

English 263

Byron Nelson, ENGL 263, Fall 2003, Shakespeare I

English 263 Byron Nelson

CRN #83072 341 Stansbury

Fall 2003 293-3107, x419

9:30 MWF bnelson2@wvu.edu

48 Stansbury Office: 9-9:30, 10:30-11:30 MWF

SHAKESPEARE

REQUIRED TEXTS (2):

Shakespeare, THE NORTON SHAKESPEARE, ed. Greenblatt (Norton)

Shakespeare, THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, ed. Halio (Oxford World's Classics)

READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

(subject to change at reasonable notice):

I 8-18 Introduction

8-20 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, Act 1; also pp. 24-27 (Oxford World's Classics edition)

8-22 MERCHANT 2; also pp. 1-13

II 8-25 MERCHANT 3

8-27 MERCHANT 4

8-29 MERCHANT 5; FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE (see below)

III 9-1 Labor Day Holiday

9-3 Read introduction to NORTON SHAKESPEARE, pp. 2-65

9-5 ALL IS TRUE (HENRY VIII), Act 5.4 (pp. 3190-92); SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE (see below)

IV 9-8 History plays: RICHARD II, Act 1

9-10 RICHARD II, 2

9-12 RICHARD II, 3 and 4

V 9-15 RICHARD II, 5

9- 17 HENRY V, Act 1

9-19 HENRY V, 2 and 3

VI 9-22 HENRY V, 4

9-24 HENRY V, 5

9-26 FIRST EXAM (MERCHANT, RICHARD II and HENRY V)

VII 9-29 Comedies: TWELFTHNIGHT, Act 1

10-1 TWELFTH NIGHT, 2

10-3 TWELFTH NIGHT, 3 and 4

VIII 10-6 TWELFTHNIGHT, 5

10-8 Problem plays: MEASURE FOR MEASURE, Act 1

10-10 MEASURE, 2

IX 10-13 MEASURE, 3; SHORT PAPER DUE

10- 15 MEASURE, 4

10-17 MEASURE, 5

X 10-20 Tragedies: HAMLET, Act 1

10-22 HAMLET, 2

10-24 HAMLET, 3

XI 10-27 HAMLET, 4

10-29 HAMLET, 5

10-31 HAMLET, 5 continued

XII 11-3 SECOND EXAM (TWELFTH NIGHT, MEASURE and HAMLET)

11-5 Roman plays: CORIOLANUS, Act 1

11-7 CORIOLANUS, 2

XIII 11-10 CORIOLANUS, 3

11-12 CORIOLANUS, 4

11-14 CORIOLANUS, 5

XIV 11-17 Shakespeare's Will, pp.3341-44; LONG PAPER ON TRAGEDIES DUE

11-19 Romances or Tragi-comedies: THE TEMPEST, 1

11 -21 TEMPEST, 2

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY, 11-22 through 11-30

XV 12-1 TEMPEST, 3; SHORT PAPER IN CLASS

12-3 TEMPEST, 4

12-5 TEMPEST, 5 and summary

FINAL EXAMS: 12-8 through 12-13

Our exam is scheduled for 8 am, Thurs., Dec.11

Although the course is a general introduction to the life and works of William Shakespeare, there will be three themes for this semester's course: "regime change," Shakespeare and monarchy, and the "inner life." Like Americans today, Shakespeare had mixed feelings about the wisdom of abrupt changes in government, the two English history plays that we will read, RICHARD II and HENRY V, show the consequences of violent changes in political authority. In his lifetime, Shakespeare lived under the rule of one queen and one king: Elizabeth I and James I. Because 2003 marks the four-hundredth anniversary of the accession of King James VI of Scotland to the English throne (1603), we'll pay special attention to

Shakespeare's complex attitudes toward the king. James (whose accession has received much less attention than the death of Elizabeth) was a controversial king and a generous patron of such artistic geniuses as the playwright Shakespeare, the poet and preacher John Donne and the painter Peter Paul Rubens. Shakespeare offers a complex tribute to the two sovereigns in the conclusion of his final play, ALL IS TRUE. One of Shakespeare's greatest achievements as poet and playwright was his ability to suggest the inner life of his characters, in a manner that later psychological novelists would emulate. Shakespeare shows his ability to demonstrate psychological complexity in such characters as Hamlet, Coriolanus and Prospero.

The course seeks to place Shakespeare specifically in the context of the European Renaissance and the rise of political absolutism in England during the reign of King James I (1603-25). The Renaissance arrived relatively late in England, where it inspired the greatest flowering of theatrical energy since the ancient Greeks, and Shakespeare succeeded commercially and artistically in a highly competitive field which included such playwrights as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton and John Webster.

Always bring the appropriate text to class. We begin with the paperback edition of THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, which includes an unusually full and rich introduction. For the remainder of the semester, always bring the NORTON SHAKESPEARE. Read the assigned acts or pages for the day's discussion. Your final grade will depend on the following factors: the quality of your papers (both arguments and style), the two exams and the final exam, formal responses and in-class presentation, and general participation and willingness to contribute. In addition to the written assignments as listed, there will be occasional in-class writing exercises based on the day's readings. You are allowed no more than THREE absences, for whatever reason, SIX or more absences will result in failure. I take attendance at the beginning of the class period. Please switch off your cell phones.

PAPER #1 (due Aug. 29): Respond to one of the following issues, using Halio's introduction to MERCHANT and responding specifically to Halio's statements (1 1/2 or 2 pp.):

1. Modern productions of the play treat Shylock as the central, tragic character, but Shakespeare's intent seems to have been to treat Shylock as a "comic villain" with some tragic features (see p. 10). Suggest ways in which Shakespeare seems to confront the audience with a precarious balancing act—Shylock is both comic and ridiculous and simultaneously deeply dignified and sympathetic.
2. Halio contends that in the trial scene (Act 4), "In demanding his forfeit, Shylock, however, seems to lose most of his humanity" (p. 48). Is it possible to see Shylock simultaneously as a deeply wronged pillar of Venetian society and as a dangerous subversive and outsider—indeed, as a kind of terrorist?

PAPER #2 (due Sept. 5) (1 page): Write a single-paragraph summary and response to your assigned portion of the general introduction to the NORTON SHAKESPEARE, pp. 2-65. (If, for example, if you were assigned "Life and Death," pp. 2-3, you would want to stress the low life expectancy, the frightening recurrence of the bubonic plague, and the precarious nature of the food supply and the deficient nature of most people's diet. Yet, you might add, the literature of the time seems to suggest that English people of Shakespeare's times worried about roughly the same things that we worry about today.)