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LIT 327L.01: Shakespeare

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SHAKESPEARE (LIT 327)

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Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00 - 3:20 and Fridays by appointment

Spring 2022

T/R 3:30-4:50

“Shakespeare sees always both sides of a thing. [...] In his plays he is woman, man, black, white, believer, heretic, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim. He grew up in an atmosphere of equivocation, but he lived in freedom. And he offers us freedom: to pin him down to a single identity would be an obvious diminishment, both for Shakespeare and for us. [...] He understood what fierce, singular certainty creates and what it destroys. In response, he made himself a diffuse, uncertain thing, a mass of contradictory, irresolvable voices that speak truth plurally.”

--Zadie Smith, “Speaking in Tongues,” in *Changing my Mind* (2009)

As we read examples of Shakespeare’s comedies, histories, tragedies, and romances, we will attend to both what is strange and what’s familiar as we strive to make sense of these works within the cultural context of the playwright’s own time four centuries ago as well as in our own. We will not attempt to “cover” Shakespeare – an impossible task for a mere semester. The aim of this course, rather, is to provide you with a working knowledge of what makes Shakespeare’s dramatic texts interesting, meaningful, challenging, debatable and, to generations of playgoers and readers, continually inspiring. To this end (which is really a beginning) we will focus our attention on the following:

Genre. The conventions of comedy, dramatic history, tragedy, and romance are the building materials out of which Shakespeare constructed his dramatic texts. What were these conventions and how does Shakespeare use them? In what ways does Shakespeare augment and challenge genre conventions?

Reading comparatively. What can the island in *The Merchant of Venice* teach us about other places removed from urban society, such as the open sea in *Hamlet* or the island in *The Tempest*? What can we learn about Hamlet’s attitudes towards war and honor from Henry V’s distinctly different perspective on these matters? An important principle of this course is that each play we read can, in one way or another, illuminate the other plays. Reading Shakespeare should be actively, even playfully, comparative. Because Shakespeare is perpetually changing the contexts and shifting the perspectives he presents to us, for each point of similarity one discovers, it is valuable also to consider how the elements differ.

Liminality. Shakespeare wrote his plays during an unusually contentious and dynamic period of Europe’s history: the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation had made the day-to-day practices of religious worship deeply controversial and the cause of much anxiety; the capitalist practices of a rapidly developing merchant class were challenging feudal norms of social hierarchy; and the discoveries of scientists such as Copernicus and Galileo were threatening to overturn traditional doctrines about the very nature of the Universe and the place of humankind in it. How does Shakespeare use elements from these cultural and conceptual conflicts to make compelling dramas?

Bardolatry. Shakespeare’s continuing popularity is evident in a variety of spheres: in Hollywood (in, literally, hundreds of film adaptations of the plays), on popular TV shows (*Star Trek*, *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, etc.), at annual festivals (including the Oregon Shakespeare festival in Ashland and Montana’s own “Shakespeare in the Park”), and in random disposable images of the Bard in commercials and on t-shirts and billboards. Why is Shakespeare – far more so than Edgar Allen Poe, Mark Twain, or Jane Austen – such a popular cultural phenomenon today? Why, moreover, is Shakespeare still commonly the only author many English literature programs require their majors to study? Is Shakespeare’s unique cultural status beginning to abate or will it continue? Should it continue?

Required Texts:

- *The Merchant of Venice*. Ed. A.R. Braunmuller. Pelican Shakespeare, 2017. ISBN: 978-0143130222
- *Henry V*. Edited by Claire McEachern. Penguin, 1999. ISBN: 978-0143130246
- *Hamlet*. Edited by Robert S. Miola. Norton Critical Edition, 2011. ISBN: 978-0393929584 (or the newer edition, ISBN 978-0393640106).
- *King Lear*. Edited by Stephen Orgel. Penguin, 2016. ISBN: 978-0143128557
- *The Tempest*. Edited by Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman. Norton Critical Edition, ISBN: 978-0393978193

An important requirement of this class is that you read and have with you in class a physical paper copy of each of the plays we study. Electronic text technology is developing rapidly, and it is, of course, convenient and can be wonderfully useful in certain ways. Judging by my observations of students over the last several years, however, I believe that paper texts really do enable a higher quality of reading than do e-texts. One reason for this is the simple fact that paper books are unplugged, which lessens the potential for distraction and can foster the kind of calmness that improves attentiveness.

Graded Work:

First formal essay (and revision) -----	30
Second formal essay -----	30
Two short, informal essays -----	20
Presentation or performance -----	10
Participation -----	10

Attendance is a sign of your commitment to your studies. I become concerned after a student has missed more than two classes. If you miss **three** classes, please reach out to me. Ordinarily, absences beyond four will reduce the final grade.

