

## **English 311: Shakespeare**

Fall 2009

Cedar Crest College

Dr. LuAnn M. Fletcher

Hartzel 112

Phone: x3396

E-mail: [lmfletch@cedarcrest.edu](mailto:lmfletch@cedarcrest.edu)

Office hours: MW 11-12, Th 6-7, and by appointment

### **Text**

Bevington, David. *The Necessary Shakespeare* (3rd edition)

You are responsible for reading each play assigned in its entirety by the first class we will be discussing it. Also, I expect you to read the introductions to the plays. Many students find Shakespeare's plays difficult to follow at first; thus, in order to give you an overview to the plots of the plays and their issues, you will find it helpful to read these introductions before you read the plays themselves. I also recommend that you read each play twice--once simply to understand the plot, a second time to pay attention to language, characterization, themes, and structure. I have placed the BBC productions of our plays on reserve for this class; please feel free to watch these productions to increase your comprehension of the plays.

You should also familiarize yourself with your text's general introduction, as well as with its supplemental materials, including bibliographies of significant critical studies. This information will aid you in the preparation of your research project for the class. I have noted on the Course Schedule when you should be reading sections from the introduction.

### **Course Description**

ENG 311: Shakespeare is a three-credit course; it is taught in a combination of lecture and discussion formats. Satisfaction of the WRI-1 requirement is a prerequisite for this course.

In ENG 311, we will consider the characteristics of Shakespeare's work that made him respected among his contemporaries and influential to audiences and other writers in succeeding centuries, including our own time. As part of our study of Shakespeare's dramatic productions, we will talk about the culture and ideologies of Renaissance England, as well as Shakespeare's philosophies about human nature and the human condition. We will discuss various critical interpretations of Shakespeare's work and ideas, and their implications for twenty-first century audiences. We will take advantage of the ongoing cinematic interest in the Bard and consider how the plays are "re-produced" for us moderns. And we will participate in the process of making sense of Shakespeare's texts and his vision of the world by developing readings of our own.

This fall, we will use a semester-long consideration of *The Tempest* as an opportunity to reflect on Shakespeare's love affair with the theatre. This late play reflects many of the thematic interests Shakespeare pursued throughout his career in his plays and poetry: love, hate, politics, deception, self-knowledge, and the power of illusion, the power of theatricality itself. Our study of the other assigned plays will contribute to your exploration of the play that some, in the past, have called Shakespeare's "farewell to the theatre."

### **Course Objectives**

As with all English courses offered by the department, ENG 311 seeks to help students acquire the ability to read and analyze critically works of literature, to acquire a general knowledge of the history of literature in English, and to expand their knowledge and appreciation of their own and other cultures and historical moments. As with other English courses, ENG 311 also seeks to develop students' oral and written communication skills.

ENG 311 achieves these programmatic goals through its provision of the opportunity for close study of Shakespeare's work, as well as the opportunity to consider why Shakespeare has been considered great; its

introduction of important critical insights into Shakespeare's methods and concerns as a playwright; its invitation to the student to participate in the practice of literary interpretation of his work; and its consideration of the close relationship between the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays and their performance.

### **Course Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of ENG 311, students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of a range of Shakespeare's plays, including the content of these works, their historical and social contexts, and some possibilities for interpretation and performance of these works. In addition, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of basic literary terms, competence in reading and analyzing works by Shakespeare, and competence in discussing and writing about works by Shakespeare.

### **Assessment of Course Outcomes**

The successfulness of ENG 311 in achieving its outcomes will be assessed, in part, by the ability of students to complete course assignments successfully. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the content and interpretive contexts of Shakespeare's works through class discussion of assigned reading, weekly quizzes, a midterm, a film production comparison assignment, a written response to the class-generated website, and an in-class final exam or take-home explication. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of basic literary terms, their competence in critical literary analysis, and their writing ability through participation in class discussion and their completion of the film production comparison assignment, a research assignment, and the take-home explication or in-class final exam.

