ENGLISH 436: ADVANCED SHAKESPEARE
“Desire and Deception”
SPRING 2011
PROFESSOR BEN SAUNDERS

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Description:
In this class we will read across the canon of Shakespeare’s works, exploring his treatment of human love from some of his earliest plays through to his middle-career. (Please note: Shakespeare did not consider love to be the unique province of heterosexuals, and neither shall we.) We will pay particular attention to the relationship between desire and misrecognition in his work: that is, the way in which love, for Shakespeare, is associated with cases of mistaken identity, disguises, and acts of deception — including self-deception. The course as a whole is constructed around two opposed but equally Shakespearean perspectives on love: a cynical, disparaging vision of the condition as a self-serving delusion, and a proto-Romantic account of love as a special kind of creative act.

Texts:
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Romeo and Juliet
As You Like It
Twelfth Night
Troilus and Cressida
Othello
Measure For Measure

All of the above should be available at the UO Textbook store. On occasion other readings will be supplied in photocopied form. I strongly recommend purchasing the particular editions I have assigned, even if you already own a Complete Works; I have generally chosen these texts for their low price and/or supplementary materials. Having more than one edition at hand can also help you a great deal when it comes to doing Close Readings.

Method of Assessment:
Grades will be based upon

• A two-part essay assignment: Part One is due on Monday, Week Three (April 11); Part Two on Monday, Week Six (May 2). Please make sure you have a copy of this assignment when you leave class today.

and Either

• A longer research paper (8-10 pages) due on Monday, Week Eleven (June 6).

Or

• A performance-based/creative final project (see below), to be presented to the class in Week X.

There will also be reading comprehension pop-quizzes throughout the semester. No further warning will be given with regard to these quizzes.
In the case of the Research Paper:
These may be on any topic that has intrigued you during the course. However, you will need to show familiarity with some recent critical work (i.e. published since the year 1990); and if your topic is already much discussed, then you should also have some familiarity with the broader critical tradition. The introduction to a good edition of the play, or any number of survey collections of Shakespeare criticism, should provide the information you need to get started.

If you use Internet sources, please cite them in full. Every year for the last ten years I have FAILED students — once, more than half a dozen from one class — for using the Internet and not citing their sources, or citing them inadequately. If you are unsure how to cite sources, you have many options: for example, consult a style manual, a reference librarian, a writing instructor, or a student-writing advisor. Remember, it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this basic requirement of scholarly writing.

I am happy to meet with you to discuss your choice of topic and provide suggestions for additional readings – just come and see me during office hours, or send me an email with your ideas. (But please give some thought to what you want to talk about in these papers before contacting me; this makes it much easier to be helpful.) I also STRONGLY recommend starting to write on your topic at least two weeks in advance of the due date.

In the case of the Performance Project:
Shakespeare’s plays were written to be spoken aloud, and to be performed. Therefore, instead of writing a second paper, you may work in groups (of 2-6) to produce a performance based final project (10-15 minutes in length) for the rest of your classmates to watch. (Video projects are also permissible, but technology can create as many problems as it solves, and theatre is generally a more forgiving medium than video. Unless your creative idea absolutely dictates a pre-recorded performance, I urge you to “go live.”)

Projects may be faithful and reverent, or may play fast and loose with the text – adapting, updating, and re-writing.

As long as your project reflects upon or says something about the texts we have studied, you have a great deal of freedom. In the past, I have seen students:

- Perform two or three different versions of the same scene – changing the mood by switching actors, crossing genders, or changing settings.
- Write new plays entirely out of original Shakespearean dialogue.
- Write (and sometimes film) original scripts that place Shakespeare’s characters in modern contexts (gameshows, talkshows, courtrooms, pseudo-documentaries, “reality” TV, music video, etc).
- Update Shakespearean language into distinctly modern idioms (such as Ebonics), and contrast a “straight” interpretation of the original texts with a modernization.
- Bring characters from different plays together into new settings.

But these are just suggestions. You are only limited by your imaginations when it comes to these projects. (And, again, I am always available to discuss your ideas in further detail.)

If you chose to take this alternative option, you must let me know by the beginning of Week Eight. If I have not heard from you by this time I will assume that you are opting for the longer paper. I will also consider other kinds of creative final project (stories, journals, visual art projects) in lieu of a conventional second paper, but please clear your ideas with me first.

Final grades break down as follows:
Shorter essay: 40%
Longer essay/Final project: 40%
Reading-comprehension tests: 20%
NB: **Extra credit** – up to 1/2 of a letter grade – will be available to those students who make valuable contributions in class throughout the quarter. Remember: **a significant in-class class contribution can involve asking an intelligent question, as well as providing answers.**

**Buyer Beware**

- Late papers will not be accepted without a **valid** medical or dean’s excuse.
- Attendance is mandatory. Three or more unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade, at the rate of 1/2 of a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every unexcused absence after the second. **No further warnings will be given.** Courteous students will contact me about their unavoidable absences, either before or (in the event of an emergency) as soon as is reasonable after the class in question.
- To use anyone else’s actual **or** paraphrased words without appropriate citation is to commit **plagiarism.** **Plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course.** In certain cases it may also result in suspension and/or dismissal from the university. **It is not worth the risk.**
- **Always bring a text to class.** Students without a text will be asked to leave. You can’t even **pretend** to be interested if you don’t have a book.

