ENGLISH 410: William Shakespeare, Gender Theorist
WINTER 2012
PROFESSOR BEN SAUNDERS

Office: 366 PLC
Hours: Friday, 2pm-5pm*
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Course Description:

In this class we will read across the canon of Shakespeare’s works from some of his earliest plays through to his middle-career, paying particular attention to issues of gender and sexuality. Our key questions will be as follows: how does Shakespeare distinguish the categories of male and female, and the related concepts of masculinity and femininity? To what extent are the differences between men and women in Shakespeare’s works marked as hierarchical? When does Shakespeare appear to suggest the existence of clear boundaries between male and female characteristics and behavior, and when does he disrupt or blur those boundaries? How and to what end are misogynistic and misanthropic energies marshaled in his works?

We will also read some challenging psychoanalytic and philosophical texts on sexual difference and the origins of human desire alongside Shakespeare’s plays.

Required Texts:

The Taming of the Shrew
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
As You Like It
Measure For Measure
Anthony and Cleopatra

All of the above should be available at the UO Textbook store. Other readings will be supplied in photocopied form. I strongly recommend purchasing the particular editions I have assigned, even if you already own Shakespeare’s Complete Works or some other edition of the play at hand; I have chosen these specific texts for their 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 on:

- An assignment on questions raised by the editorial “glossing” of Shakespeare’s language (2 pages, minimum), due on Friday, Week II (Jan. 20), at 366 PLC, by 12 pm. Make sure you have a copy of this assignment when you leave class today.

AND

- A two-part essay assignment: Part One due on Friday, Week Four (Feb. 3), at 366 PLC, by 12 pm; Part Two on Friday, Week Six (Feb. 17), same time and location. Again, make sure you have a copy of this assignment when you leave class today.

AND EITHER
- A longer research paper (10 pages, **minimum**) due on Friday, Week Ten (March 16), at 366 PLC, by 12 pm.

OR

- A **performance-based/creative final project**, 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:**

The paper may be on any aspect of any play you have read this term. It should be in dialog with at least one recent critical text (i.e. a scholarly article published since the year 2000); and if your topic is already much discussed, then I will expect you to display some familiarity with the broader critical tradition surrounding that topic. The introduction to a good scholarly edition of the play should provide the kind of information you need to get started.

I will not assign specific questions; it is **your** research project, and **you** need to decide what you want to spend the time researching. However, I am happy to meet with you to discuss your topic, provide suggestions for further reading, and help you refine your ideas — just come and see me during office hours. I am also generally able to respond to email queries within 48 hours during the week (this does not include weekends). But please give some thought to what you want to talk about in these papers before contacting me; it 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 research 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 film. 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 research paper.**

Final grades break down as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glossing Assignment</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term Essay</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Essay/Performance</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Remember: a significant in-class class contribution can involve asking an intelligent question, as well as providing answers.

In addition, students who answer **90%** or more of the reading comprehension quizzes correctly will have their overall grade **boosted** by 1/3 of a letter grade (B- becomes B, etc). However, students who get more than **50%** of these questions wrong will see their grade **lowered** by an equivalent amount.

**Buyer Beware**

- **Late papers will not be accepted** without a valid medical or dean’s excuse.
- **Attendance is mandatory.** Unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade, at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every unexcused absence. **No further warnings will be given.**
- In the event of illness, an unanticipated family commitment, or other approved University business (such as participation in a sporting event), some absences may be considered “excused.” In almost all cases, **excused absences require some form of official documentation** (for example, a doctor’s note). Courteous students will also 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.
- **There will be no “do-overs” or second-chances on written assignments.** You need to make it your best work the first time around. If you are concerned that you will underperform on a particular assignment, **you need to come and see me beforehand;** afterwards is too late.
- **If you miss a quiz, you missed a quiz.** There will be no make-up assignments (except in the case of an excused absence).
- **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 in front of you.
- 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 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.
A Warning About Plagiarism.

