

Introduction to Shakespeare
Fall 2015
Dr. Ann Rea
Syllabus and Course Description
ENGLIT 0581
MWF 1:00-1:50 Biddle 252

anr12@pitt.edu
Office hours: MWF 1:00-2:00 and MW 4:00-5:00
and by appointment
Office – Biddle 232C
Phone ext. 7166

Shakespeare is a phenomenon unique in English literature. His plays have been read, performed, quoted, studied and written about continually since his lifetime four hundred and fifty years ago, and their influence on English speaking cultures is so enormous that we can scarcely grasp it. Our factual knowledge about Shakespeare himself has some gaps and our access to the plays' texts sometimes relies on conflicting versions: folios and actors' prompt books that occasionally have missing words and contradictions. But we do have parish records that show that Shakespeare was born on 26th April, 1564 and died in 1616, fifty two years later almost to the day. His family was solidly middleclass and he had a good education which, in those days, consisted largely of the classics: especially Latin. We also have four hundred and fifty years of scholarship about Shakespeare, written by famous writers such as Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and contemporary scholars continue to find richness and complexity in Shakespeare's works and to reconsider them from new perspectives.

For this introductory course we will read ten plays and work on understanding them in their historical contexts, understanding and appreciating the language and the use of verse, prose and stagecraft, as well as characterization. We will examine many of the preoccupations to which Shakespeare returns: kingship and political representation; women and authority; the regulation of sexual behavior; the growing sense of individual sensibility; acting and performance and the prevalent discomfort with dissembling, or inauthenticity. In many cases these are the preoccupations of his era, but the wide popular audience of his plays means that he also intervened on contemporary issues. Many of Shakespeare's plays tell stories about England's fairly immediate history, and we will explore the ways in which Shakespeare influenced contemporary opinion about political matters, perhaps to the point of propaganda, as well as helping to create a cohesive sense of English national identity after a divisive and tumultuous historical period. But his life and work straddle the end of the reign of Elizabeth I and James I's ascension to the throne: an important political shift which entailed a change in how the theatre was viewed, as well as an increase in censorship, and many of his plays comment indirectly on social and political issues even while they appear to describe very different matters.

This class will focus on the plays, although Shakespeare was also a poet. The plays show an enormous diversity between the histories, the comedies, tragedies, and the many "problem plays" which evade these categories. Many of the plays are based on the Latin texts that Shakespeare encountered during his education, others are based on old English stories, and some revise these old stories and combine them to make totally new tales.

This class requires your active participation in a way in which your other classes may not. This is not a lecture class, but one where you will engage with ideas and conversation and express your own thoughts. We get to know one another in this class. But you must prepare for class by reading the assigned plays thoughtfully and by coming to class prepared to be involved in active discussion. This can be lots of fun, and we can often have a laugh, but for it to function we need everyone to make the effort to be reflective about his or her part in it. If you tend to want to talk a lot you might need to check that you

do not dominate the discussion. If you are shy and tend to leave the talking to others you might need to push yourself to speak. It is extremely important that we behave respectfully towards others in the discussions.

Class participation will form part of your grade.

Required Text:

The Riverside Shakespeare or *The Wadsworth Shakespeare*

Policies and Rules:

-Please ensure that your cell phone is turned OFF before class. That means that you will not check for “text” messages. I can see texting through chairs and am not fooled by the old phone-on-the-lap or the phone-behind-the-book bag! Give yourself the chance to be disconnected from the outside world and fully present in class.

-Attendance is required. More than three absences and you risk having your grade lowered. If you need to schedule appointments make sure that they do not take place during class time. Be punctual at the beginning of class, and do not make plans to leave before class ends: to do otherwise will result in an absence being recorded.

-Plagiarism is an extremely serious offence and will not be excused. Be sure that you see the distinction between peer revision in which you help each other to revise your work, and the kind of help with writing which involves someone else doing work for you. This includes writing that other people have done and posted on the internet. To present the language or ideas of others as if they are your own is plagiarism. I know that Dr. Paul Newman will have talked about academic integrity at your orientation and by now I'm sure you know what it is.

