

English 1300 (CRN 41868) – Introduction to Shakespeare
Fall 2018

Professor Kevin Laam
Oakland University
M 6:00–9:20 pm
174 South Foundation Hall

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DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course will introduce students to the plays of William Shakespeare and to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they were produced. We will trace Shakespeare's literary career through the course of five plays: one history, one tragedy, one romance, and two comedies. In the course we will pay close attention to both the formal features and cultural meanings of Shakespeare's plays, with the goal of making his work accessible and relevant to our interests as twenty-first century readers. In addition to close reading, we will also consider Shakespeare in performance through regular in-class screenings of theatrical and filmic productions: some traditional, some more radical. There will be weekly quizzes and regular in-class group writing assignments, as well as a midterm and a final examination. Class sessions will be comprised variously of lecture, discussion, and group work. Diligent attendance and preparation are essential.

The course satisfies the general education requirement in literature by preparing students to demonstrate:

- Knowledge of how literature is an expression of culture. To meet this requirement, we will examine texts in their cultural contexts, which may include (but are not limited to) gender, class, religion, race, and family.
- Knowledge of literary form. To meet this requirement, we will examine how various genres of drama (comedy, tragedy, history, and romance) work, and how Shakespeare enhances each of these genres through his prose and poetic style.

TEXTS

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest* (Folger Shakespeare Library Editions). It is essential that you acquire the Folger editions, as the contents of the course, including quizzes, will draw extensively from the notes and supplementary essays included with these editions.

Additional texts will be periodically distributed in class or online through the course website (<https://moodle.oakland.edu>). In addition to the written texts, the following Shakespeare films and theatrical productions will be screened in part or in full during the course of the semester. This list is tentative and subject to change.

- *Henry IV, Part 1* (dir. Dominic Dromgoole, 2011)
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (dir. Christopher Luscombe, 2010)
- *The Merchant of Venice* (dir. Michael Radford, 2004)
- *Othello* (dir. Oliver Parker, 1995)
- *The Tempest* (dir. Julie Taymor, 2010)

Note: Shakespeare's language is brilliant but demanding. Therefore, allow yourself ample reading time, and pay close attention to the scene-by-scene plot summaries and explanatory notes provided in the Folger editions. If you need additional help understanding the plays, resources are widely available in print and online: for example, the *No Fear Shakespeare* series, as well as various movie and TV adaptations, available on DVD and YouTube. However, these resources should be used as a supplement, not as a substitute, for reading Shakespeare's original text, and certainly not as a substitute for the editions required in this class. Reading modern "translations" of Shakespeare is tantamount to learning a hearing a cover version of a favorite song: it may be serviceable at best, but it can never capture the distinctiveness of the original. This is a college-level Shakespeare course; the purpose is to grapple with, and ultimately to understand, difficult material.

REQUIREMENTS

1) Attendance/Promptness: Regular attendance and promptness are required and expected. You are allowed to be absent once or to be late twice without penalty to your attendance and promptness grade. However, any work you miss in class the day you are absent or late, including quizzes, may not be made up, with the exception of one group assignment. If you miss a class, consult a classmate for notes, handouts, and important announcements. If you miss a group assignment, complete it on your own (questions will be posted on Moodle) and bring it to the following class. If you arrive late, see me before leaving class to make sure I mark you down as late, not absent. You are responsible for keeping track of your absence and lateness totals; I will not seek you out. However, on your request I will be happy to tell you where you stand. If you are absent more than once or late more than twice, penalties are as follows:

- You will be assessed a deduction of one grade point from your final attendance grade for each additional day that you are absent.
- You will be assessed a deduction of one-half of a grade point from your final attendance grade for each additional day that you arrive late to class.

Other penalties are as follows:

- You will be assessed a deduction of one-half of a grade point from your final attendance grade for any day that you leave class early, unless you make prior, valid arrangements with me. You will also receive an automatic zero on that day's quiz.
- If you miss more than four classes for any reason, you will be unable to derive sufficient benefit from the course and thus receive a zero for the course—no exceptions.

2) In-Class Activities and Participation: Students should prepare adequately—that is, read closely and carefully—for every class session and contribute to discussion regularly. Group activities in class will also figure into your participation grade. All students must acquire the assigned texts and bring them to class daily.

