

English 263—Shakespeare
T/Th: 1:2-15
125 Brooks Hall
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241 Colson Hall; 293-9725
Office Hours: Wed. 9:30-11:00 or by appointment

Rule and Misrule



William Shakespeare's plays were first performed during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, at the end of the Tudor dynasty and at the beginning of the Stuart. Beset by threats of invasion and civil war, and rife with political plots and intrigue, the reigns of Elizabeth and James raised important, and sometimes contentious, questions about the nature and practice of rule. In English 263 we will approach a selection of Shakespeare's dramas through the concept of "governance," which can refer to both political and personal rule, to the government and conduct of both the state and the self.

Required Text: *The Norton Shakespeare: The Essential Plays/3rd Edition*

Henry IV, Part 1

As You Like It

Twelfth Night

King Lear

Macbeth

Othello

The Tempest

Attendance: Intelligent participation and faithful attendance are required in English 263; any student missing more than **four** classes will be penalized 2% of the final grade for **each** subsequent absence. Students who are late to class may be counted as absent.

Class Participation: Class participation—sharing and exploring your observations, thoughts, and ideas and responding to those of your fellow students—is one of the principal ways to enhance your skills of communication. The first element in creating an environment that fosters participation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas is civility; the second is being open and responsive to the ideas and observations of your peers. Remember, while class participation is a communal activity, its aim is not consensus. Class participation allows each of us the opportunity to refine and expand our interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays by taking into account the interpretations of our fellow readers.

Asking and answering questions, making observations about the plays assigned, pointing out, commenting on, and/or wrestling with specific passages or episodes in those texts, acknowledging and responding to the diverse opinions and observations of the other members of the class are all excellent forms of participation.

Out of courtesy to all, please turn off and put away you cellphones, laptops, etc. before the beginning of class. E readers are permitted but should be used only to read and refer to the material in ENGL 263.

Academic Integrity: The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code

http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code.

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me *before* the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Inclusivity Statement: The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment. Any suggestions as to 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 and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Requirements

1. Quizzes—one on each play; given in class on any day a particular play is assigned. Quizzes cannot be taken except on the day given unless you have a university excused absence.

2. Midterm and Final Exam—both the midterm and the final will follow the same format: identifications of passages from the plays and an essay. The midterm will cover *Henry IV* through *Twelfth Night* and the final will cover *King Lear* through *The Tempest*.

3. Reflection/Presentist Essay—In this essay you will reflect on our contemporary political or cultural situation through the lens of one or more of Shakespeare’s plays that we have read during the semester. “Politics” in this essay can refer (but is not limited) to: activities or policies associated with government; public life and affairs involving matters of authority and government; actions concerned with the acquisition of power, status, and/or authority; management or control of private affairs and interests; and the political ideas, beliefs, or commitments of a particular individual, organization, region, or nation.

Your grade for the course will be determined as follows: quizzes=15%; midterm exam=20%; final exam=30%; reflection/presentist essay=20%; and class participation=15%.

SpeakWrite



Purpose: What exactly do I want to happen?

Audience: Who is reading, listening, or viewing?

Conventions: What is expected in this context?

Trouble: What could get in the way of my goals?

Purpose

- What is my main goal or purpose in this particular situation?
- Do I have any secondary purpose/s?

Audience

- Who is my main audience?
- What are their expectations?
- Who else might be reading, viewing, or listening to my message?

Conventions

- What delivery method is best suited to this situation? What are the conventions for the medium I have chosen?
- What other conventions do I need to keep in mind in terms of tone, style, documentation, or grammar?

Trouble

- What could get in the way of my goals?
- How can I anticipate and avoid trouble-spots?

