

English 263

William French, ENGL 263, Fall 2002, Shakespeare I

ENGLISH 263 SHAKESPEARE

Course Notes for Section 2, TTh 1:00-2:15

Fall Semester 2002, 48 Stansbury Hall

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"Shakespeare should startle us into seeing the world anew."

1. Text for this course:

The Riverside Shakespeare, 2nd Ed.

The idea of Western character, of the self as a moral agent, has many sources: Homer and Plato, Aristotle and Sophocles, the Bible and St. Augustine, Dante and Kant.... Personality, in our sense, is Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness.

2. Grades:

Grades for writing assignments are based on the "Indiana Standard," a copy of which is attached. I will discuss this standard, but you should familiarize yourself with it.

Written work is due on the date assigned. Work turned in later will not be accepted and will be given the grade of F.

Writing assignments must be printed from a disk using a word processing program. Follow pages 437-70 in the Harbrace College Handbook for formatting all written assignments. Documentation should follow the revised MLA format, widely available, as in the Harbrace or Trimmer's Guide to MLA Documentation.

One of the main aims of English 263 is to extend your skills of literacy. The writing you do, which is based on the reading, exercises those skills. Therefore, give your writing the care and attention it deserves.

You are expected, however, also to participate fully in classroom oral activities. Asking questions, answering questions raised in classroom lectures and discussions, joining into the general discussion of issues, will make a positive difference in your final grade.

Let the beauty we love be what we do. Our real work is an attempt to bring spirit into reality."

3. Absence Policy

Daily attendance is required. More than three unexcused absences will lower your grade by one letter, more than four by another letter. Six absences will result in failure of the course. I base this policy on this statement from The Mountie, the WVU student guide:

The student who is absent from class for any reason is responsible for work missed. Students should understand that absences may jeopardize their grades or continuance in the course. Instructors who use absence records in the determination of grades must announce this fact to students (in writing) within the first five class meetings. It is the responsibility of the instructor to keep an accurate record of all students enrolled. Instructors may report excessive absences to the student's dean or advisor. Students who have been absent because of illness, authorized University activities, or for other valid reasons are to have the opportunity to make up regularly scheduled examinations. As a matter of good manners, a student should inform an instructor in advance if obliged to be absent from a class meeting.

An excused absence requires written documentation. This means that if you miss class for a medical or other compelling reason you must present written validation. Furthermore, you are responsible for material covered in class even if you are absent.

"Shakespeare's relation to reality is paradoxical and ambiguous and needs construal and is interpreted according to the interests of the interpreter."

4. Reading

Assigned readings from the Riverside are a required part of the course. Do not fall behind in the assigned reading. You are always responsible for having read the assigned material.

Also, it is useless to attend class without a text. During the class period you will need to turn to specific passages of the material under discussion, which you may wish to highlight, underline, or annotate. You must bring the text to each class. Failure to bring the text will result in your being asked to leave the class. You would then be counted absent.

"It is the spectstor, and not life, that are really mirrors."

5. Final Grades

Your final grade will be based on:

A. The quality of your written work, including the in-class exam, your journal entries, the research paper in two versions, and the final examination. The relative importance of written work to your final grade will be roughly:

In-Class Exam: 10%

Journal Entries 40%

Research paper 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Total Writing: 90%

B. Other evidence of interest and concern, including attendance and willingness to participate in classroom discussion. This component of your grade, which is labeled "Class Profile," also includes improvement in your writing. The "Class Profile" is worth 10% of the final grade.

Thus:

Written Work: 90%

Class Profile: 10%

Total: 100%

In performance, Shakespeare's plays become shared literature, something very different from the solitary literature of reading.

6. Writing Assignments:

A) The in-class, written exam will be taken before mid-semester. satisfactory performance on this exam will require that you keep up on daily reading assignments, take good class notes, and assimilate material from classroom lectures and discussions in a specific way. You will be asked on this exam to write literate and informed responses to essay topics.

B) You are required to write four short, three- to five-page personal essays. These essays will proceed from assigned topics designed to engage you in four of Shakespeare's plays. You may choose two topics from among Julius Caesar, The Winter's Tale, Much Ado about Nothing, and one of the history plays. You will be required to write on Hamlet and Othello. You are encouraged, however, to think independently on any issue raised by the plays that you find engaging; if you wish to write on a topic of your own devising, simply provide me with a one-sentence statement of it, and I will either approve or disapprove. Usually, I approve. Each essay should be typed and follow the MLA format. Essays will be turned in periodically, as assigned, four times during the semester. While the entries are informal, I do expect literate, error-free, grammatically-correct writing.

D) The research essay, worth 20% of your final grade, will be eight to ten pages long. The subject will be specified in class, though a variety of possibilities will be available to you. This essay will be formal and will require library as well as internet research. The paper should manifest your ability to initiate and manage a short literary essay and to compose a persuasive, knowledgeable, and generally error-free piece of work.