Plagiarism (presenting the research and insights of others as if they were your own) will result in automatic failure of the course. Loss of financial aid is a not uncommon additional consequence; and in certain cases (a second offense, for example), plagiarism can result in dismissal from the university. It is not worth the risk.

Please be aware that every term for the last twelve years I have failed dozens of students for not citing or for inadequately citing (that is, plagiarizing) online sources. In one particularly unpleasant term I was forced to fail eight students in a class of forty. (Yes, that’s almost a quarter of the class; yes, I failed them all, outright; yes, at least one of those students lost her financial aid and was unable to complete her degree.) Understand further: even if you re-write a source in your own words, if you do not cite that source in both your text and your bibliography, you are still committing plagiarism (of the sneakiest, most dishonest kind).

This is your only warning about this issue. Let’s try and make this the first term that I don’t have to fail anyone. If you are unsure how to cite sources, you have many options: for example, you can consult a style manual, a reference librarian, a writing instructor, or a student-writing advisor. If you remain uncertain, you can even ask me. But remember, it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this basic requirement of scholarly writing.

Finally, 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. For example, this term, I will be unable to hold office hours on Friday, February 9th. Generally, I will endeavor to reschedule my hours, and inform you all in advance, but this will not always be possible; your patience and understanding is appreciated.*
Some Recommendations For Secondary Sources

At least two stacks of shelves at the Knight Library, from floor to ceiling, are taken up with Shakespeare-related material. The sheer amount of secondary literature is daunting, especially if we recall 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 could multiply that figure by another ten, at least. We’re talking about more reading than a human being could do in a lifetime, let alone during a single term of college.

But this burgeoning industry need not be cause for concern. Besides the fact that you should have your hands full with the texts on the syllabus, a lot of Shakespeare criticism, both in print and online, is not worth reading — dull and unimaginative, it tends to say more about the intellectual fashions and cultural assumptions of its time period than it does about Shakespeare (indeed, such criticism if often more valuable as a document of intellectual and social change than as a source of insight into Shakespeare’s texts).

On the other hand, good criticism can be elucidatory, stimulating, and even revelatory. For example, I hope the critical essays I assign this term will help you think about the plays, as they have helped me in my own thinking. There are also a few other obvious places to go for ideas and inspiration. Therefore, when it comes to the preparation of essays, you should definitely consider the following additional resources:

The Earliest Printed Texts: The history of the textual reproduction of Shakespeare's plays is fascinating, and worth knowing about. At the very least, you must read Stephen Orgel’s “The Texts of Shakespeare” (just 3 pages of the prefatory material in the Pelican editions you have been assigned). But a searchable facsimile of the First Folio and the various Quartos can also be found online at http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/

Professional Academic Criticism: Individual texts are too numerous to mention. Names to watch for include William Empson, Stanley Cavell, Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore, Harry Berger, Coppelia Kahn, Valerie Traub, Jonathan Bate, Jan Kott, Patricia Parker, Stephen Greenblatt, Janet Adelman, David Willbern, Malcolm Evans, Gail Kern Paster ... In addition, the English Renaissance specialists here at the UO (Lara Bovilsky, Lisa Freinkel, George Rowe, and myself) have all published on the drama of the period. For the best critical search engine, try the MLA database; consult with a reference librarian to find it from the UO library homepage.

The Twelve Volume Oxford English Dictionary: The meanings of words are not historically fixed; they 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 a whole essay, and the OED is a marvelous tool for applying that pressure. 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, consider watching a production on video or DVD or even seeking out clips of scenes on YouTube. Although sometimes cheesy and never equivalent to a good theatrical performance, filmed productions can greatly enhance your comprehension – probably more than any secondary reading. The BBC filmed every play at least once in the late 70s/early 80s, and some of the plays we are reading have been filmed many times over. The library has all of the BBC productions, and more besides. Remember, 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 one (often not very good) version all the way through.