Early Shakespeare

Description

In this course, students will read four innovative works from the first half of Shakespeare’s career: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Richard II*, *the Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet*. Together, we will gain an appreciation for the plays’ mixture of entertainment and philosophical reflection, the strange beauty of their language, their morally ambiguous heroes and villains, and the historical contexts in which they were written. Along the way, we will take in Shakespeare through different media, including written performance, theatrical performance, film adaptation, painting, and comics. Topics considered will include: gender and desire, political authority and ambition, social and personal identity, and the enthralling yet occasionally dangerous powers of language.

Required Materials

Students must purchase the specific editions listed below in print form.


In addition, the following films are required for class. The first two can be rented for a small fee on Amazon, the last two are available for free through YouTube and Kanopy, respectively.

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (dir. Hoffman, 1999), [https://tinyurl.com/5p9wtnjb](https://tinyurl.com/5p9wtnjb)


*To Be or Not to Be* (dir. Lubitsch, 1942), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33Oofg6cv7E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33Oofg6cv7E)

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction
  - Remote Instruction. Complete material in Week 1 module.

Week 2: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*
  4/4: Act 1
  4/6: Act 2-3

Week 3: *Midsummer*
  4/11: Act 4-5
  4/13 Film: *Midsummer* (dir. Hoffman, 1999), [https://tinyurl.com/5p9wtnjb](https://tinyurl.com/5p9wtnjb)

Week 4: *Richard II*
  4/18: Acts 1-2
  4/20: Act 3

Week 5: *Richard II*
  4/25: Act 4-5

Week 6: *The Merchant of Venice*
  5/2: Midterm Exam
  5/4: Acts 1-2

Week 7: *The Merchant of Venice*
  5/9: Acts 3-4
  5/11: Act 5

Week 8: *Hamlet*
  5/16: Act 1-2
  5/18: Act 3

Week 9: *Hamlet*
  5/23: Act 4-5
  5/25: *To Be or Not to Be* (dir. Lubitsch, 1942), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33Oofg6cv7E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33Oofg6cv7E)

Week 10
  6/1: Final Exam
  6/8: Review Assignment due
Assignments

Attendance (10%): Coming to class with the day’s reading is mandatory. Coming to class without
the text or without having done the reading will count as an absence. If you are unable to attend
due to illness or other reasons, contact me in advance and I may be able to arrange an alternate
assignment.

In-Class Group Assignments (10%): The class will be divided into smaller seminar groups of
about five students. On Wednesdays, we will split up into groups to discuss some portion of the
reading and collaboratively complete a short assignment about it. Instructions will be given in
class. If you miss class the day of group work, contact me about how to make up the assignment.

Weekly Writing (6 submissions worth 5% each): You will have a short writing assignment every
week except the two weeks with exams. These will vary, but may ask you to reflect on the reading
or lecture, paraphrase or annotate a passage, brainstorm ideas, make connections to other texts
we've read, or outline an argument. Writing will be less formal than for an essay. Specific
instructions will be given on Canvas. You can expect to write about 250-500 words per week.
Weekly writing will be due on Friday each week. You can miss two weekly writings with no
penalty.

Review of Adaptation or Influence (10%): Choose one film, novel, comic, play, or video game
that adapts or heavily draws on one of the four plays we read for this class. Do not choose one of
the films on the syllabus. In an essay of 500-750 words, describe what the work is trying to
accomplish in relation to its Shakespearean source. Include at least one way in which the newer
work is true to its source and one way in which it challenges or transforms the original’s meaning.
Be sure your review is well-organized, has a clear thesis, and cites specific scenes or lines from the
work and from Shakespeare as evidence.

Midterm and Final Exams (20% each): Exams will cover all the material from one half of the
term. They are designed to make sure you have kept up with the readings, lectures, and
discussions. They will take about 80 minutes to complete and will consist of multiple choice
questions, passage identification, and short essays. Preparation time will vary, but I recommend
at least 6 hours of study spread over a few days.
Policies

Accessibility: Please let me know if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. 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: Your assignments must be in twelve-point font, double-spaced, and have one-inch margins. Submitting assignments electronically is acceptable, but you need to use .doc(x) or .pdf format (not .pages or .odt). You can follow either MLA or Chicago guidelines for citations, but be consistent. Great guides to either format can be found at Purdue’s OWL website (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/). You are expected to proofread your work; too many errors will result in a small penalty to your grade.

Late Assignments: I give out extensions readily, but you need to ask in advance. Exceptions may be given for emergencies and other drastic situations. Late assignments are graded down one third of a letter grade per day late. Assignments are due at the beginning of class unless stated otherwise; assignments turned in after that will be considered a day late. Weekly Writing will be accepted in print or by Canvas.

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 me. 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 an assignment, 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.

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.