us today. What allows him to speak for so many, and across the world? Why does he continue to be read, performed, referenced, and adapted across platforms, communities, and contexts? And what can he make possible for our future? In this class, we shall consider the playwright's use of language, metaphor, characterization, genre, and literary form in five of his major plays. Using film clips or theatre recordings, and our own staging of moments from the plays, we shall ask how performance creates or extends meaning. Finally, in our critical discussions, we shall work towards an intersectional method that can read gender, race, sexuality, class, and dis/ability in relation to one another, as well as in dialogic relation between the early modern past and our contemporary present.

Previous study of Shakespeare is encouraged but not required. Commitment to spending time outside class in thoughtful reading and writing is required.

Course Goals

1. A sound grasp of the basics of Shakespeare's life and times;
2. A good understanding of some of Shakespeare's major plays;
3. Understanding—and enjoying!—some centuries-old language;
4. Comprehending Shakespeare's language as the language of theatre;
5. A critical understanding of how and why Shakespeare remains relevant today.

Required Materials

The Comedy of Errors, edited by Kent Cartwright (Bloomsbury, 2017)

Measure for Measure, edited by A. R. Braunmuller and Robert N. Watson (Bloomsbury, 2020)

The Merchant of Venice, edited by John Drakakis (Bloomsbury, 2010)

Othello, edited by Kim Hall (Bedford/ St Martin's, 2007)

The Tempest, edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (Bloomsbury, 2001)

All other materials will be made available in Carmen.

Course Requirements and Breakdown of Final Course Grade

Class discussions (throughout the term)	10%
Brief examination (30 minutes)	10%
Close reading papers (2 pages each; throughout the term)	20%
Mid-term essay (3 pages)	20%
In-class performance exercise (20 minutes)	10%
In-class group presentation (30 minutes)	10%
Final essay (7-8 pages)	20%

Class discussions

You will complete and annotate for yourself each day's assigned reading, and prepare thoroughly for each class meeting with your own questions and concerns. Since the class is a collaborative effort, participation is essential to your success. Here are some markers of good participation:

- asking a specific question or making a specific comment about the reading;
- building upon something that another person has already said;
- making a specific comment about what you find useful or interesting about another person's point;
- asking a question or making a comment that encourages another person to elaborate upon their point;
- making a comment that connects two points or two strands of our conversation;
- constructively and respectfully disagreeing with what someone has said, and extending the conversation with your reason for disagreement.

Thoughtful and consistent participation will be expected throughout the term.

Short examination

Expect a 30-minute short-answer examination in the third week of the term. This evaluation is designed to ensure that we are all on the same page with some basic and functional knowledge about Shakespeare's life and times, and the structures and conventions of Elizabethan theatre. Your success in this simple and brief examination will indicate your preparedness for the critical conversations we shall have over the rest of the term. (All you need to do in order to do well in this exam is read thoroughly the two relevant essays. See the schedule for more details on this.)

Close reading responses

A short close reading paper (2 pages) will be due most weeks; in it, you will be expected to pay critical attention to a brief section of text—usually of your choice—from a play or a part of a play that we have covered together as a class. In your close reading paper, you will be expected to go beyond the class discussion and illuminate a specific aspect of the text that we have not talked about. These short papers are meant to be preparatory for the mid-term essay.

Mid-term essay

For this essay, you will pick a single passage or moment from one of the plays that we have so far studied, and subject it to intense critical analysis. You will clearly identify what part of which play you are considering, and in it, engage closely with its language, characterizations, metaphors, or any other critical category that you want to discuss. Remember that your close reading should enrich this section—and the play—for your reader. Indeed, it should help your reader see the moment in a substantially new light. (Remember too that a close reading is *not a description* of something; it is an informed and persuasive *reading* of it. For your use, a handout on close reading will be distributed early in the semester. Refer to it often and well.)

