

Spring 1-15-2014

## ENG 3892-099: Shakespeare

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# Eng 3892: "Shakespeare"

spring 2014 / Section 099

Dr. Chris Wixson

## syllabus

"Every age creates its own Shakespeare."

-Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All*

## course philosophy

Ben Jonson's epitaph, memorializing Shakespeare as "not of an age but for all time" has proven prophetic. Recently, the Royal Shakespeare Company premiered *Such Tweet Sorrow*, an experimental five-week production of *Romeo and Juliet* performed via Twitter. Also not too long ago, the venerable Arden Shakespeare series officially welcomed an addition to the Bard's canon entitled *Double Falsehood*. The last year or so has produced major cinematic adaptations (*The Tempest* and *Coriolanus* as well as Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing*) along with the sudsy *Anonymous* that explored the authorship controversy. In short, with a "brand new" play and multiple films out and a central role in the vanguard of alternative media performance, Shakespeare is alive and well in the 21st century.

Rather than read widely in the Shakespearean canon, we will read slowly, closely, playfully — exploring two comedies, two tragedies, and a romance alongside a smattering of period documents, excerpts from other plays, and scholarly articles. In addition to the usual suspects in terms of requirements (short papers, critical essays, exams), robust class discussion will be juxtaposed with regular, vigorous excursions into theatrical practice. Class sessions will frequently be dedicated to approaching these plays as theatre practitioners do, exploring their potential as *scripts*. We will also see two staged productions together during the semester as well as a variety of films. As such, while no prior experience with acting is required, this course provides an excellent opportunity to experience Shakespeare's language in both scholarly and theatrical contexts.

The format of each class will be discussion, the movement of the course relatively fluid, changing with regard to the material, my ideas, and your interests. I will usually send some thoughts via email before our class sessions so as not to take up class time needlessly with informal lecture. As such, this course should focus primarily on you, your questions, and opinions. Remember this is not MY class but ours.

## Learning Outcomes

1. To provide strategies for reading and appreciating the works of William Shakespeare for the insight they provide about Early Modern England and our own time.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage the significant issues and questions raised by the plays through writing, performance, and class discussion.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical thinking and argumentative writing.

## course texts

Various individual editions of Shakespeare's plays

*The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, Russ McDonald

## contact information

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Office Hours: 11-12 T; 8:30-9:30 R; by appointment

## assignments

- Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called "seed papers." You may be asked to present and conduct class discussion with your question once during the semester. However, you will be required to write three total that deal specifically with the language of part of the reading due for that day. Because these papers are primarily for discussion, no late seed papers will be accepted.
- Two critical papers that are engaged, engaging, and articulate. The first will be a *Notes and Queries*-style assignment (to be delivered at the English Studies conference on Saturday, April 5th) while the second will allow seminarians to pursue (in 8-10 pages) their own research topics, even on plays we have not read as a class.
- Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion — defined as TALKING productively.
- A Midterm and Final Exam (of the take-home variety so as not to disrupt class time)
- Active, Engaged participation in Performance activities.

## longer paper topic

It is important to identify as early as possible in the term your area of interest for the second paper. (I am assuming seminarians are bringing with them critical problems and issues of interest to them from earlier coursework.) At some point, by the end of March, you need to meet with me to propose a topic and sketch the contours of your argument. In the past, it has been most advantageous to seminarians to have their topic set *before* spring break. Again, the paper must be 10-12 pages and employ at least five scholarly sources.

## final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Three Seed Papers	15%
Production Analysis/Activities	5%
Two Critical Papers	30%
Midterm Exam	10%
Final Exam/Project	20%
In-class Writings/ Active Participation/ Performance	20%

**\*\*You must complete all written assignments and exams to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.**

## **attendance**

Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in discussion. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After two, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by half a letter. **More than six unexcused absences will result in a "0" for participation. More than eight unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking “for the assignment” or a “rundown of what you missed.” My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

## **class participation**

Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities; You should come to class *prepared to talk* about the reading for that day. Participation in a college-level course means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials. Class participation means that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually AND that you work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and success. (This might mean, for example, moving from merely your position during class discussion to striving to promote dialogue between yourself and other students). In addition to your required short papers, what else you bring to share need not be written out but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic or questions. Reading quizzes may happen relatively frequently to ensure the quality of our discussions.

Coming to class and saying you are “frustrated” with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. Shakespeare’s language is demanding but rewarding; while there will be frustration with its complexity at times, this course understands the complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

We will meet on January 16<sup>th</sup> by the racquetball courts at the SRC and (on designated days in the Great Hall in Pemberton) for performance activities. Please wear comfortable clothing and sneakers. On the Shakespearean stage, the presence of the actor was known as “the ability of the body.” Our explorations of the language this term will include acts of interpretation *performed*. You will not be judged on acting ability; this side of the course is an opportunity to approach the act of interpretation in a different way than we do as scholars. There will be a (hopefully only initial) trepidation with and uncertainty surrounding this approach, and going outside of the traditional English “comfort zone” will yield insightful results on their

own but also in tandem with classroom discussion. For these sessions, wear comfortable clothing and preferably sneakers. There will be badminton.

