

English 399: Shakespeare's World



Students in “Shakespeare’s World” learn to read Shakespeare’s works in relation to the cultural, literary, and historical contexts in which he wrote. This can be a first course in Shakespeare (no prerequisites). In Winter 2021, students will read Hamlet in relation to earlier revenge tragedies as well as developing early modern ideas of consciousness. They will also study King Lear while learning about early modern ideas of human/animal relations and theories of political authority. We will look at some cinematic adaptations of both plays.

Contact Information

Email: bdawson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: Thursday 4-6, sign up and zoom link at <https://tinyurl.com/dawsonhours>

Required Materials

You must purchase the specific editions listed below. Versions of the play that are online or published by a different company are not acceptable. Used or rented is fine. Ebook is not ideal but not prohibited (it will be harder for you to find specific scenes and lines). If you buy the book from Amazon or other online stores, make sure to search using the ISBN number listed. All other readings will be made available through Canvas.

Hamlet. Oxford World’s Classics. ISBN: 978-0199535811

King Lear. Oxford World's Classics. ISBN: 9780199535828

Link to UO Duck Store Page: <https://www.uoduckstore.com/book-search-results?crn=22076>

Calendar

Week 1: *Hamlet* Acts 1-2

Week 2: *Hamlet* Act 3-5

Week 3: *Hamlet*, Vengeance and Memory

Context: Kyd, Spanish Tragedy 1.1, 3.2.1-52, 3.13, 4.4

Criticism: Adelman, Greenblatt, Maguire

Week 4: *Hamlet*, Desire and the Self

Context: Descartes, Meditations 1

Criticism: Freud, Critchley, de Grazia

Week 5: *Hamlet* into Film

Kurosawa, *The Bad Sleep Well*;

Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Week 6: Lear Scenes 1-5

Harry Berger, Jr., "The Lear Family Romance"

Week 7: Lear Scenes 6-7

Richard Strier, "Impossible Radicalism II: Shakespeare and Disobedience"

Week 8: Lear Scenes 8-14

Laurie Shannon, "Poor, Bare, Forked"

Week 9: Lear Scenes 15-21

Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love in King Lear"

Week 10: Lear Scenes 22-24

T. J. Clark, "Picasso and Tragedy"

Assignment Overview

Reading: Completing the week's assigned reading is essential to all the other work in the class. Read slowly! The language will often be both archaic and dense. I recommend reading twice, once to get a basic sense of what's happening and once to think about the language and meaning. Reading aloud is not only helpful but entertains yourself and the people you live with. Watching film versions or looking at modernized editions is completely fine *if and only if* you also read the original.

Attending Class: Each week, the main class will hold two sessions on zoom. They will typically consist of a lecture, question and answer, and some small-group or whole-class activity. Attending all weekly sessions, prepared and having done the reading, is important and counts toward your grade. Attendance is worth 20% of your grade. Showing up to class late will count as one third an absence. If you're unable to attend the live sessions for technical or other reasons, you can watch the recording and submit a 300-word summary to make up your absence.

Re-Reading Journal: We'll be spending a lot of time on each of our two plays and going back over them through the lenses of context, criticism, and adaptation. For this assignment, you will practice re-reading and re-thinking moments in the play through these different lenses. In Weeks 1, 2, 6, and 7, you will choose one scene from the play and write about what interests you for at least 300 words. You should be sure to 1) include at least one quotation, 2) spend some time analyzing that quotation, and 3) write at least one question that the passage leaves you with, a question that we may be able to discuss as a class. In weeks 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10, you will choose one of the scenes you've already written about and add something more. In particular, you should include at least one quotation from the week's reading, and talk about how that context, criticism, or adaptation leads you to see the original differently. You're allowed to miss two entries without penalty. The journal is worth 30% of your grade.

Two Papers: Each short paper is designed to help you practice a particular skill important to analyzing Shakespeare. The first paper will have you do a deep reading of a particular passage from Shakespeare, analyzing his complex and poetic language as a way of thinking about a particular issue. The second paper will have you read a play alongside either a piece of criticism or of context, looking at how the passage can both illustrate and challenge our understanding of its companion. The prompt for each paper will be given out at least two weeks in advance. Each paper will be 4-5 pages of written work and is worth 25%.

Policies

Accessibility: Please let me know me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation, especially in this online form. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Formatting Papers: For turning in assignments electronically, you can either submit them as text on Canvas or as an attached document. If you submit them as attachments, you need to use .doc(x) or .pdf format (not .pages or .odt). If you need to include citations, you should use MLA-style parenthetical citations and include a Works Cited page. A great guide to MLA format can be found at Purdue's OWL website (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> (Links to an external site.)). You are expected to proofread your work; too many errors will result in a penalty to your grade.

Late Assignments: I give out extensions readily, but you need to ask in advance. Late assignments are generally graded down one third a letter grade per day late. Exceptions may be given for emergencies and other drastic situations.

Plagiarism: All work must be your own and written solely for this class. Plagiarism can be unintentional, so be careful and make sure you understand the rules. If you're not certain, ask the instructor or TA. If you quote, paraphrase, or borrow ideas from an article, website, editor's note, friend, or any other outside source, you need to provide documentation. I encourage you to look at the library's guides for citing sources and avoiding plagiarism (<https://library.uoregon.edu/citing>). The same link will also allow you to access the university's official policy toward academic misconduct; you should read over the policy if you're unclear on what counts as cheating or plagiarism. If you're struggling with a paper, I encourage you to contact me. It's better to submit a paper late, unfinished, or in poor quality than risk the penalties for plagiarizing.

English Language Learners: Anyone can succeed in this class whether or not English is their primary language. You will likely have some additional challenges: readings and papers will take longer to complete, participating in class discussion may be more intimidating. If you're having trouble with participation, you're welcome to share your ideas in email or office hours. If you're struggling with assignments, come to office hours and we can discuss. You should know that grammar, syntax, and spelling are a relatively minor part of any paper grades. As with all students, I expect you to show care with your language, but your ideas are what is most important.

Advisory: Be aware that the material we read for this course can be disturbing in its treatment of sexuality and violence, and our discussions will cover these topics. If you feel you can't participate in discussion around a particular issue or text, let me know and I will try to design alternative work.

Grades and How to Improve

If you are concerned about your grade, the best thing you can do is seek help early. Some other things you can do:

- 1) Give yourself more time to complete the reading and assignments. Each class's reading should take you about 60-90 minutes, if you read it carefully, go back and read it again, and take notes. If you read slowly, you will understand more and perform better on the assignments. Similarly, be sure to take time to plan your writing before beginning, and then read it over once you're through.
- 2) Sign up for office hours at [this link](#). Many students find it awkward or intimidating to meet with a professor, but it's one of the best ways to learn. I'm happy to talk with you about the plays, assignments, or any areas you feel you'd like feedback.
- 3) Make an appointment with the Writing Associates Program, which offers free, one-on-one, online(!) peer tutoring for students in lower-division English and Composition classes and Honors College classes. Writing Associate tutors are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course, from learning how to write about literature and media to crafting clearer and more effective arguments. More information and sign ups are available at [this link](#).