Finally, you should be aware that Shakespeare wrote powerful dramas dealing with **adult themes** and subjects. His work is often **violent** and **sexual**, spanning the full range of human sexuality (although in many editions, particularly those aimed at schoolchildren, the innuendoes that pepper his dialogue are passed over without notes or commentary). The plays are also sometimes shockingly unconventional in their treatment of **political and religious** issues. You are not required to like everything you read – indeed, I hope for a more complicated response than that – but please be ready to meet the intellectual challenges of this extraordinary material with an open mind if you chose to take this course.

If you have any questions about any of the above, feel free to ask. That is why I am here.

*Please note: on occasion I am forced to cancel my office hours for departmental/committee meetings, graduate student examinations, and other significant administrative duties. This is case on Monday, April 4th. I will always endeavor to inform you all in advance of such cancellations, and to reschedule my hours; but it may not always be possible to do so. Your patience and understanding is appreciated.*
A Note About Secondary Reading, and Some Recommendations

At least two stacks of shelves at the Knight Library, from floor to ceiling, are taken up with Shakespeare and Shakespeare related material. The sheer amount of secondary literature is daunting, especially if we recall that it is largely twentieth-century commentary on display, that there are three prior centuries of writing to consider, and that the Knight collection is far from comprehensive. In fact, you could multiply it by ten and still not come close to the number of books, dissertations, journal articles, and essay collections that are actually out there. Add the material available online, and you can add a few more decimal points to the total figure …

But this need not be cause for concern. Besides the fact that you should mostly have your hands full with the primary texts on the syllabus, a lot of Shakespeare criticism, both in print and online, is simply not worth reading — dull and unimaginative, a waste of time and trees. In general, I would prefer that you confine yourselves to the Scylla of the course texts and avoid the Charybdis of additional material.

However, some of this stuff is informative, elucidatory, and even stimulating. For example, I hope the critical essays I assign will help you think about the plays, as they have helped me in my own thinking; and when it comes to the preparation of essays, you should definitely consider some or all of the following resources:

Performance Guides: Bristol Classical Press has published a series entitled Plays in Performance. There is one book on each of the major plays, with photos, directing hints, and other tasty tidbits. Manchester University Press has published a similar series, similarly titled Shakespeare in Performance. Again, there is one on most of the plays (fewer photos, more commentary).

Textual Transmission: The history of the textual reproduction of Shakespeare's plays is fascinating, and worth knowing a little about. At the very least, you should find the time to read Stephen Orgel’s “The Texts of Shakespeare” (just 3 pages of the prefatory material in the Pelican editions you have been assigned). But try Jonathan Goldberg’s “‘What? In a Name Names That Which We Call A Rose’: The Desired Texts of Romeo and Juliet,” in Crisis In Editing (ed. Randall McLeod), if you want to see how much mileage a good critic can get out of the issue of textual transmission. (Quarto and Folio versions of the plays can also be found online at <http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/index.html>.)

Criticism: Individual texts are too numerous to mention. A selection of stuff from pre-1800 has been collected in a six volume series entitled Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage, edited by Brian Vickers. More modern names to watch for include Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore, Harry Berger, Coppelia Kahn, Valerie Traub, Marjorie Garber, Thomas Greene, Jan Kott, Patricia Parker, Stephen Greenblatt, Janet Adelman, David Willburn, Malcolm Evans, etc. etc. etc. … For the best academic search engine, try the MLA database; consult with a reference librarian to find it from the library homepage.

The Twelve Volume Oxford English Dictionary: The meanings of words are neither historically nor semantically fixed; they can vary over time, as well as according to immediate context. The 12 volume OED will provide you with usages lost to the modern reader, significances and valances that can change the interpretation of a line or even of an entire speech. Remember, putting the right pressure on a well-chosen word can generate whole essays, and the OED is a marvelous tool for doing just that. You should know the location of the OED in the library. If you don't, now is the time to find out. It is also available online; see your first assignment for more details.

Finally, perhaps more useful than any secondary reading: don’t forget the possibility of watching a production on video or DVD. Although sometimes cheesy and almost never equivalent to a good theatrical performance, filmed performances can greatly enhance your comprehension and pleasure. The BBC filmed every play in the late 70s, and some of the plays we are reading have been filmed several times over. The library has all of the BBC productions, and many more besides. It can be more helpful to compare one scene in two different film versions, to see the different interpretive choices different actors and directors make, than to watch just one (often not very good) version all the way through.