SHAKESPEARE: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

ENGL 4304-002 Dr. Catherine Cox
Spring 2013 Office: FC 278; Phone (361) 825-2641
Class time: MW 5:30-6:45 <Catherine.Cox@tamucc.edu>
Classroom: CS 114 Office hrs.: MWF 10-12; other times by
appointment.

Course Description. By treating Shakespeare’s plays both inter-textually (that is comparing
one against another) and contextually (placing the plays in the light of historical, social, and
theoretical backgrounds), this course promotes a broad and deep understanding of Shakespearean
drama. As part of the inter-textual experience, we will be comparing plays from a variety of
genres (comedies, tragedies, histories) and from the early, middle, and late periods of
Shakespeare’s career. As part of the contextual experience, the class will examine Shakespeare’s
works in light of early modern culture, Shakespeare’s life, and stage history. Students are
involved in multiple experiences (including close reading, film analysis, historical analysis,
theoretical application, research, writing, discussion, and performance). We will further discuss
textual production in the age of Shakespeare and in our own time, including live performance,
film, and print culture. We will consider the role of collaboration in the development of
Shakespeare’s plays and the role of collaboration and mediation in the experience of his plays
today. Our class will also help to shape Shakespeare’s “text” by performing scenes from the
plays.

Student Learning Outcomes.

- Students will identify and explain the significance of specific characters, themes, settings,
and plot details in five Shakespearean plays. (Identification section on examinations will
test for this knowledge.)

- Students will apply relevant philosophical, literary, and historical concepts to their
interpretation of individual plays. (Students demonstrate their ability to make these
connections both through examinations and in their final paper.)

- After reading and discussing Shakespeare’s life, Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, and
eyearly modern theatrical and print practices, students will explain in a class exercise the
significance of several of these contexts to Shakespeare’s drama.

- In completing a ten page academic paper on one of Shakespeare’s plays, students will
pose an argument in a clear thesis statement, research background(s) appropriate to their
topic, analyze and evaluate the appropriateness of historical, critical, and theoretical
materials, organize a cogent argument, use research findings and close textual reading to
support their conclusions, incorporate quotations into their argument, document sources
according to the MLA style guide, and revise and edit the essay. (The paper will be
graded holistically and the grade will represent the student’s ability to perform successfully these multiple tasks. Comments on the paper to the student will indicate particular areas of weakness and strength.

- Students will practice and present a final group performance, either interpreting and acting scenes from Shakespeare’s plays or integrating lines of Shakespeare’s plays into their own creative projects.

**Themes.** As we read the plays and view segments of filmed productions of the plays, we will focus especially on the following themes. You may wish, though you are not required, to consider one of these topics for your paper topic:

1) **Shakespeare’s Creation of Human Personality in Character.** The plays that we will treat in this section are *Richard III, Much Ado About Nothing,* and *Macbeth.* In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human,* Harold Bloom writes:

   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, and all you might care to add. Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare’s greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness. Insofar as we ourselves value, and deplore, our own personalities, we are the heirs of Falstaff and of Hamlet, and of all the other persons who throng Shakespeare’s theater of what might be called the colors of the spirit. (4)

   Focusing on the plays listed above, we will explore Shakespeare’s creation of “human inwardness.” By looking at Shakespeare’s source materials and reflecting on what we have experienced from our former studies of classical, medieval, and renaissance styles of characterization, we may judge whether or not Bloom is correct in his assessment of Shakespeare’s contribution to the development of subjectivity in literary character? (Questions for the end of the semester: Which characters studied this term did you find most realistic? Why? What dramatic techniques does Shakespeare use to bring a sense of believable human personality to these characters?)

2) **The Challenges of Love.** *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew* are comedies involving internal and external obstacles to love. How do the two comedies contrast in the psychological and social obstacles that stand in the way to love? How does manipulation play a role in preventing love and in bringing lovers together?

3) **The Language of Folly in Shakespeare’s Comedies.** How does Shakespeare use the language of folly to encourage love? We will be looking at the verbal license of lovers and fools, the Humanist fascination with the “slippage” of meaning inherent in language, and at the various characters’ facility with language. How do multivalent words intermesh with other elements of play, such as dance, disguise, schemes of deception, and
double-plots, to suggest the instability of identity and the comic side of life?

4) Courts and Monarchy. Richard III, Macbeth, and The Winter’s Tale provide fascinating studies of courts and kings. How do early modern concepts of kingship resonate in these plays? What comments do these plays make about the importance of royal integrity? Do Shakespeare’s views on monarchy and royal courts change as England moves from Tudor to Stuart control. Does Shakespeare seem critical, applauding, or conflicted in his presentation of kings and courts?