F) You will be asked to revise the essay. The revision will be based on a personal, one-on-one conference with me in my office. At that time, you will receive a grade on the first version of your paper, worth 10%. The revised version, to be returned with the original version, will be worth another 10%. The conference is a required component of the course. This system is designed to help you improve your writing skills.

G) The Final Exam will consist of essays and short answer responses similar to those on the mid-semester in-class exam.

You may thin you are living in modern times, here and now, but that is the necessary illusion of every age. No one conducts himself as if he or she is preparatory to your time. There was nothing quaint or colorful about past lives.

7. Cheating:

Plagiarism is defined on pages 415-17 of the Harbrace Handbook. Read also the statement on cheating in the WVU Undergraduate Catalog, 1995-97, pp. 51-53, and in the student handbook, The Mountie. Consistent with these statements, I will fail any student found to be representing the work of another person as his or her own. Plagiarism is criminal behavior. It is your responsibility to understand it and to avoid it in your writing. This is a warning of the severe penalties awaiting those who commit this crime.

Keats's words "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" do not identify sensuous pleasure outside any other context. The line does not signify an escape into personal pleasure; it suggests, rather, what one critic has called a "medicine" promoting general social health and salvation. "Beauty" in the sense gently but firmly leads us into a critique of our personal actions as well as of acts of corrupt political power; it unfolds for us what is dark, inhuman, destructive, and unhealthy and what, on the other hand is bright and truly desirable, noble, creative, health-and life-giving. Beauty in this sense provides light for us that we may better search ways to develop our character and our social and ethical being. "Beauty" in this sense is truly unacknowledged legislating, which is the true role of poets. In her or his art, the true poet subordinates everything to this ideal of beauty, an ideal that balances opposites: happiness suffering, possession and loss, awareness and oblivion, fruition and corruption. And, as Flannery O'Connor once said, the "basis of art is truth, and the person who aims after art in her work aims after truth.

8. Social Justice Policy

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to foster a nurturing learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

"Great drama (like that of Shakespeare) serves to open thought rather than close it down. It allows us to understand without assenting, to go over to the other side and still stay home, to be violated and yet in control; It appeals to our freedom and individualism and in the process to our investment in collectivities. It may allow us, in our timid fashion, to indulge a certain taste for the sublime. "

"We know the truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart."

"We return from the experience of great drama in the theatre with heightened awareness of the tastes and choices that ordinarily define and confine us: Experiencing the variety of meanings available in a great work of dramatic art helps make us tolerant and mentally lithe. Dramatic art is a realm of thought experiments that quicken, sharpen, and sweeten our being in the world."

"Shakespeare's characters, especially Falstaff and Hamlet, but also Rosalind, Shylock, Iago, Lear, Macbeth, Cleopatra, "are the invention of the human, the inauguration of personality as we have come to recognize it. "

Cruelty really is evil; kindness really is good; generosity really is lovable. Meanness really is despicable. Matters of taste are not without moral aspects, though ethical decisions are not entirely a matter of taste.

Cruelty is not all right for Shakespeare's villains if all wrong for us--cruelty was a vice then and now. Some of what we now think cruel, they did not; but it would be senseless to say that they knew what cruelty was and thought it was not an evil. The commission of cruel and brutal acts might be part of otherwise admirable ways of life that had their inescapable deficiencies--such as the near-continuous warfare of the world of Shakespeare's history plays and tragedies--but they remained evil in themselves.

9. DAILY SCHEDULE

Aug 20 Introduction to the Course

22 The Riverside, pp. 3-25; 55-60; scan 27-54; 60-87

Twelfth Night, Intro, Act 1

1. Twelfth Night, Acts 2, 3

29 Twelfth Night, Acts 4, 5

Sep 3 Twelfth Night

5 Twelfth Night, Summing up

10 Julius Caesar, Intro, Acts 1, 2, 3

12 Julius Caesar, Acts 4, 5

17 The Winter's Tale, Intro, Acts 1, 2

19 The Winter's Tale, Acts 2, 3, 4

24 The Winter's Tale, Summing up

26 Examination

Oct 1 Much Ado about Nothing, Intro, Acts 1, 2

5 Much Ado about Nothing, Acts 4, 5

Mid-Semester

8 Shakespeare's History Plays, Riverside

10 Richard II, Intro, Acts 1, 2

Assignment of Research Paper

15 Richard II, Acts 3, 4, 5

Statement of Research Topic due

17 Henry IV, Part 1, Acts 1, 2

22 Henry IV, Part 1, Acts 3, 4, 5

24 Henry IV, Part 1, Summing up

29 Hamlet, Intro, Act 1

31 Hamlet, Acts 2, 3

Nov 5 Hamlet, Acts 4,5

7 Hamlet, Summing up .

Research Paper, Draft 1, due

12 Othello, Intro, Act 1

Conferences during this week

14 Othello, Acts 2, 3

1. Othello, Acts 4,5

21 Othello, Summing up

THANESGIVING HOLIDAY

Dec 3 The Tempest, Intro, Acts 1, 2

1. The Tempest, Acts 3, 4, 5

Research Paper Revision due

FINAL EXAMINATION: Fri, Dec 13, 15:00 - 17:00

NOTES

1) You are responsible for reading the introductory essays to all the plays assigned.

