

ENGL 148W Introduction to Shakespeare

Messiah College, Fall 2011, TR 8-9.15 & 10.30-11.45

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Course Description

ENGL 148W Introduction to Shakespeare fulfills the Literature requirement identified in Area Two of the Messiah College General Education curriculum, “Expanding Knowledge to the Liberally Educated,” as well as the General Education Writing Intensive/Enriched requirement. The college document informs us that “the liberally-educated person should have pursued knowledge in many fields of inquiry and understand how each contributes to the interdependent nature of human society.” In the preface to his book, *The Meaning of a Liberal Education* (1926), Everett Dean Martin notes that a liberal education provides “a *spiritual* revaluation of human life. Its task is to *reorient* the individual, to enable her to take a richer and more significant view of her experiences, to place her above and not within the system of her beliefs and ideals . . . [A] liberal education [is] the kind of education which sets the mind free from the servitude of the crowd and from vulgar self-interests” (viii; my emphasis first, Martin’s second). As your instructor/guide, I take this as a given as to what we are primarily about in this course: we seek answers to the question “what is living for?” By the end of the semester, you will see that this is also what Shakespeare was about as a playwright: providing a liberal education for his audiences, and confronting them with possible answers to the big question(s) of *life*.

Course Objectives

1. To introduce you to the traditions and methods of literary study, of reading and writing texts.
2. To provide you with the opportunity to become engaged with the texts of a significant writer—Shakespeare (and to ask, what makes a writer “significant” anyway?).
3. To foster in you the ability to read with sensitivity and care, and to pay critical attention to your reading responses.
4. To help you understand our cultural heritage, and to understand the extent to which our cultural heritage—especially Shakespeare as a major part of that heritage—shapes us as both readers and human beings.
5. To encourage you to encounter significant questions of meaning and identity—it would not be unfair to say that much of what we will do is philosophical (even theological at times): literature *as* philosophy, philosophy *as* literature.
6. To sum it up: we aim to improve our reading skills, to become aware of what is involved in reading a text, to strengthen our written expression, to understand ourselves both as individuals and as a culture—in other words, to engage in the process of soul-making.

Course Texts

John R. Trimble. *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*. Third Edition. Prentice-Hall/Pearson Education, 2011.

William Shakespeare's plays, specifically:

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Merchant of Venice

Twelfth Night

Hamlet

King Lear

Macbeth

The Winter's Tale

Note: any edition will do, but I have ordered Pelican/Penguin editions for all of these, except *Hamlet*, which I've ordered in the RSC edition. You will need to read the essay on Shakespeare's theater from one of these editions.

Course Requirements

1. *Class attendance and discussion*: this is not a lecture course, so your participation is imperative. You are permitted two unexcused absences; any other absences must be cleared with me before the class absence. Your participation will be graded as a plus, nil, or minus on the final semester grade for the course.
2. *Writing portfolio*: this will consist of all writing assignments (listed in the course schedule), both "graded" drafts and revisions for re-grading. The final portfolio must consist of at least ten revised pages spread out over at least two different assignments. These must be accompanied by written explanations of the revisions you made and why. You must also include a two-page reflection on what you learned as a writer in this class and how you developed as a writer in this class. This is worth three-quarters of your grade.
3. *Semester exam*: this will be a comprehensive exam on literary/dramatic terms and text passages which have been clearly identified as exam material during the course of the semester. This is worth one-quarter of your grade.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: Any student whose disability falls within ADA guidelines should inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of any special accommodations or equipment needs necessary to complete the requirements for this course. Students must register documentation with the Office of Disability Services (Hoffman 101). If you have questions, call extension 5382.

Review Academic Integrity Policy:

http://www.messiah.edu/academics/advising_handbook/academic_policies/integrity.pdf

NOTE: Since the course instructor is easily distracted, this class includes a NO LAP-TOP computers or electronic NOTEBOOKS policy, as these are not necessary to the work we are doing in this class. Turn off or to complete silence all cell-phones, blackberries, etc. Consider this class your hour of freedom from the ubiquitous tentacles of electronic media!