Participation: In Virginia Woolf’s view, “It is rashness that we need in reading Shakespeare,” because the Bard’s “fame intimidates and bores.” I hope you will always be willing to give voice to your own thoughts about the plays we are studying—to point out what you’re seeing, to suggest what you think something might mean, and to raise questions of all sorts. Your contributions are *essential* to our explorations!

Electronic devices: Please do not use these during class time for anything unrelated to the class. It is fine to use them for class-related matters.

Formal essays: Two formal essays are required to complete this course. I’ll distribute a list of potential topics, but you will also have the option of devising your own (subject to approval). For both formal essays, you will need to develop a strong interpretive argument (a thesis), and support this argument with textual evidence and careful reading. You will be expected to incorporate at least one secondary source into your discussion. Your first essay is to be revised in concert with my feedback and resubmitted.

Informal essays: Two short (one-page, *single-spaced*) informal essays are required. For the first of these, you will select a particular speech or soliloquy from a play we have studied recently (any one will do) and conduct a close reading of this text, with special attention to its place within the play. The second

of these asks you to reflect on “Shakespeare” as a cultural phenomenon in our own times. I will suggest specific topics, but you’ll also be free to devise your own.

Presentation or performance: With the aid of one or two of your classmates, you will be called upon either to give a short (10-15 minutes or so), engaging presentation on a topic relevant to our reading OR to adapt and perform a short scene from one of the plays. Presenters should create a document that records the essential content of your presentation, including documentation of the sources you consulted, and post this on Moodle. Performers should create a document that offers an account of how you chose to adapt the scene and how this expresses your interpretation of it.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a violation of scholarly trust. According to the Provost, “Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VP/SA/index.cfm/page/1321>.” Violators of the Student Conduct Code will receive an “F” for the offending paper. Each essay you submit must be signed at the bottom of the last page, assuring that the work is your own, except where indicated by proper documentation. Your signature is your word that the essay is free of plagiarism.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. “Reasonable” means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications.

Specific goals for students of this course:

1. To become experienced, insightful interpreters of “Shakespeare”—the plays and the cultural phenomenon.
2. To become adept at performing meaningful, interesting close-readings of dramatic texts.
3. To practice revising and developing the draft of a formal analytical essay.
4. To become proficient in writing rhetorically effective essays (well-reasoned and grammatically sound), driven by a thesis and sustained by an ordered, coherent argument.

The following schedule is tentative. Please check the daily schedule on Moodle for updates on the next class’s homework, which may sometimes include video clips or secondary readings not listed below.

1/18 Tues. For this introductory class, please read “The Theatrical World” and “The Texts of Shakespeare,” which you can find near the front of any of the Penguin editions of the plays.

1/20 Thurs. *The Merchant of Venice*, act one; Alfred Harbage, “On Reading Shakespeare” (posted on Moodle for this date)

1/25 Tues. *The Merchant of Venice*, act two; Northrop Frye, “The Argument of Comedy” (posted on Moodle)

1/27 Thurs. *The Merchant of Venice*, act three; Avraham Oz, “*The Merchant of Venice* in Israel” (Moodle)

2/1 Tues. *The Merchant of Venice*, act four

2/3 Thurs. *The Merchant of Venice*, act five

2/8 Tues. *Henry V*; Peter Saccio, "Shakespearean History and the Reign of Henry IV" (Moodle)
2/10 Thurs. *Henry V*

2/15 Tues. *Henry V*; Marjorie Garber, "Henry V: the Quest for Exemplarity" (Moodle)
2/17 Thurs. *Henry V*

2/22 Tues. *Henry V*
2/24 Thurs. *Hamlet*

3/1 Tues. *Hamlet*
3/3 Thurs. *Hamlet* ("To be or not to be")
3/4 Fri. **First formal essay due by the end of the day.**

3/8 Tues. *Hamlet*
3/10 Thurs. *Hamlet*; Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia" (Moodle)

3/15 Tues. Discussion of the film *Hamlet* (2000), directed by Michael Almereyda, starring Ethan Hawke and Julia Stiles
3/17 Thurs. *King Lear*

3/29 Tues. *King Lear*
3/31 Thurs. *King Lear*

4/5 Tues. *King Lear*
4/7 Thurs. *King Lear*

4/12 Tues. Screening of *King Lear* (2018), directed by Richard Eyre, starring Anthony Hopkins
4/14 Thurs. Discussion of *King Lear* (Eyre & Hopkins)

4/19 Tues. **Revised formal essay due.** *The Tempest*
4/21 Thurs. *The Tempest*

4/26 Tues. *The Tempest*
4/28 Thurs. *The Tempest*

5/3 Tues. Leo Marx, "Shakespeare's American Fable" (Moodle)
5/5 Thurs. Shakespeare in 2022

Your second formal essay is due Monday May 9th by the end of the day.

University guidelines regarding COVID-19:

- Mask use is required within the classroom or laboratory.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress.
- UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.

- Class attendance and seating will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.