5) The Family and Order. During the early modern period, the family was considered an essential building block of social, political, and cosmic order. How do we see this idea played out in Shakespeare’s comedies and tragedies? Where for example do you see the strife of siblings (the Cain and Abel theme) reflected? The sacrifice, estrangement, and/or blessing of children? The severance and/or reconciliation of husband and wife? What are the implications of family disruption for political and cosmic order in the individual plays?

6) Near, Distant, and Imaginary Lands. In the early modern period, explorers often brought back stories of their travels. Often these were exaggerated and fanciful. How does Shakespeare represent England and foreign lands in the plays that we are reading this semester? How are contrasts used in the play to draw attention to the possibility of better times ahead or to create a sense of sadness and loss due to lost innocence? How important are Shakespeare’s settings to the development of themes and tone in his plays?

7) The Burden of the Past. This theme enters Shakespeare’s work as early as Romeo and Juliet and manifests itself in many different ways throughout his plays. How does Shakespeare dramatize this theme in his late comedy The Winter’s Tale?

Requirements. You are expected to read all assigned material, attend class regularly, participate in class activities and discussions, take two examinations, an in-class essay and a quiz, submit a final research paper, and participate in a final group presentation/performance.

Examinations. Your exams will be part essay and part identification or some other form of short answer. The short answer section will be taken with all books closed. I will provide a list of topics to help you prepare for the essay portion. For this essay section, you may use your text of the plays to help locate supporting quotations, but should not turn to introductions or lengthy marginal notes or any other text for help. You may not use a text that provides a modern English version of the play. Make-up exams are given only at the professor’s discretion. Consideration is given only to student who contact the professor prior to the scheduled exam.

In-class Essay. For The Winter’s Tale, you will select a prompt from several that I will provide and will write a solid response in prose style. You may open your text to the play to select good quotations for your essay. You should use a standard play text for this assignment and not one that gives a modern language equivalent. You will be given 40 minutes to write.
Research Paper. The formal paper should examine one of the plays studied this semester within a selected context. The context may be Shakespeare’s sources for the play; other Renaissance plays; theatrical tradition (medieval influences, renaissance staging, for example); the historical and social milieu; filmed productions; variant quarto and Folio texts; or particular theoretical perspectives (psychological, gender, post-colonial, new-historical, etc.). You will, of course, need to narrow your focus to a particular issue, theme, character, plot element, rhetorical device, etc. A close reading of the written text is essential. This means that you should incorporate good supporting quotations and explicate some of these quotations, explaining their significance. Incorporate your research (primary and/or secondary) to support and deepen your reading.

The formal paper will be approximately ten typed pages (double-spaced, using 12 pt. font) and will include outside critical sources (at least 6) documented according to the MLA style.

Use books and articles (published by university and other reputable presses) for the preponderance of your secondary research. Some scholarly periodicals are now on-line, but be aware that some of the on-line materials are merely abstracts and some have not undergone peer-review (screening by professional colleagues). You need to work with complete peer-reviewed articles (whether in hard copy or electronic) and books. Use the MLA Bibliography, Project Muse, and JSTOR to find on-line articles on your topic. Use Inter-library Loan when needed to locate books and articles not available on campus or on-line. Avoid the use of internet postings and chat group analyses. I will be happy to talk to you about paper topics and development.

You must attach a rough draft of your paper and copies of supporting materials when you submit your paper. See paragraph below for details.

Conferences. Many students find that they do better on written work when they get feedback and use it to revise. This, of course, means that you need to let me see your paper well in advance of the due date. If my office hours are not convenient, we can set another time for your conferences. I invite all students to share their paper ideas, outlines, or partial drafts with me. Please feel free to come by my office during office hours or to talk to me directly after class if you have any questions about my instructions regarding assignments or course material.

Rough drafts and supporting materials. You are required to submit a rough draft with your final paper, and to attach as well copies of source materials used for references and quotation in your paper. In submitting copies of source materials, you do not need to include the entire article or book chapter; include only two to three pages for each source, enough to show the passage cited and its context. For example, if you cite a passage on p. 14 of a given article, photocopy pages 13-15 of that article. Please highlight the passage used and identify the source by the author’s name and the title on the first page of the copy.

Late Work: Five points will be deducted for each day that the paper is late. Make-ups for exams are given only at the instructor’s discretion. You must notify the instructor prior to the
missed exam and provide documentation in order to make-up work.

**Reminder to English Majors:** As part of the English undergraduate capstone course (ENGL 4351), all English majors are required to submit a portfolio of writings in different discourse genres that they have completed for their college classes. To help you prepare for this assignment, you should **keep a copy** of all essays, research papers, literary analyses, creative and report writing, etc., so that you will have an ample selection from which to choose when the portfolio comes due.

