

ENGLISH 426: TOPICS IN SHAKESPEARE

THE QUESTION OF GENRE

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office hours: MWF 10:00-11:00; M 1:30-2:45, TH 2:45-4:30, and by appointment

Texts:

Bevington, ed. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 6th edn. (Harper Collins, 2008)

McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, 2nd edn. (St. Martin's, 2001)

This course will focus on the question of genre in Shakespeare's plays: how they have been classified, and why classification itself has become problematic. We shall read plays that test the traditional criteria of comedy and tragedy by including material from other acknowledged sources such as history, myth and romance. Generic classifications are always bound up in cultural perspectives – how social, political, and gender issues were represented during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods; consequently, class discussion will often address how a play may be understood as a product of its time. Conversely, Shakespeare's plays have retained their popularity in part because their meanings have been shaped by the values brought to them by readers and audiences from diverse cultures and at different times in history. Thus we shall examine our own cultural perspectives to discover why, for us, these particular plays remain so fascinating.

The course will be organized as a seminar: we shall sit around a table and talk. There will be no lecturing, and I shall assume that participants will have read each play *prior* to the first day of discussion. We shall allocate three or four class meetings to each play, enough to permit us to discuss issues in depth. We shall also view and analyze film versions of selected plays. Our discussion will regularly be informed by readings from other sources. Some will be from *The Bedford Companion*. In addition, for each play you will be asked to do independent reading in critical journals or books on which you should be prepared to report to the class. You will be expected to pass in a summary, or *précis*, of that reading at the end of the class for which it is due. By the end of the course, you should have evidence that you have examined a variety of critical approaches to Shakespeare's plays in your file of *précis*: formalist, feminist, historicist, political, and psychoanalytic. Such readings will help you to define topics for your research papers.

You are required to submit two research papers of 10-12 and 12-14 pages, respectively, each of which should tackle a problem broached in class discussion. Late papers will be penalized by a half letter grade per day. Because active participation is crucial to the class, you will be allowed two unexcused absences without penalty: your final grade will be lowered by 3 percent for each additional unexcused absence. Final grades will be calculated approximately as follows: class participation and *précis*, 35%; research papers, 30% and 35%. Finally, DVDs of all plays will be kept on reserve in the library: see the list at the back of the syllabus. Apart from scheduled showings, which are mandatory, you may view videos as you wish in the library's viewing carrels.

DATE	ASSIGNMENT
9/1	Shakespeare and the problem of genre; discussion of research methods
9/6-13	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> : comedy and the politics of gender. Read Danson, chapter 3 (on reserve); Holderness, chapter 1 (on reserve); and McDonald, chapters 1 and 8.
9/11, 7pm	Film: Zeffirelli's <i>Taming of the Shrew</i> (Odd Fellows 106)
9/15	Discussion of précis and <i>Shrew</i> films
9/20-27	<i>Twelfth Night</i> : romantic comedy, social critique, and sexual identity. Read McDonald, chapters 2 and 7.
9/25, 7pm	Film: Nunn's <i>Twelfth Night</i> (Odd Fellows 106)
9/29	Discussion of précis and <i>Twelfth Night</i> film
9/30 or 10/1 8 pm.	See a performance of <i>The Crazy Things We Do: Love and Loss</i> in the Vukovich Center theatre.
10/4-11	<i>Measure for Measure</i> : What constitutes a problem comedy? Read McDonald, chapter 9.
10/13	Discussion of précis
10/18	No class: Fall break
10/24, noon	Research paper due: comedy (10-12 pages)
10/20-27	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> : tragedy vs. comedy, the idea of fate vs. character, and the configuration of the Elizabethan playhouse. Read McDonald, chapters 4 and 10.
10/27, 4:30	Bulman lecture on three versions of <i>Hamlet</i>, Pelletier Library
[10/27, 7pm	OPTIONAL Film: Zeffirelli's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>, in Odd Fellows 221]
10/30, 7pm	Film: Luhrmann's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Odd Fellows 106)
11/1	Discussion of précis and <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> films
11/3-10	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> : the limits of classical tragedy, the influence of romance. Read Danson, chapter 5 (on reserve) and McDonald, chapter 3.
11/15	Discussion of précis

- 11/17-22 *The Tempest* : romance of tragicomedy? The classical unities, colonialism, and Shakespeare's reading. Read McDonald, chapter 5.
- 11/24** **No class: Thanksgiving break**
- 11/28, 7 pm** **Film: Taymor's *The Tempest***
- 11/29 Discussion of *Tempest* film and the function of spectacle
- 12/1 Discussion of précis
- 12/6-13 *Troilus and Cressida*, the function of satire, and the indeterminacy of genre. Read McDonald, chapter 6.
- 12/20, 5pm** **Research paper due (12-14 pages)**

DVDs on reserve at Pelletier Library
(may be viewed only at the library, not taken out)

The Taming of the Shrew (BBC: Miller)

The Taming of the Shrew (Zeffirelli)

Twelfth Night (Nunn)

Measure for Measure (BBC)

Romeo and Juliet (Zeffirelli)

Romeo and Juliet (Luhrmann)

Antony and Cleopatra (RSC: Nunn)

The Tempest (Taymor)

Troilus and Cressida (BBC)