SHAKESPEARE: THE (Scary) STRANGER in THE MIRROR


Place: LL 206, Seminar Rm.  Time: TR 12:00-1:50

Course Texts: The Merchant of Venice: Texts and Contexts (Bedford St. Martins); Twelfth Night: Texts and Contexts (Bedford St. Martins); Measure for Measure: Texts and Contexts (Bedford St. Martins); Troilus and Cressida (Random House); The Tempest: A Cast Study in Critical Controversy (Bedford St. Martins). Except for Troilus, you will need these exact texts, as we will be reading the plays and other items therein. We will also read a variety of critical articles, which you will find on Canvas.

Please read this syllabus carefully. It is long and detailed and I may not cover all aspects of it in class. You are responsible for it all, however.

Course Description: In this course we will seek the ability to individually discover, assess, and understand the works of Shakespeare in the context of his time and ours. A seminar is meant to develop skills other than a lecture course, and as a result, there will be few lectures “handed down from on high” by the professor. Instead, we will read the plays on our own; prepare for and engage in class discussion, mostly based on prompts from the professor; present on the salient contexts of the early modern period, noting and assessing their connections to the plays (undergraduate presentations); and present on and respond to some of our contemporary scholarly criticism, evaluating the insight it provides to the play (graduate presentations). This will be a course of discovery and the amount of work you choose to put in will
determine the growth of your skill to understand these iconic and complicated works.

We will read five important plays by William Shakespeare that are particular popular during our own time, and discuss as many aspects of them as time permits. The playwright’s treatment of the relationship between friend and foe, and insider and outsider, will be of particular interest to us, however. More than simply noting the groups marginalized by the English early modern period as different and/or inferior, we will consider how individuals and societies first establish then mystify what is “normative” and for what reasons. Why will some people treat others, who are like them in many ways, as “scary strangers?” True, sometimes these groups are notably different from the hegemony, for example, Jews, homosexuals, or non-Europeans (Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night, and The Tempest), but other times, they are identical to the people who alienate them as other, for example religious devotees or warriors (Measure for Measure and Troilus and Cressida). All five plays contain these opposites and parallels.

The main theoretical approach of this course is new-historicist, and while I expect graduate students to be somewhat familiar with the term, there is no need to have any experience with this theory in order to take the course. Everybody must read the “Definition of New Historicism” document and the article by Greenblatt, both of which are on Canvass (Modules – Course Articles), which we will subsequently discuss in class. We will focus our attention on how Shakespeare’s contemporaries understood and described “otherness,” and Shakespeare’s own ideas of why groups generate categories of “otherness” even when no obvious ones exist. The “contexts” we shall read are mostly collections of Renaissance writings on these topics, and sometimes their medieval and classical influences and sources. The criticism articles we will also read are chosen with an eye to different approaches, for example, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and gender studies, but all of these approaches share a space with new historicism.

Course format will be discussions and presentations. We will devote three days to each play; as the professor, I will give you prompts to consider as you read and prepare each play. We will spend the first day discussing these prompts: I will ask the questions, and participate in the discussion, but you, the students, will provide the main responses and conversation. Because this is a seminar, you must come to class ready, able, and indeed most willing to participate in discussion, even if you are not the one presenting. The undergraduate student will lead day two, the context day, and the graduate student will lead day three, the article day. See below under “Course Evaluation, Presentations,” for information about the Undergraduate and Graduate-led days.

Please see the excel sheets (on Canvas – Pages) for the generic, official, course outcomes.

Course Evaluation:
Undergraduate:
“Context” presentation and class session with handout 5-6pp: 25%
Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (5 secondary texts min): 15%
Research Synthesis Paper: 35%
Attendance, Reading, Preparation, and Participation: 25%

Graduate:
“Article analysis” presentation and class session with handout 4-5pp: 25%
Workshop: Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (10 secondary texts min): 15%
Research Synthesis Paper: 35%
Attendance, Reading, Preparation, and Participation: 25%

Presentations and Class Sessions: 25%
Undergraduates: You are responsible for the whole class period. You will begin by presenting an overview of the context sections that we’ve all read (what general themes, conclusions, insights can you glean from all the readings? In other words, you will be practicing forming syntheses from a variety of disparate readings on one or two subjects) and then present an argument (i.e. a thesis) about a particular angle of the play that makes use of this context. The context readings will give you a variety of issues from which to choose the topic and some of the background to make that argument. I do not expect you to do more research, but you may if you wish. Please note that most context sections begin with a short, introductory essay by the editor(s) of the text; this essay may provide you with some good ideas for your thesis, if you don’t already have one. As well as providing a thesis, you must be able to argue and prove it with citations, references, quotations, from both the play and the contexts. The handout must make clear the synthesis review, the thesis, and the main points you will over to support your argument. Make sure your handout is organized in a way that articulates these points. Finally, you should have a series of questions and/or discussion points to drive the class for the remainder of the period. Use the Writing Handout to craft and edit your handouts. Note: the handout must cover everything! Overview of context, argument, proof, discussion points, works cited and consulted, etc.