In-class performance exercise and in-class group presentation

At the heart of this paired exercise will be a staged performance that you will undertake as part of a group. In your group, you will pick one section of a play that we have read, and “stage” about 20 minutes from it. Everyone in the group will be expected to do some part of the “acting.” (For instance, if a group of four decides to do an extended exchange between two characters, say, Iago and Othello, then one pair of actors might play the characters in the first ten minutes, and then the next pair can carry on for the next ten minutes. The audience will know that we are watching the same character, although the actors will have switched.) As you prepare for this performance, you will discuss in your group just how you want to play the parts you pick. You will debate and consider gestures, delivery, and decisions about positioning of the actors’ bodies. On the day of the performance exercise for your group, you may bring simple props if they help you establish significant meaning.

Following each performance, each group will also be responsible for a collaborative 20-minute presentation elaborating on questions they worked through as they picked the section they performed. The actors will explain their choices for the performance itself, and the thought processes behind their decisions of staging. Each member of the group must present some part of the full presentation. The presentation will, in turn be followed by 10 minutes of questions and comments from the rest of the class. The presenters must be capable of fielding these questions with thoughtful and substantive answers.

This exercise of performing-and-presenting is meant to test your capacity for *literally* walking in the shoes of the characters you read about, and understanding, through your own embodied experiences as actors, the kinds of meaning generated or extended at the instance of performance. The presentation part of the exercise, in which you will critically reflect on the acting part of the exercise, will assess your scholarly discussion skills: your ability to identify the crucial points of meaning within a text; your capacity to clearly lay out the stakes of certain decisions and discuss not only the options you chose, but the possibilities you erased; and your proficiencies of listening well and then responding efficiently and to the point.

Final essay

Your final assignment will be a critical paper on a topic of your choice. It must focus on one or several of Shakespeare’s texts in relation to a critical question that you have developed. Your topic must be generated out of a genuine question of interest to you, something about which you want to learn more.

This project involves multiple steps (all due dates are noted on the schedule):

- a paragraph stating your initial question and your methodological orientation;
- a critical bibliography summarizing 6-8 relevant articles or book chapters;
- a 250-word prospectus;
- final paper (7-8 pages, plus endnotes).

Allow yourself sufficient time to:

- conceptualise your project;
- carry out the necessary reading and drafting; and above all,
- write and edit.

Course Policies

1. Our class is a learning community; remember that every member is an equal and valued participant.
 2. Be aware that this is a reading-and-writing intensive class. Remember to make time outside class to review class material, prepare for the following class, and complete assignments in a timely manner. The better your preparation for class is, the better your in-class participation will be.
 3. If you require extra time or any other adjustments in order to fulfil course expectations, please let me know in the first few meetings of the term. I will do my best to enable the best learning conditions for you. (For more information on the support available to you, please see here: <https://newark.osu.edu/students/student-life/disability-services.html>).
 4. Please try to attend all classes and stay for the entire class duration. If you *must* miss a class, however, please let me know in advance so that we may together plan the best means for you to make up work. It would be smart as well to arrange early in the term to trade notes with a classmate in case you do have to be absent.
 5. I expect that the work you turn in will be entirely your own, written specifically for this course. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment, and possibly for the course. Understand that I am also *required* to report all academic misconduct to the Office of Academic Affairs, which may impose other penalties. (For further information, please see here: <https://oaa.osu.edu/academic-integrity-and-misconduct>).
 6. Please bring the relevant texts, a notebook, and a pencil/pen to class each day. (If you prefer to take notes electronically, do so. However, please make sure that neither you nor those around you are distracted by the technology you are using.)
 7. The format for all written assignments for this class is as follows: 1-inch margin on all sides of the page; 12-point Times New Roman font; double-spaced. If the assignment is to be submitted in print, please print on both sides of the paper, and staple (if applicable). If the assignment is to be submitted electronically, please submit as a PDF.
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Schedule

Monday, 6 January

Welcome to the course

Shakespeare's plea for refugees:

