

ENGL 348 Shakespeare
Messiah College, Spring 2011
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Course Description

This course examines seven plays by Shakespeare, selected for variety of genre and with an eye toward surveying Shakespeare's career and development as a dramatist and ethical thinker: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, and *The Winter's Tale*; while our focus will be on Shakespeare's literary and dramatic art, we will consider Shakespearean ethics - regarding economics, politics, revenge, sex, family, and aesthetics (an ethics of theatre). We will especially consider how Shakespeare stages both comic and tragic protagonists whose flawed perspectives and mistaken actions invite our critical judgment, but whose brokenness and pain simultaneously solicit our compassion, even our empathy. In this way Shakespeare provides us with the opportunity to combine a discriminating understanding with an ethic of compassion. I think we could argue that Shakespeare understood (in fact, may have had some role in inspiring) Emerson's remarks from his essay on "Circles":

Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens [this last line is a steal from Milton, refurbished for a new purpose].

There is no need to make an argument for the study of Shakespeare's texts in the university curriculum. The dramatic works of William Shakespeare offer us what Leopold Bloom, James Joyce's protagonist in *Ulysses*, calls "the university of life." Shakespeare provides a most lively way of considering who we have been, who we are, and who we will choose to be. His plays investigate psychology, ethics, politics, sex, religion, and—to borrow an old phrase—everything else under the sun. Shakespeare helps us to see the world "feelingly" and critically, to work out our answers to that most important of questions: what is living for? Shakespeare has more than secured a living in our cultural soul; Shakespeare has achieved the status of ICON in contemporary English-speaking cultures. Guests on Ellen Hughes' "Desert Island Discs" radio show were allowed to choose one book to take along on their desert island, and they were always asked to choose a book other than the Bible or the Complete Works of Shakespeare. This reflects the reality that the Shakespearean canon (nearly) equals the Bible in significance in our culture today. The continuing success of Shakespeare's 400 year old dramas as contemporary stage productions and films also reflects Shakespeare's power and currency: Zeffereilli's *Hamlet*, Branagh's *Henry V*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet*, Parker's *Othello*, Loncraine's *Richard III*, and Nunn's *Twelfth Night* are just a few examples of recent cinematic successes with Shakespeare texts. Quotations from

Shakespearean drama are ubiquitous: if you can get Shakespeare's text on your side of an argument, you're halfway home. In this course we will examine a representative selection of Shakespeare plays, and we will (hopefully) *both* qualify and humanize the "myth" that is Shakespeare *and* discern and appreciate Shakespeare's genuinely superlative skills as a playwright and poet.

Course Texts

Since we will be reading several critical essays together, three plays will require the Ignatius Critical Edition (published by Ignatius Press): *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. For the remaining four plays, you are welcome to use any edition of the text. The best scholarly editions are offered by Arden, Oxford World's Classics, Pelican, Signet, Bedford/St. Martin's, and Norton (Critical Editions).

Course Motivations/Intentions (excepting #5, order does not reflect prioritization)

1. To discern and interpret key historical and cultural contexts for Shakespeare's texts.
2. To identify and contemplate key themes and features of Shakespearean drama.
3. To discern and consider the implications and possibilities of performance (stage and screen) for interpreting and representing Shakespeare's dramatic texts.
4. To identify, consider, and enjoy Shakespeare's use of language as a dramatic medium.
5. To consider the questions—both old and new—posed by and to Shakespeare's dramatic texts, and to continue answering for ourselves that most important question: what is living for? In this respect we will especially concern ourselves with moral/ethical questions dramatically posed by Shakespeare's plays.

Course Requirements

Regular attendance and class participation; you are allowed two unexcused absences, three tardies equal one unexcused absence. Final grades are diminished by a half-grade for each unexcused absence beyond the allowance. I use class participation to consider awarding plus or minus half a grade at the end of term.

You must read all assigned plays and critical essays, and write a single-page, single-spaced, exploratory essay for each play assigned (for a total of ten papers). These papers are due **at the beginning of the class hour when we start a new play**. No research for this paper, just your encounter with the text—exploring and examining a particular question raised by the play or dramatic/literary device employed by Shakespeare (thus this paper must have a single focus). 20%

You must complete one double-spaced, five [5] page literary or theatrical analysis essay, which can be developed from a response paper (actually this is preferable). No research

necessary for this paper, but you are welcome to include research if you wish. 20% **Due March 3.**

You must complete one double-spaced, five [5] page Final Exam essay on a question I will set for you, focused on motivation #5 above. 20% **Due May 6.**

You must complete one double-spaced, ten [10] page essay, literary or theatrical analysis incorporating research, which can also be developed from a response paper or expand your five-page essay. Research should be thorough; MLA or Chicago (Notes-bibliography) Style accepted. 40% **Due April 19.**

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: No lap-tops, ipads, blackberrys, etc.; cell-phones must be turned off before entering the classroom.

Course Schedule

Class Lesson/ Reading Assignments

Work Due **Writing Assignments**

1 Feb T	Goldberg, "Agents and Lives: Making Moral Sense of People"; Walhout, "The End of Literature: Reflections on Literature and Ethics"; syllabus	
3 R	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	Response paper on <i>MV</i>
8 T	Critical Essay TBD	
10 R	Downing, "Text as Test: Reading <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> " 167-82	
15 T	<i>Twelfth Night, or What You Will</i>	Response paper on <i>TN</i>
17 R	Critical Essay TBD	
22 T		

24 R	<i>Measure For Measure</i>	Response paper on <i>MFM</i>
1 March T	Critical Essay TBD	
3 R		5-page literary analysis paper
8 T	<i>Henry V</i>	Response paper on <i>H5</i>
10 R	Norman Rabkin essay on <i>H5</i>	
	(Spring Break)	
22 T		
24 R	<i>Hamlet, Prince of Denmark</i>	Response paper on <i>Hamlet</i>
29 T	Downing essay on <i>Hamlet</i>	
31 R		
5 April T	<i>King Lear</i>	Response paper on <i>KL</i>
7 R	Critical Essay TBD	
12 T	Critical Essay TBD	
	Service Day: No Class	
19 T		10-page researched paper
21 R	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	
26 April T	Critical Essay TBD	
28 R		
3 May T	Smith essay (manuscript)	
Final	May 6: Final Exam essay due	