**Participation: Attendance, Class Participation, and Group Presentation.**

**Presentation.** On the day of the final exam, we will have group presentations and performances. You may perform a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays or you may use another creative approach. Please do not depend heavily on any technological medium for this group project. Live presentation/performance, not taped performance, is important. Be sure that your presentation is enlightening and interesting. If you perform a scene from a play, using costumes and a few props will help you get into your roles and help the audience identify characters and settings, adding to the total effect of the performance. Do not spend a lot of money renting costumes. Be creative! Construction paper, pens and crayons, tinsel and foil left over from the holidays, and cheap fabrics, along with pieces from your own wardrobes can transform you quickly into a shepherdess, a fairy, or a king. You are not required to memorize your parts, but you should know your lines very well so that you can deliver them clearly and with ease. You should be convincing as a character and for this you must know your lines very well.

Groups of from 4-6 usually work best, though smaller and larger groups are possible. Everyone should have a speaking role. In calculating the amount of time for your performance, multiply 5 times the number of people in your group, and this will give you the appropriate time. If the number exceeds 20, however, please limit to 20 minutes.

**Grading for Class Participation.** When I establish your grade for the class participation, I first give the presentation itself a grade. Since student's efforts may be uneven, I adjust this grade to reflect your contribution to the project as well as your overall participation in the class (including attendance, free-write responses, group work, etc.). Regular attendance and class participation both in activities and discussion are expected. Bring your text to class everyday, so that you can participate fully in discussion. If discussion wanes, quizzes will be given to assure that everyone is keeping up with the reading. Regular attendance is also very important. Absences, tardies, leaving early, napping, and working on classes other than this one, will adversely affect your participation grade. Two absences should be your limit.

**Courtesy Policy.** It is very important that we be considerate of all who are trying to learn. If you have a tendency to chat with your friends during lectures and discussions, I urge you to sit where you will not be distracted or drawn into conversation. Any student who disrupts the process of instruction will be asked to leave the class and will be readmitted only at the professor’s discretion. In addition to dismissal from class, 10 points will automatically be deducted from the
student’s final grade if the student is asked to leave the class. Other points of courtesy:

- come to class on time and stay until the class is dismissed
- turn off cell-phones
- wait until the instructor signals that the class is over before starting to pack materials to leave
- when a film is shown in class, stay seated until the end of class unless you have an emergency
- No electronics should be used unless approved by the professor
- Refrain from eating crunchy and/or smelly foods in class

This policy is not intended to inhibit class discussion but rather to clarify expectations and the penalty for disruptive behavior. I appreciate your cooperation in this area.

**Grading Distribution:**

- 1st Exam 22.5%
- 2nd Exam 22.5%
- In-class Essay 10%
- Research Paper 22.5%
- Group Presentation/Class Participation 22.5%

**Text.** *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997 (4 volumes). You may use other editions of the plays if you wish. If you do, however, you should check to be sure that the edition that you choose has **good textual notes**. *The Norton Shakespeare* and many other complete works have additional materials in appendices helpful in studying Shakespeare. Check your edition for descriptions of the early editions, sources, genealogical diagrams, maps, bibliography, etc. The bibliography will be helpful for your research paper.

**Notice to Students with Disabilities:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance.

**Withdrawals.** Last day to drop a course is Friday, April 12. At this university, the student, and not the instructor, is responsible for filling out and submitting to the Office of Admission and Records the drop or withdrawal request form. Monday, May 6, is the last day to withdraw from the University.
**Academic Advising.** The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College's Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.

**Plagiarism and other forms of Academic Dishonesty.** Plagiarism, the undocumented use of another's work, will warrant the grade of 0 on the work submitted. In egregious cases of plagiarism or in multiple cases of plagiarism, the student will receive an F as his or her final grade. Collaboration on written work is treated as plagiarism and will also warrant the grade of 0. Plagiarism on any homework or cheating on a quiz will result in a 0 in Class Participation. Signing another student’s name on the attendance sheet (unless approved by the professor) will also result in a 0 in Class Participation. Cheating on an exam will result in a 0 on the exam. For any act of academic dishonesty, a form relating the case will be sent to the Dean of Student’s Office, notifying the Dean of the offense.

**Grade Appeal Process.** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.
### Calendar:

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<td>Week 12</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
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<td>Exam on Macbeth and The Winter’s Tale</td>
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<th>Week 15</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Workshop. Complete paper drafts due. Bring two copies to class.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Week 16</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>(Presentation by volunteer group) Practice for Presentations. Come to class first before breaking into groups. Final Papers Due (attach your rough draft and source copies)</th>
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<td>Reading Day (no classes)</td>
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**Monday, May 15 from 4:30-7:00 p.m.** Presentation Day. All students must attend. All students must be in class and ready for performances by 1:45. Lateness on this important day will count off of an individual’s performance grade.

Syllabus is subject to change.