### **Course Requirements**

The requirements for this course are as follows:

--reading quizzes each week we begin a new play, 8 total, worth 10% of your final grade. I will drop the lowest quiz grade.

--a midterm exam, which will consist of identifications and short answer responses. This assignment will be worth 15% of your grade.

--a film production comparison assignment (5-6 pages), worth 25% of your final grade. (See description of this assignment below.)

--a short (roughly 5 pages) research assignment, worth 25% of your final grade, intended to provide content for *The Tempest* website, to be developed by and for this class. (More details about this assignment to be provided when we discuss it in class on September 15th.)

--informal paper (1-2 pages) that responds to *The Tempest* class website, worth 5% of your final grade and due in class on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. (I will provide more details about this assignment as we get closer to the date it's due.)

--a final examination, consisting of a cumulative essay question, OR a take-home explication of a scene, worth 20% of your final grade.

\*\*If you are a master's level student enrolled in this course, in addition to the requirements that appear above, I will expect you to read the optional plays listed on the course schedule and to choose one of the optional play/assigned play pairings as the subject of a 3-4 page comparison paper, topic to be chosen in consultation with me.

### **Comparison of Two Film Productions**

For this assignment, you will view two different film versions of ONE play and write a paper in which you compare a

single scene from the play represented in both films and discuss each director's treatment of this scene. Your discussion should ultimately answer the following: how does each director's treatment of your chosen scene reflect in little the director's vision of the play as a whole?

In order to help you consider what each director might be trying to achieve by his/her production of the scene, you should consider the effects of the following: casting, staging, scenery, characterization, historical allusions, cuts or additions, and/or production values--lighting, camera movement and angles, sound, point of view (who "sees"?), special camera effects. As you think about how the director's choices reveal his objectives in creating his version of Shakespeare's play, you will also find it helpful to consider the following: how effective do you think the director's choices are in rendering this scene from Shakespeare's play? Why? I will provide you with additional resources on viewing a Shakespeare film that you may use to guide your analysis as you prepare this paper.

The scene you choose to analyze must be included, at least in part, in both film versions. It should represent a significant moment in the play. Use any of our class discussion of the play and the film versions of it that you find helpful to guide your analysis of the films, but go beyond the generalizations we will inevitably make in class. Make sure that your paper has a thesis, or general argument, that guides your discussion and provides you with a means of organizing your observations. Please **DO NOT** do any "research" for this paper by consulting internet sources in which these films are discussed. I am interested in **YOUR** consideration of each film and the vision of the play it represents; I do not want to read interpretations of the films, however valid, advanced by others.

Below are the options from which you may choose the subject of your comparison. Please note that we will be viewing excerpts from the film versions of each play in class; you will be responsible for viewing both films in their entirety on your own. Copies of the films will be on reserve in the library all semester; additionally, all are available for purchase from Amazon, and the Hoffman and Polanski films should be available at most video stores. Note that each of the possible film pairings has a separate due-date, indicated on the course schedule.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, versions directed by Adrian Noble (1996) and Michael Hoffman (1999)

*Macbeth*, versions directed by Roman Polanski (1971) and Philip Casson (1979)

### **Course Policies**

Please see attached document for specific information regarding attendance and my policies regarding absences, classroom protocol and the Cedar Crest Honor Code, late work, make-up work, plagiarism, disability accommodations, and class cancellations.

### **Use of Study Aids**

I am aware that many students turn to various study aids (e.g., *Cliffs Notes*, *SparkNotes*, Wikipedia) for help when they take literature courses. I do not recommend the use of these guides/websites, because they tend to provide overly simplistic—and occasionally inaccurate—summaries of plots and themes. Furthermore, they prevent students from engaging with a literary work on its own terms, noting interesting details, making connections to other works on the syllabus, placing a work in its historical or cultural context. I acknowledge, however, that my warning will not prevent students from utilizing these resources. Therefore, I urge the following: **DO NOT** use these aids in lieu of reading a literary work. If you refer to these aids at all, refer to them **ONLY** after having read the assigned text and consider them to provide supplemental information to the results of your own reading of the text and our class discussion of it. In no circumstances should you incorporate information from a study aid or Wikipedia into a paper or exam, as these resources do not meet the definition of an academic source.