Tentative Schedule:

Aug. 16	Introduction
Aug. 21	<i>Henry IV, Part I</i> : Act 1 (Close reading and annotating); “Shakespearean History,” pp. 615-627
Aug. 23	<i>Henry IV, Part I</i> : Acts 1-2

During the first month of classes, you should read the General Introduction, the General Textual Introduction, and The Theater of Shakespeare’s Time in the *Norton*. These essays will provide some of the historical, political, and cultural background to the plays

Aug. 28	<i>Henry IV, Part 1: Acts 3-4</i>
Aug. 30	<i>Henry IV, Part 1: Act 5</i>
Sept. 4	<i>As You Like It: Acts 1-2;</i> Shakespearean Comedy, pp. 121-136
Sept. 6	<i>As You Like It: Acts 3-4</i>
Sept. 11	<i>As You Like It: Act 5</i>
Sept. 13	<i>Twelfth Night: Acts 1-2</i>
Sept. 18	<i>Twelfth Night: Acts 3-4</i>
Sept. 20	<i>Twelfth Night: Act 5</i>
Sept. 25	<i>Twelfth Night, continued</i>
Sept. 27	Histories and Comedies Review
Oct. 2	Midterm Exam
Oct. 4	<i>King Lear: Act 1;</i> “Shakespearean Tragedy,” pp. 957-970
Oct. 9	<i>King Lear: Act 2</i>
Oct. 11	<i>King Lear: Act 3</i>
Oct. 16	<i>King Lear: Act 4</i>
Oct. 18	<i>King Lear: Act 5</i>
Oct. 23	<i>Macbeth: Acts 1-2</i>
Oct. 25	<i>Macbeth: Acts 3-4</i>
Oct. 30	<i>Macbeth: Act 5</i>
Nov. 1	<i>Othello: Acts 1-2</i>
Nov. 6	No class—Election Day
Nov. 8	Reading Day
Nov. 13	<i>Othello: Acts 3-4</i>
Nov. 15	<i>Othello: Act 5</i>
Nov. 20	Thanksgiving Recess
Nov. 22	Thanksgiving Recess
Nov. 27	<i>The Tempest: Acts 1-2;</i> “Shakespearean Romance,” pp. 1625-1642
Nov. 29	<i>The Tempest: Acts 3-4</i>

Dec. 4 *The Tempest: Act 5*
Dec. 6 Tragedies and Romance Review
 Reflection/Presentist Essay due

Dec. 14 **Final Exam 11 a.m.-1 p.m.**

Keywords and Keynotes

A keyword is a word of particular importance or significance. A *keynote* expresses the prevailing tone or essential idea of something, in our case one of Shakespeare's plays. Keynotes are related to motifs, which in literature can be introduced by the frequent repetition of significant words or phrases. Keynotes can be likened to themes, which refer to the abstract claims, ideas, or doctrines which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader. The *key* in keynotes refers to the tenor—the general meaning and/or underlying idea—of a piece of writing.

We might say that keywords give rise to keynotes. This is, perhaps, especially true in the plays of Shakespeare where, when first performed, the elements of *mise en scène* (costumes, props, sets, etc.) would have been kept to a minimum.

In reading Shakespeare, it is important to be attentive to the words (and phrases), to the keywords, in any given play, because those keywords are one of the ways in which (in addition to plot, characterization and character conflict, imagery and symbol, etc.) Shakespeare introduces and develops the central ideas or keynotes on which the play is founded and which it sets out to explore.

So in addition to reading for keywords and keynotes that refer to rule and misrule, to governance and misgovernment, here are some other keys to keep track of:

- plague, disease, sickness, deformity, infection, etc.
- madness, lunacy, folly, etc.
- civil war, rebellion, anarchy, insurrection, treason, etc.
- “values” like justice, honor, pity, mercy, etc.
- playing, counterfeiting, feigning, disguise, etc.
- naming
- monsters and monstrosity
- issue (as in offspring and descendants, but possible also as in a point of contention or significance)
- love and desire (and appetite)

During the semester, as you read the Shakespeare plays assigned, you should construct your own list of keywords and keynotes, which can be an ongoing record of what you think is important in the plays.

Presentism (from Shakespeare Reloaded)

[W]e need urgently to recognize the permanence of the present's role in all our dealings with the past. We cannot make contact with a past unshaped by our own concerns. (Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (eds.), *Presentist Shakespeares*, London: Routledge, (2007): 3)

When we experience a Shakespeare play, we experience it in a specific place and time. You don't read or watch Shakespeare in a vacuum. Presentism is interested in understanding how a literary text is experienced in the present. This theoretical approach acknowledges that our experience of the present (as critics, readers, spectators, students) inevitably shapes our experience of the literary text.

Evelyn Gajowski offers the following definition:

presentism has developed as a theoretical and critical strategy of interpreting Shakespeare's texts in relation to contemporary political, social, and economic ideologies, discourses, and events. (Evelyn Gajowski, 'Beyond historicism: presentism, subjectivity, politics', *Literature Compass* 7/8 (2010): 675.)

