

ENGLISH 554
SPRING 2012

DRAMA IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

J. C. BULMAN

ODD FELLOWS 231

X4325

EMAIL: JBULMAN

OFFICE HOURS: MWF 10-11 M 1:30-2:30 TH 2:45-4:45 AND BY APPOINTMENT

Text: *English Renaissance Drama*, ed. David Bevington (Norton, 2002)

Shakespeare wrote at a time when the drama was flourishing. Had he never lived, the Elizabethan/Jacobean era would still be regarded as the golden age of English theatre. Yet Shakespeare has eclipsed his fellow dramatists. Their work is studied and performed far less than his; their reputations shine less brightly because of him. In their own day, however, the popularity of these dramatists sometimes surpassed that of Shakespeare: their wit, imagination and dark genius spoke to an age in the throes of social and political upheaval. By studying these dramatists, we learn more about the stage that gave rise to Shakespeare; we pass from the heroic certainties of Elizabeth's reign to the open dissensions of James's; we move from a century in which social rank was largely fixed to one in which class mobility became the norm; we feel Tudor ideology shake with the first rumblings of the Puritan revolution.

Shakespeare's presence will hover over this class. In addition to reading *Hamlet*, a revenge play which had a shaping influence on later Jacobean tragedy, we shall read *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare's controversial response to Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. Films of both these plays are on reserve in Pelletier Library. The plays we study for the course span more than thirty years – from the decade before Shakespeare came to London to the decade after his death – and they are richly varied: heroic plays, revenge plays, romantic comedies, satirical comedies, citizen comedies, domestic tragedies. We shall spend two or three class periods on each play. I expect you to have finished the play for the first class meeting and to bring to the second or third meeting one or two précis (to be assigned) of significant critical articles or chapters which should inform your discussion of the play. During the course of the semester, you should have written précis on scholarship illustrating a variety of theoretical approaches: formalist, cultural materialist, new historicist, psychoanalytic, gender-based, and performance-based.

You will be assigned two research papers: one of 10-12 pages due on March 16; the other of 12-14 pages due on May 8. To give you practice in research methods, I ask that you submit a proposal for each paper, along with an annotated bibliography, more than a week before the paper is due (March 7, April 30). Your research papers and proposals

will constitute 70% of your final grade; collected précis and class participation, 30%. Papers will be penalized by a half-letter grade each day they are late. You may have up to two unexcused absences without penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will incur a 3 ½ point deduction from your final grade. Absences will be excused only with *written* proof of cause – medical, institutional, or religious.

Date	Assignment
1/19	Introduction to the period; tour of library holdings
1/24-26	Marlowe, <i>Tamburlaine the Great, Part One</i>
1/31-2/2	Marlowe, <i>The Jew of Malta</i>
2/7-9	Shakespeare, <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
2/14-21	Jonson, <i>Volpone</i>
2/23-28	Middleton, <i>A Chaste Maid in Cheapside</i>
3/1-6	Massinger, <i>A New Way to Pay Old Debts</i>
3/7, 4 pm	Proposal and bibliography for first research paper due
3/8-15	Kyd, <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>
3/16, 4 pm	Research paper due (10-12 pages)
3/17-25	SPRING BREAK
3/27-4/3	Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i>
4/5	No class
4/10-17	Webster, <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>
4/19-24	Middleton, <i>The Changeling</i>
4/26-5/1	Ford, <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i>
4/30, 5 pm	Proposal and bibliography for second research paper due
5/8, 5 pm	Research paper due (12-14 pages)