2) The schedule designates reading assignments as well as some subjects for lecture and discussion. You are responsible for the assigned readings.

"Shakespeare's age was breaking into chaos, while our age is trying to turn chaos into order. "

To the basic interrogation of man: Why is it that God never speaks to us openly or answers us directly with clear voice? Why are we never allowed to see his face? C. S. Lewis gave a striking answer: How can God meet us, face to face, till we have faces?

In the madness of Don Quixote, we may read a perfect illustration of the power and wisdom of faith. Don Quixote pursued immortal fame and a glory that would never fade. To this purpose, he chose to follow

what would appear as the most absurd and impractical path: he followed the way of a knight errant in a world where chivalry had disappeared ages ago. Therefore clever wits all laughed at his folly. But in this long fight, which pitted the lonely knight and his faithful squire against the world, which side finally was befogged in illusion? The world that mocked them has turned to dust, whereas Don Quixote and Sancho live forever.

The primary mission of a university is "the transmission of a precious heritage." This view of education is widely castigated as "conservative" by the academic establishment. But transmitting traditional knowledge and skills actually frees the intellect, liberates the learner, and opens in the learner the possibility of radical newness. But nobody is listening. The problem is that everything has been said, but nobody is listening. Therefore it has to be said all over again--only better.

WRITING STANDARDS

A. EXCELLENT

CONTENT: Central idea clearly defined and developed with originality and careful thought, and supported substantially and concretely.

ORGANIZATION: Theme planned so that it progresses by clearly ordered and necessary stages, paragraphs unified and developed with unusual effectiveness, transitions between and within paragraphs clear and effective, and paragraphs and

sentences coherent and emphatic.

DICTION: Appropriate, fresh, accurate, precise, concise and idiomatic.

MECHANICS: Except for rare or isolated minor errors, grammar, punctuation, and spelling help to clarify meaning by following accepted convention; only rare or isolated misspellings.

B. SUPERIOR

CONTENT: Central idea defined with more than usual care and clarity, developed fully and with consistent attention to proportion and emphasis, and supported with sufficient and consistently relevant detail.

ORGANIZATION: Theme planned so that its purpose and method are consistently apparent and fulfilled; paragraphs well developed and unified; transitions between paragraphs explicit and effective; and paragraphs and sentences coherent and emphatic.

DICTION: Appropriate, clear, carefully chosen and idiomatic.

MECHANICS: Except for very infrequent minor errors, grammar and punctuation

follow accepted conventions; only very infrequent misspellings.

C. AVERAGE

CONTENT: Central idea adequately defined but trite, trivial, or too general; or developed adequately but with occasional disproportion or inappropriate emphasis; or supported adequately but with occasional repetition or sketchiness.

ORGANIZATION: Plan, purpose, and method of theme apparent but fulfilled unimaginatively or incompletely (sketchy introduction or conclusion, for example); or paragraphs unified and coherent but occasionally ineffective in their development, or transitions between paragraphs usually clear but occasionally monotonous, unemphatic; or ineffective in structure.

DICTION: Occasionally inappropriate, vague, trite or unidiomatic.

D. WEAK

CONTENT: Central idea loosely defined or carelessly thought-out; or developed and supported with occasional irrelevances, redundancy or inconsistency.

ORGANIZATION: Plan, purpose, and method of theme not consistently apparent; or paragraphs occasionally disunified or inadequately developed; or transitions between paragraphs occasionally unclear or ineffective; or paragraphs and sentences occasionally incoherent.

DICTION: Inappropriate, vague, or unidiomatic often enough to interfere with the expression and development of the important ideas of the theme.

MECHANICS: Occasional serious errors in grammar and punctuation; or frequent minor errors in grammar or punctuation; or frequent misspellings.

F. UNACCEPTABLE

CONTENT: Central idea unclear; or inadequately developed and supported.

ORGANIZATION: Plan, purpose, and method of theme not clearly apparent; or paragraphs often incoherent or disunified; or transitions between paragraphs inadequate or lacking; or sentences often incoherent.

DICTION: Generally inappropriate, vague, or unidiomatic.

MECHANICS: Frequent serious errors, or one serious error made more than twice, or very frequent minor errors in grammar or punctuation, or frequent misspellings.

*The quotations in italics scattered throughout this document are taken from a variety of sources. I hope they catch your fancy and stimulate your thinking about Shakespeare and just about everything else that's important.