### **Opportunity to Attend a Live Shakespeare Production**

This semester, I will be taking students to see a production of *Romeo and Juliet* by the Shakespeare Theatre of New

Jersey at Drew University, located in Madison, NJ. We will be attending the 2:00 performance on Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>. I'll give you more information on this trip in class and will ask for sign-ups during the first week of classes (ENG 311 students have the first chance to sign up for this trip before I extend the offer more widely to English majors and the rest of the campus).

I post on the Events board down the hall from my office all information I receive about regional Shakespeare performances; please ask me or consult this board if you would like to see what else might be playing this year.

### Course Schedule

PLEASE NOTE: You should complete your reading of each play by the FIRST class we are scheduled to discuss it.

Students occasionally ask me for more reading than I assign to the class. To accommodate the ambitious among you, I have listed a few optional reading assignments related to the assigned plays that, should you choose to do them, will broaden your acquaintance with a range of Shakespeare plays. I will not be using class time specifically to discuss these additional plays, but I may refer to them from time to time in class, and you're more than welcome to talk to me about them outside of class.

- Aug 27 Introduction to the course: Shakespeare's world and work  
Film: "Using the Verse," from John Barton's *Playing Shakespeare*. Discussion of sonnets: 55, 106, 135, and 136 in your anthology. Handout: "The Mirror of Life: How Shakespeare Conquered the World," by Jonathan Bate (*Harper's Magazine*, April 2007)
- Sep 3 *Richard III*
- Sep 10 Screening and discussion of Richard Loncraine's 1995 film version of *Richard III*
- Sep 17 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- Sep 19 Optional field trip to see performance of *Hamlet* at the NJ Shakespeare Festival
- Sep 24 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—discussion of excerpts from film versions directed by Michael Hoffman (1999) and Adrian Noble (1996)  
Optional reading: *Romeo and Juliet*  
Discussion of research project and sign-ups. Initial presentation on *The Tempest*
- Sep 25 Screening and discussion of BBC production of *The Tempest* in Miller 33, 6:30-9:30 p.m.. Since this activity does not take place during class time, you may choose to view the film on your own. It will be on reserve in the library for our class after the screening. I recommend that you see a film version of this play, to assist your comprehension prior to beginning your research project.
- Oct 1 *Much Ado About Nothing*  
Optional reading: *Measure for Measure*
- Oct 8 Midterm exam, first half of class  
*Much Ado About Nothing*—discussion of excerpts from film versions directed by Kenneth Branagh (1996) and BBC production, second half of class

Fall break

Oct 15 *Twelfth Night*

Film production comparison assignment on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* due

Oct 22 Special event connected with President Ambar's inauguration, first half of class: the 2009 Reimert Lecture, given by Christine Todd Whitman

Question and answer session on *The Tempest* and your research project, second half of class. You must have read the play and obtained your research materials by this point. I will collect an annotated bibliography from you this evening.

Oct 29 *Macbeth*  
Optional reading: *Hamlet*

Nov 5 *Macbeth*—discussion of film versions directed by Roman Polanski (1971) and Philip Casson (1979)

Research project due

Nov 12 *Othello*

Nov 19 *Antony and Cleopatra*  
\*\*PLEASE NOTE: Due to another college obligation, I am unable to meet our class at the 7:00 start time. Hence, we will begin class at 8:00 this evening. Class will end at 9:30, as usual.

Nov 26 Thanksgiving break

Dec 3 *The Tempest*—final discussion; discussion of website  
Response to *The Tempest* website due

Film production comparison assignment on *Macbeth* due

Film: *A Midwinter's Tale*, directed by Kenneth Branagh

The final exam time for this class will be as scheduled by the Registrar, most likely Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup> beginning at 6:30 p.m.. If you choose the explication option, your explication is due to me by the start time of the final exam.