Historicist approaches (including new historicism) aim to understand a text in its own historical context. Presentism, however, understands a text through the context in which it is consumed. From a presentist perspective, our own sense of the present influences how we understand the historical contexts of Shakespeare's plays.

However, this does not necessarily mean that presentism is at odds with historicist approaches to understanding Shakespeare or other literary texts. Gajowski adds that presentism does not suggest that historical investigations into Shakespeare's context should be discontinued: 'History, we can all agree, matters' (680). Terence Hawkes makes a similar point in *Shakespeare in the Present*:

For none of us can step beyond time. It can't be drained out of our experience. As a result, the critic's own 'situatedness' does not – cannot – contaminate the past. In effect, it constitutes the only means by which it's possible to see the past and perhaps comprehend it. And since we can only see the past through the eyes of the present, few serious historians would deny that the one has a major influence on their account of the other. Of course we should read Shakespeare historically. But given that history results from a never-ending dialogue between past and present, how can we decide whose historical circumstances will have priority in that process, Shakespeare's, or OUR OWN? (Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, London: Routledge (2002): 3.)

A presentist approach to Shakespeare thus takes into account a reader's or spectator's temporal, social, political and geographical contexts. Gabriel Egan explains that:

In the past ten years, Presentism has become a way of doing literary criticism by explicitly evoking the present concerns that motivate a desire to reread old literature (especially Shakespeare) to discover resonances that it could not have had for its first audiences or readers, because these only became possible as a consequence of what happened between then and now. (Gabriel Egan, '[The presentist threat to editions of Shakespeare](#)', in Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now: Criticism and Theory in the 21st Century*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013), 39.)

This requires a self-conscious reflexivity on our part; not only must we critically examine Shakespeare's text, but we must also examine our own relationship to that text.

There are many answers to the questions of 'what to do' with presentism and what presentism means for the study of Shakespeare.

Presentism is especially pertinent for dramatic texts like Shakespeare's plays because, as Flaherty points out, a performance is by nature 'permeable to its contexts' and 'generated through encounters with living culture'. Terence Hawkes reinforces this:

Presentism thus highlights what has been termed drama's 'performative' function: a feature that always operates concurrently with, and perhaps as a modification of, its referential function. The effect of that realignment is to sophisticate and expand our notion of performing, and to refocus interest on what the early modern theatre meant by the activity it termed 'playing'. (Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, 5.)

Presentism's spotlight on the immediate context in which a play is experienced encourages us to consider the performativity of Shakespeare's plays. What is it like to perform a play like *Henry IV* or *King Lear* today? How is a play like this 'generated' through encounters with living, modern culture?

Grady and Hawkes argue that it is impossible to escape the present:

For we can never, finally, evade the present. And if it's always and only the present that makes the past speak, it speaks always and only to – and about – ourselves. It follows that the first duty of a credible presentist criticism must be to acknowledge that the questions we ask of any literary text will inevitably be shaped by our own concerns, even when those include what we call 'the past'. (Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (eds), *Presentist Shakespeares*, London: Routledge, 2007, 5.)

While presentism offers an interesting way to understand how we engage with and interpret Shakespeare's plays, many questions remain over how to use presentism and how presentist approaches impact the way we think about Shakespeare. Some critics think of it as a type of 'anachronism'. We also need to be careful about what we mean by the 'past' and the 'present'. What is the relationship between the two? How do we construct ideas about the past and about our own context?

To get you thinking about presentist approaches to Shakespeare's plays, you may like to consider the following questions:

- Is it inevitable that we will relate what we read to our own context? Does this help or hinder our understanding of Shakespeare?
- Consider your own 'present' context in which you are experiencing Shakespeare's plays. What shapes your present?
- Are there 'contemporary political, social, and economic ideologies, discourses, and events' that relate to the play you are reading at the moment?
- We tend to think about the past and the present as definitively separated, even as opposites. Is there a different way of considering this? How might you describe the relationship between the past and the present? How (and why) exactly do we differentiate between the 'early modern period' and our own time period?
- What role does the future have in presentism, and in Shakespeare studies? If we consider the past and the present to be important, should we also be thinking about the future?