### **class preparation**

In addition to your written assignments, what else you bring to share need not be written out (although you may be asked to do so) but should refer to **specific passages** in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic. Come to class with an agenda. That means coming with lucrative questions that you think **the texts** are asking with their form and content, not simply questions you have *about* the texts. In addition, you may also wish to read the introductions to our plays, although I would advise doing so **AFTER** you have read each play; consider this sentence a formal spoiler alert. Besides preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what other seminarians share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to promote dialogue between yourself and other seminarians. **I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.**

### **production activities**

You are required to attend two production-related activities this semester (choosing among two performances, a *Macbeth* rehearsal, a *Macbeth* panel, a Shakespeare birthday April event) and write brief pieces on what you see. Details will be forthcoming.

### **late papers**

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a "0."** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

### **cell phone and computer use**

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** email, news, or box scores, surf the web, use chat applications, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with your computer.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

### **academic integrity**

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). We will discuss how to avoid it. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

### **special needs and situations**

If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

### **a final historical note**

In the fall of 1926, a *DEN* article entitled "Shakespeare Class Without Pilot" reported that English 46 was engaged in what was described as an "experiment" due to the sudden absence of faculty member Miss McKinney. The situation had necessitated students rethinking their classroom roles, becoming more active in the production and performance of meaning by taking turns supplying the class lectures. Supposedly, "enthusiasm reigned supreme" as "discussions [were] worthwhile," their "success [depending] large on team-work." While we will assiduously attempt to avoid lecturing by anyone, English 3892 will deliberately conduct itself as an homage to English 46's unintentional innovation

# Eng 3892: Shakespeare

## course calendar

Dr. Wixson

\*\* Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you bring it to each class meeting so as to make the appropriate revisions.

- January
- 14 Course Introduction
- 16 Meet at Racquetball Courts at the SRC  
Read Bedford: pp. 1-3; 109-14; 123-7; 134-7; 194-7; 221-4
- 21 *Taming of the Shrew* / Inductions, Act One / Word Cards  
Bedford: pp. 81-5; 253-53; 265-8 (Marriage, Gender, and Economics)
- 23 *Taming of the Shrew* / Acts One and Two / **Seed Paper #1 due (I-M)**
- 28 *Taming of the Shrew* / Acts Three and Four / Word Cards
- 30 *Taming of the Shrew* / Act Five / Alternate Ending **Seed #1 due (P-Z)**  
Bedford: pp. 285-90 ("Homily of the State of Matrimony")
- February
- 4 Meet in Great Hall (Pemberton Hall) / Performing *Shrew*
- 6 *Macbeth* / Act One / **Seed #2 (A-F; G-H)**  
Bedford: pp. 85-90 (Tragedy)
- 11 *Macbeth* / Act Two / Word Cards
- 13 *Macbeth* / Act Three
- 18 *Macbeth* / Act Four
- 20 *Macbeth* / Act Five **Seed #2 due (I-M / P-Z)**

\*\**Macbeth* pre-production panel Tuesday, 2/18/14 at 4:00 in the Doudna Theatre Classroom

25 Meet in Great Hall (Pemberton) / Performing *Macbeth*

27 Meet in Great Hall (Pemberton)

\*\*EIU's production of *Macbeth* opens — Trip details TBA

March 4 Meet in Great Hall (Pemberton)

6 Meet in Great Hall (Pemberton) / **Take-Home Midterm Exam Due**

### HAPPY SPRING BREAK!!!!

18 *Hamlet*

20 *Hamlet* / **Seed #3 due (A-H)**

\*\*Meet with Wixson to propose argument for second critical paper.

25 *Hamlet*

27 *Hamlet* / **Seed #3 due (I-Z)**

April 1 *Hamlet*

3 *Hamlet*

\*\*English Studies Conference, April 5<sup>th</sup> 10:00-12:00 Coleman Hall

8 *Hamlet*

10 *Hamlet*

\*\*English Department Shakespeare Birthday event Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 in the 1895 Room (Union)

\*\*U of I's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* opens — Trip details TBA

15 *The Winter's Tale*

17 *The Winter's Tale* / **Seed #4 due (A-Z)**

22 *The Winter's Tale*

24 *The Winter's Tale* / **Second Critical Paper Due**

29 *The Winter's Tale*

May 1 *The Winter's Tale* / Evaluation

\*\*Final exam date: Wednesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> 8:00-10:00 AM



