

SHAKESPEARE COURSE DESCRIPTION

The plays of Shakespeare are too often taught in the classroom as difficult and rather obscure sacred texts. The aim of this course is to remind students that Shakespeare was not only a great poet but also a great **dramatist**, and to show students that his plays are still exciting and dynamic as **theatre**. Consequently, this course is structured around the Shakespeare plays which are currently in production in London and Stratford-upon-Avon, so that Shakespeare can be seen and heard, as well as read.

Method

The scripts will be studied taking an actor's/director's approach with due emphasis on Shakespeare's language and how it should be spoken. In order to appreciate fully Shakespeare's dramatic skills, it is essential to understand his poetic skills. This will involve a study of Shakespeare's use of both prose and verse, including his methods of, and reasons for, using rhymed or blank verse, variations in rhythm, stress, repetition and variation of verbal patterns, and use of rhetoric. His use of imagery to convey themes, background, atmosphere and lighting effects will be examined; and the question of how modern day theatre technology can enhance (or obscure) his poetic devices will be considered, and used to assess the productions we see. We will also look at how an actor can establish character and convey emotional response from using the speech patterns and rhythms of the text.

The course will be conducted mainly by seminar discussion of both scripts and performances. In addition, there will be a series of short lectures designed to provide useful background information, and to place the plays in their social, historical and theatrical contexts.

Grading

1. Class work (attendance, preparation, participation) will be worth roughly 25% of the final grade. Attendance at the performances is a course requirement. By 'preparation' and 'participation' I mean that you should have read the script through before we discuss it in class; have ready questions and comments about plot, characters, key speeches and scenes; have given some consideration to possible ways of producing the script on stage. Having seen a production, you should be ready to comment on all aspects of that production e.g. acting performances, set design, choice of costume, notable stage effects, and how well each component worked towards the realisation of the script.

2. Two essays: written discussion and analysis of a speech, or part of a scene selected from one of the scripts, and each essay is worth 20% of the final grade. You must refer only to the script, using the glossary provided if necessary. Do not use critical texts, Cliff Notes or the Internet. It's just you and the script! All quotations should be formatted correctly (i.e. verse should be written as verse, prose as prose) and referred to by Act and Scene numbers (not line nor page numbers). Essays may be typed, word-processed

or hand-written. The essays should be around 1000 words, but I do not consider actual numbers of words or pages to be a factor in determining the quality of any paper.

3. Mid-term test: a short paper written in class and worth about 15%. I will give you a speech or a piece of dialogue from one of the scripts we are reading, and ask you to write a commentary on it. Responses may be in extended note form.

4. Final exam: worth about 20% of the final grade, this will take the form of a list of topics. You will select one of those topics to write on, illustrating your discussion from all the scripts and productions studied during the semester. You will be expected to bring with you all your scripts, notes, journals, programmes, and to use them (i.e. 'open book').

The percentages are a rough guide only. Given that some students may be less familiar with Shakespeare than others, the final grade should be able to reflect effort and improvement.

Required Reading

The scripts of the plays. [New Penguin edition]

This semester the plays include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. There will be more!

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