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/shakespeares-handwriting-in-the-book-of-sir-thomas-more>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/15/william-shakespeare-handwritten-plea-for-refugees-online-sir-thomas-more-script-play-british-library-exhibition>

Shakespeare Unlimited podcasts:

<https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/iqbal-khan>

<https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/glenda-jackson>

<https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/peter-sellars>

Read the first of the two essays assigned for the Week 3 exam: Peter Holland's biography of Shakespeare (available on Carmen)

Wednesday, 8 January

Get acquainted, virtually, with Shakespeare's Globe: <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/>

Browse in Shakespeare's Globe's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwN-jwNNNQN-8sfKG-gg8uA?reload=9> (watch the videos that look interesting to you; we shall exchange notes on Monday)

Browse in the Before Shakespeare Project site: <https://beforeshakespeare.com/>

Read the second of the two essays assigned for the Week 3 exam: "The Theater of Shakespeare's Time" by Holger Schott Syme (available on Carmen)

Monday, 13 January

With last week's readings and viewings in mind, come prepared for an intensive discussion on the following questions:

-Who are we, and what are we doing here?

-Why Shakespeare?

-Why us?

-Why now?

-Whose Shakespeare is it, anyway?

(Bring some notes on these questions already prepared; they will help you launch into the class discussion. Towards the end of today's class, I shall ask you to submit a short essay based on our class discussion.)

Firming up dates and details for performance exercises and group presentations

The Comedy of Errors, Act 1

Wednesday, 15 January

The Comedy of Errors, Acts 1-3

Monday, 20 January

Martin Luther King Day; no class; **revise the key points from the two essays you have read last week**

Wednesday, 22 January

Short examination on Shakespeare's life and times, and the theatre of Shakespeare's day (30 minutes)

The Comedy of Errors, complete

Monday, 27 January

The Comedy of Errors

Patricia Akhimié, "Bruised with Adversity: Reading Race in *The Comedy of Errors*" in Valerie Traub, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 186-196

<https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/57988/PDF/1/>

Wednesday, 29 January

Measure for Measure, Act 1

Monday, 3 February

Measure for Measure, Acts 1-4

Wednesday, 5 February

Measure for Measure, complete

Monday, 10 February

Measure for Measure

Laura Kolb, "The Very Modern Anger of Shakespeare's Women,"

<https://electricliterature.com/the-very-modern-anger-of-shakespeares-women/>

Wednesday, 12 February

Measure for Measure

Mid-term essay due in class

Monday, 17 February

The Merchant of Venice, Act 1

Wednesday, 19 February

The Merchant of Venice, Acts 1-3

Monday, 24 February

The Merchant of Venice, complete

Wednesday, 26 February

The Merchant of Venice

Kim Hall, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Colonization and Miscegenation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992), pp. 87-111

Monday, 2 March

The Merchant of Venice

Wednesday, 4 March

Othello, Act 1

Monday and Wednesday, 9 and 11 March

Spring Break; no class

Monday, 16 March

Othello, complete

Wednesday, 18 March

Othello

Ania Loomba, "Othello and the Racial Question," *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 91-111

Monday, 23 March

Othello

Ian Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64.1 (2013), pp. 1-25

Wednesday, 25 March

Othello

Monday, 30 March

The Tempest, Acts 1-2

Hester Lees-Jeffries, "Enter Mariners, wet,"

<https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/research/stormtossed/2019/10/05/enter-mariners-wet-1-1-50-68-stormtossed/>

Wednesday, 1 April

The Tempest, complete

One paragraph stating your final paper idea due in class

Monday, 6 April

The Tempest

Critical bibliography summarising 6-8 texts relevant to your final project due in class

Wednesday, 8 April

The Tempest

250-word prospectus due in class

Monday, 13 April 2019

The Tempest

Wednesday, 15 April 2019

Draft of final paper due; peer review workshops

Monday, 20 April

Final paper due in class together with one-page self-assessment of your learning over the semester

Conclusion to the course