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Syllabus

Text: The Riverside Shakespeare, edited by G.B. Evans. Houghton Mifflin 1987. ISBN# 0-395-75490-9.

(other complete Shakespeares are acceptable however, if they have appeared within the last 30 years).

Plays Covered

2 Henry VI
Richard III
Richard II
1 Henry IV
Midsummer Night's Dream
Merchant of Venice
Much Ado About Nothing
Twelfth Night
Hamlet
Othello
Anthony and Cleopatra
Macbeth
King Lear

Introduction

Shakespeare belongs to all of us; he is our common culture. Almost all of you have read him several times at different stages of your life, with different reactions. Many have taken an undergraduate class on Shakespeare already. Most of you have probably seen at least a few Shakespeare plays produced, either on the stage or in the theater. Many of you are also familiar with modern appropriations of Shakespeare (i.e. Jane Smiley's *Thousand Acres* or Kurosawa's *Ran*). Very few of you, probably, have read *all* the plays assigned in this class – but you have read some. You are familiar with poetry, and know how to read it. You have a basic familiarity with Early Modern English, though you may sometimes struggle

with nuance. Accordingly, the goals in this class are not really to *introduce* Shakespeare: I will presume you are past that. Instead, the goal of this class will be to 1) expand your repertoire, 2) read them with more knowledge and understanding, and 3) dive into that immense realm, Shakespeare Criticism. In the process, you will surely hone your ability to read the language with nuance. Students should not expect, however, that this course will teach such skills from scratch – students who have somehow missed Shakespeare along the way, or who have lingering difficulties with the Early Modern dialect, should see me, and consider sitting in on my English 311 course (also taught this semester at 11:00).

Apologia, sort of:

I make no apology for the number of plays assigned in this course (13), since your presence here sufficiently indicates your interest in Shakespeare, and I know you're capable readers. But I do apologize for the plays I have left out. I admit to feeling somewhat guilty, when I assign *2 Henry VI* and omit *As You Like It* and *Taming of the Shrew*. If you have not read these last two plays, please do as soon as the course is over. Some method of elimination is necessary, however, since he wrote far too many plays to cover in one semester. And in this particular course, I have decided to pay special attentions to Shakespeare's social and political constructs -- particularly 1) constructs of authority, and relations to/within it, 2) Shakespeare's depiction of "the commons" – those people under authority, and 3) Shakespeare's interest in the social and political status of social "outsiders" – people not properly belonging in either category.

Course Objectives

Students will learn to analyze Shakespeare's plays. Specifically:

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to master the literary diction necessary to comprehend pre-modern literary texts.
2. Students will be able to analyze the cultural assumptions inherent in pre-modern literary texts – assumptions no longer current today.
3. Students will demonstrate their ability to make a meaningful contribution to Shakespeare criticism by producing three papers, including at least one 10-15 page original research paper.

English 526: Studies in Shakespeare

Course Description

Introduction

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How You Are Graded: Requirements

PAPERS:

History Paper	20%
Comedy Paper	20%
Tragedy Paper	20%

Journals	25% total
Discussions	15% total

Journals and Secondary Reading

In the past I have explored a number of fairly complicated ways of introducing graduate students to secondary reading. On two occasions, I went so far as to design four separate syllabi for this course – a general Syllabus for Shakespeare, and three separate syllabi of secondary readings, each focusing on a particular theme (i.e. "performance," "gender" "sources," etc). The disadvantages of this system (apart from the labor of preparation on my part) soon became clear, however: students are stuck spending a semester researching *my* particular interests – which may or may not coincide with your own. Most recently I tried creating a single syllabus of secondary reading, taking care to pick articles that explored a variety of theoretical approaches. This corrected the biases of the first system at the cost of a rather scattershot, unfocused approach. One feature of this experiment, however, worked very well indeed: on certain days I would simply invite students to "pick your own" article on the play in question. The skill and imagination showed by many students on these occasions to let my students make the choices, this time around.

This semester therefore I ask you to pick one article every other week, focusing on one of the two plays you've just read. Pick an article that you consider rewarding for one reason or another. If it is long, I have no objection to your reading selectively; I want you to read only what you find *useful*. Then write one page (typed), telling me what you took away with you – what you made your own. Please notice that this assignment

requires *discipline*. I **do not want you to summarize** the article -- in fact, I promise to penalize you for doing it. Instead, I want you to focus on what was rewarding to you in it. **Why did it interest you?** Note that you cannot merely criticize the article: if it is so wrong-thinking, you shouldn't have chosen it.

Put the author, title and journal at the top of the page, skip one line, and then begin. **You should not need more than a page** for this assignment; a page and a half max. I will grade these analyses with a check only – or on rare occasions, a check plus. I will comment however; I look forward to it.

At the end of the semester, those **with checks on all but one assignment will get an A on the Critical Readings portions of the class**. Those missing two will get a B; 3 will earn a C, etc. All students, therefore, may omit the reading at least once (when work piles up on you, presumably) without affecting their grade.

Discussions:

By rights there ought to be discussions every week, and I have done this in the past. I have pared these back in the interests of quality: both the journals and the discussions may be more thoughtful if I give you more time to explore before committing yourself. This is an experiment however. When discussions are assigned therefore, remember that I want an absolute minimum of **two substantive comments: one before Wednesday midnight, and one before Saturday midnight**. The second contribution should include sections that respond to colleagues -- ideally two or more different colleagues. Here it is not enough to agree with someone; if you build on someone's idea, add to it. Don't think of this as a "chat" -- this is a DEBATE. Quick additional responses (beyond the two substantive ones) are encouraged but not required.

Note: I am looking for above and beyond in the discussions; we're not having them every week after all. A solid performance that does not go beyond that will probably get a B; I am hoping for more.

Papers: Graduate classes in English often settle for one major research paper. This is excellent in theory -- and in practice too if you have spent long enough thinking about Shakespeare. In real life however, it takes time to evolve our best ideas. To make matters more complicated, graduate school (doctoral especially) often revolves around conference papers, and the work that is born from it. And conference papers are relatively short.

In this class therefore I am asking for 3 10-12 page papers, roughly speaking. Aim for 2-3 pages longer than the standard conference paper: long enough to cut the weaker parts before delivery, but not so long that you have to cut whole sections. Each paper must show extensive research: this is a graduate class after all. If anyone in this class feels inexperienced re research, please write me privately with whatever questions you have. We use MLA, peer-reviewed sources only. 7-15 secondary sources seems reasonable for a paper of this length, but don't just strive for the minimum. Remember too that you are not writing a review: make sure you have a clear research question and a nuanced answer that goes above and beyond what your sources offer (though you should draw from them).

Plagiarism

Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty (including collusion and selling academic products). Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise.

Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b [1,2,3])

Discrimination Statement

A&M-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Courtesy Statement:

"All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment." (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct).

Students with Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Gee Library

Room 132

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

Grievance Procedure

Students who have concerns regarding their courses should first address those concerns with the assigned instructor in order to reach a resolution. Students who are unsatisfied with the outcome of that conversation or have not been able to meet individually with their instructor, whether in-person, by email, by telephone, or by another communication medium, should then schedule an appointment with the Department Head or Assistant Department Head by completing a Student Grievance Form (available in the main office, HL 141). In the event that the instructor is the Department Head, the student should schedule a meeting with the Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Humanities after following the steps outlined above; if the instructor is the Assistant Department Head, students should schedule a meeting with the Department Head. Where applicable, students should also consult University Procedure 13.99.99.R0.05 ("Student Appeal of Instructor Evaluation").