The course work will consist of three 2 short 4-page papers, a mid-term exam and a final longer 6-page paper. You will also keep a journal – just a separate notebook that you keep for this class – and I will often ask you to write in your journal during class or for homework. These written assignments, journal entries, short papers and exams, will be occasions for you to consolidate ideas from several readings, think about how a metaphor, for example, develops, and how Shakespeare’s thinking about, for example marriage, develops from one play to another. I will comment on your short papers, making suggestions for how you can improve your own thought process and writing. I expect proper English grammar and spelling. When I grade, I write lots of responses to the content of your papers, engaging in a conversation with you about your topic. I hope you will appreciate this and think about the comments. The mid-term exam will offer a chance for you to reflect on what you have learned to that point and to consolidate your understanding.

Grades

Two short 4-page papers: 25% each

Mid-term exam: 20%

Final 6-page paper: 30%

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Health and Counseling Services, G-10 Student Union, 814-269-7119 as early as possible in the term. The Office of Health and Counseling Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

During the first week of the semester I will be presenting at a conference in London. There will be no class meetings until Wednesday, 9th September. There will, however, be reading assignments that you will need to complete, as well as a short written assignment about *Julius Caesar*, described below. I will keep in touch by email.

Monday, 31st August

Introduction: Please carefully read the syllabus (on courseweb and in a hard copy which Dr. Stoneham will give out in class) and then begin to read Harry Levin's Introduction to your Riverside or Wadsworth anthology, pages 1-27. (The anthologies are the same). This is 27 pages, but since we don't have class this week you can use class time as well as "homework" time to complete this useful background reading.

Wednesday, 2nd September

Read *Julius Caesar*, Acts I and II.

Friday, 4th September

Please complete a short writing assignment in which you describe the events in *Julius Caesar* so far. Think about why the political issues that it depicts might have relevance to an Elizabethan audience. This should be at least a page and should be carefully written, observing the rules of correct grammar and spelling. Please send it to me by email: anr12@pitt.edu by midnight on Friday.

Monday, 7th September Labor Day No Class

Check for an email response to the short writing assignment that will guide your reading of the rest of *Julius Caesar*.

Wednesday, 9th September – First proper class!

Finish reading *Julius Caesar*.

Friday, 11th September

Continue discussion of *Julius Caesar*.

Monday, 14th September

Continue discussion of *Julius Caesar*.

Wednesday 16th September

Read *Coriolanus*, I.

Friday 18th September

Read *Coriolanus* II

Monday 21st September

Finish reading *Coriolanus*

Wednesday, 23rd September

Continue in-class discussion of *Coriolanus*

Friday, 25th September

Journal assignment due in class.

Continue in-class discussion of *Coriolanus*

Monday, 28th September

Read *Macbeth*, I, II, and III.

Wednesday, 30th September

Finish reading *Macbeth*

Friday, 2nd October

Continued in-class discussion of *Macbeth*

Monday, 5th October

Mid-term

Wednesday, 7th October

Read *King Lear* I and II

Friday, 9th October

Read *King Lear* III

Monday, 12th October

Finish reading *King Lear*

Wednesday, 14th October

Read *Twelfth Night* I and II.

Friday 16th October

Read *Twelfth Night* III.

Monday, 19th October

No Class – Fall Break

Wednesday, 21st October

Finish *Twelfth Night*

Friday, 23rd October

In-class discussion of *Twelfth Night*

Monday, 26th October

Paper One due in class

Read *As You Like It*, I.

Wednesday, 28th October

Read *As You Like It*, II and III.

Friday, 30th October

Finish reading *As You Like It*.

Monday, 2nd November

Read *The Tempest*, I, II, and III

Wednesday, 4th November

Finish *The Tempest*

Friday, 6th November

Continued in-class discussion of *The Tempest*

Monday, 9th November

Measure for Measure, I, II, and III

Wednesday, 11th November

Measure for Measure IV

Friday, 13th November

Finish *Measure for Measure*

Monday, 16th November

Paper Two due

Read *Richard III*, I, scenes i and ii.

Wednesday, 18th November

Read *Richard III*, to the end of I, and also II

Friday, 20th November

Read *Richard III*, III

Monday, 23rd November

Finish *Richard III*.

Wednesday 25th and Friday 27th - No Class - Thanksgiving Break

Monday, 30th November

Continued discussion of *Richard III*

Wednesday, 2nd December

Read *Henry V*, I and II.

Friday 4th December

Read *Henry V*, III

Monday 7th December

Finish reading *Henry V*.

Prepare a description of the topic for your final paper.

Wednesday, 9th December

Presentations of final paper topic

Friday, 11th December

Presentations of final paper topic

Final Paper due Tuesday, 15th at 3 p.m.