3) Quizzes: There will be a short quiz (5 minutes) at the beginning of class each week. Quizzes are designed to make sure that you read the assigned texts and read them closely, but they may occasionally include questions on materials from prior lectures. Quizzes may not be made up under any circumstance, but the lowest quiz grade will be dropped. If you leave class early, you will automatically receive a zero grade for that day's quiz.

4) Examinations: There will be two examinations in this class: one midterm, and one final. Both examinations will take place in class, and both will consist of essay questions. I will briefly review exam preparation strategies prior to the midterm, but there will be no comprehensive review of the course materials for either exam. The best strategy to succeed on the exams is to attend class, take copious notes, and keep up with the readings week in and week out.

OTHER POLICIES

1) **Classroom etiquette** will be stressed throughout the semester in order to ensure the best possible learning environment for all students. Here are simple guidelines to follow:

- Do not arrive late to class and do not leave early.
- Do not leave the classroom unless you absolutely must.
- Turn off and put away all cellular phones, laptop computers, headphones, and other electronic devices before class begins. Tablets are allowed only if they are used for Folger editions of the play (i.e. exact digital versions of the editions we are using).
- Avoid eating during class.
- Do not talk while others are talking.
- Be courteous and respectful during class discussions.

2) **Cheating and plagiarism** are serious offenses within the university community. Plagiarism is the submission of material authored by another person but represented as your own work, whether that material is paraphrased, or copied verbatim from another source. When using words or ideas from outside sources in your work, you must document those sources. Any student work containing plagiarized materials will receive an automatic zero; the full penalty may also include a zero for the course and suspension or expulsion from the university. If you are suspected of cheating or of plagiarizing someone else's work, you will be referred to the Dean of Students and to the Academic Conduct Committee of the University Senate. Refer to the OU Undergraduate Catalogue for a full review of the university's Academic Conduct Policy.

3) **Students with disabilities or special learning needs** should make arrangements through the Office of Disability Support Services (103A North Foundation Hall) and inform me early in the semester so that their needs can be properly accommodated.

GRADING

Attendance/Promptness: 10%

In-Class Activities/Participation: 20%

Weekly Quizzes: 25%

Midterm Examination: 20%

Final Examination: 25%

Always feel free to contact me at any point in the semester (the earlier, the better) if you have questions or concerns pertaining to your grade.

SCHEDULE

• Week 1

M 9/10 Course Introduction

• Week 2

M 9/17 Prefatory materials to *Henry IV, Part 1*, including: "Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*," "Reading Shakespeare's Language: *Henry IV, Part 1*," "Shakespeare's Life," "Shakespeare's Theater" (pp. xii–l)
Henry IV, Part 1, Acts 1–3
Quiz #1

• Week 3

M 9/24 *Henry IV, Part 1*, Acts 4 & 5
Alexander Leggatt, "*Henry IV, Part 1: A Modern Perspective*" (pp. 243–57)
Quiz #2

- **Week 4**

M 10/1 “Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*” (pp. xiii–xiv)

The Merry Wives of Windsor, Acts 1–3

Quiz #3

- **Week 5**

M 10/8 *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Acts 4 & 5

Natasha Korda, “*The Merry Wives of Windsor*: A Modern Perspective” (pp. 227–40)

Quiz #4

- **Week 6**

M 10/15 MIDTERM EXAMINATION

- **Week 7**

M 10/22 “Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*” (pp. xiii–xiv)

The Merchant of Venice, Acts 1–3

Quiz #5

- **Week 8**

M 10/29 *The Merchant of Venice*, Acts 4 & 5

Alexander Leggatt, “*The Merchant of Venice*: A Modern Perspective” (pp. 211–21)

Quiz #6

- **Week 9**

M 11/5 “Shakespeare’s *Othello*” (pp. xiii–xiv)

Othello, Acts 1 & 2

Quiz #7

- **Week 10**

M 11/12 *Othello*, Act 3

Quiz #8

- **Week 11**

M 11/19 *Othello*, Acts 4 & 5

Susan Snyder, “*Othello*: A Modern Perspective” (pp. 287–98)

Quiz #9

- **Week 12**

M 11/26 “Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*” (pp. xiii–xiv)

The Tempest, Acts 1–3

Quiz #10

- **Week 13**

M 12/3 *The Tempest*, Acts 4 & 5

Barbara A. Mowat, “*The Tempest*: A Modern Perspective” (pp. 185–99)

FINAL EXAMINATION Monday, December 10, 7–10 pm