Course Schedule

Day	Date	Assignment
Tues.	August 30	Introduction to Shakespeare and his world
Thurs.	September 1	Introduction to Shakespeare's theatre and language Reading: Trimble 2-22 (chs. 1 & 2) Writing: "My relation to Shakespeare thus far" – 1-2
Tues.	6	Reading: <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> What's going on, how is it going on, and why is it going on? Writing: question the play poses to us as audience
Thurs.	8	<i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> as theater: performing the text and performance as interpretation of the text. What is the role of the audience in performance?
Tues.	13	Reading: Trimble 23-47 (chs. 3-5); 147-62 (ch. 14) Writing: "When I laugh and why" or "What's serious in this silly play?" – 2-3 Class focus: structuring your essay
Thurs.	15	Reading: Trimble 48-57 (ch. 6) Shakespeare's diction and yours <i>MND</i> : imagination and faith
Tues.	20	Reading: <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> What's going on, how is it going on, and why is it going on? Writing: question the play poses to us as audience
Thurs.	22	Performing Shylock: how do directors and actors choose to stage a character, to make the character "real"?
Tues.	27	Reading: Trimble 58-75 (ch. 7) Class focus: how to make your prose live(ly) Writing: "How to stage Shylock in a Messiah Theatre production" or "Why does everyone like Bassanio, except/including me?" 2-3
Thurs.	29	What would a Christian reading of <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> look like?

Day	Date	Assignment
Tues.	October 4	Reading: <i>Twelfth Night, or What You Will</i> What's going on, how is it going on, and why is it going on? Writing: question the play poses to us as audience
Thurs.	6	Performing Malvolio: simply irresistible?
Tues.	11	Reading: Trimble 76-87 (ch. 8) Writing: "I've just won a week-long holiday in Italy with the <i>TN</i> character of my choice! Here's who I've chosen and why:" 2-3
Thurs.	13	Reflections on Shakespeare's comic faith—or faithful comedy
Tues.	18	Reading: <i>The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark</i> What's going on, how is it going on, and why is it going on? Writing: question the play poses to us as audience
Thurs.	20	Fall Recess October 20–23, 2011 No Classes
		Monday October 24th Classes Resume – 8:00 a.m.
Tues.	25	Reading: Trimble 88-100 (ch. 9); selected critical essay on <i>Hamlet</i> Writing: critical notes in response to selected essay
Thurs.	27	Writing: "What does <i>Hamlet</i> actually suggest about Providence?" 3-4
Tues.	November 1	Reading: <i>The Tragedy of King Lear</i> What's going on, how is it going on, and why is it going on? Writing: question the play poses to us as audience
Thurs.	3	Dramatizing the crucial opening scene: a tale of two Lears

Day	Date	Assignment
Tues.	8	Reading: Trimble 101-116 (ch. 10) Writing: "Madness in Shakespeare: a play-goer's guide" 4-5 (dramatizing ideas about Shakespeare dramatizing madness)
Thurs.	10	King Lear and the gods: faith, hope, and Cordelia
Tues.	15	Reading: <i>The Tragedy of Macbeth</i> <i>The Scottish Macbeth</i>
Thurs.	17	Singing the Highland Blues
Tues.	22	Writing: "I loved/hated the ending of Macbeth, and let me tell you why" 1-2 Macbeth's imagination: fair or foul, foul or fair?
Thurs.	24	Thanksgiving Break November 23–27, 2011 No Classes
Tues.	29	Reading: <i>The Winter's Tale</i> What's going on, how is it going on, and why is it going on? Writing: question the play poses to us as audience
Thurs.	December 1	How do we perform/dramatize Hermione's "resurrection"? How does our reading of the play shape this? How does the play's mixed genre suggest possibilities for our choice(s)?
Tues.	6	Writing: "What can we talk about if we talk about Shakespeare's faith?" 4-5
Thurs.	8	Your/My/Our Shakespeare, real and imagined
		Semester Exam 8: 8-10am, December 13 10.30: 8-10am, December 14