Graduates: You are responsible for the whole class period. You will begin by presenting an overview of the assigned article we’ve all read. You will sum up the main claims, as well as critique, assess, and discuss their strengths and weaknesses in discussion with the rest of the class. Look for novel insights, contradictions, claims with which you agree, claims with which you don’t agree, etc. You will be the one(s) mainly driving the article discussion, but the discussion should also be an interactive activity in which the rest of the class can participate. Building on the article’s claims, present a thesis about an aspect of the play to which the article gave rise and which we have not discussed at length already. If you think we’ve already discussed all the aspects that are implicated in the article,
come up with something new. I do not expect you to do more research, but you may if you wish. As well as a thesis, you must be able to argue and prove your position with citations, references, quotations, from both the play and the article, etc. The handout must make clear this thesis and the main points you will cover to support your argument. Make sure your handout is organized in a way that articulates these points. Finally, you should have a series of questions and/or discussion points to drive the class for the remainder of the period. Use the Writing Handout to craft and edit your handouts. Note: the handout must cover everything! Overview of context, argument, proof, discussion points, works cited and consulted, etc.

Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (AB): 15% (Due Nov. 25)
The prospectus is a preview of your final paper. It is due about two weeks before the paper to allow for feedback to assist in improving your paper. There are assignment sheets on Canvas with more extensive information, but briefly, undergrads will write an AB for a minimum 5 critical sources (plays and other fiction don’t count), and the grads for 10. The prospectus itself will identify the plays you will write on, the approach you will take, the thesis, the organization, etc.

Undergrads: You may submit your proposal to be workshopped as described below for the grad students. Otherwise, by noon on November 25th, you must upload a copy of your prospectus on Canvas, which I will read and respond to via trackchange. You are expected to attend class and participate in the workshop for the rest of the students, even if you’re not submitting your proposal.

Grads: We will workshop your prospectuses, and those of any undergraduate student who wishes to participate, on November 25th during class. Please bring enough printed copies of the prospectus for all members in the class, including the prof (you only need one copy of the AB to hand in to the prof at the end of the period). We will read along on our copies as you read your prospectus aloud and then offer you feedback. You do not need to upload a version onto Canvas.

The Research Synthesis Paper: 35% (Due Dec. 9)
The final paper is a final paper (6-8 pages undergraduate, 10-12 pages graduate, not counting Works Cited), due Dec. 9th at 08:59 am, on Canvas). While your presentations focused on only one play, the final paper must deal equally with at least two; undergrads may write on two plays we discussed during the course, grads may write on only one play we discussed during the course, choosing one of Shakespeare’s other plays for the second. You may use your presentation material in developing the final paper, but you cannot propose the same thesis as the presentation. You must come up with a thesis that takes into consideration all the plays you are discussing – i.e. don’t have a thesis that states in one play Shakespeare supports independent women and in another play he doesn’t. Your thesis should be
what makes one independent woman acceptable and the other one not, according to Shakespeare.

**Your paper must not be organized one play at a time.** You will fail the assignment otherwise. Why? Because writing a synthesis comparison paper by focusing on one play at a time is an awkward and unsophisticated method of writing. Instead, you must focus on the elements within the plays you will discuss. For example, the first section may be on women’s relationship to money, and how the two kinds of independent women differ in their attitudes to it. This section may be organized by play, if you absolutely must. The second section may be on women’s relationship to men, and how the two kinds of independent women differ in their responses to these men, etc. I want you to work on developing the faculty of synthesizing for your papers, for this and future classes. This paper does require research, as noted in the prospectus; you must have critical sources (at least 5 for undergraduate and 10 for graduate) that inform the claims of your essay. Make sure these texts (articles, book chapters, books, etc.) are available in the MLA database, i.e. that they are scholarly sources. Websites do not count unless you clear them with me first.

There will be more information forthcoming.

**Attendance, Reading, Preparation, and Participation: 25%**

In a seminar, it is absolutely crucial that conversations and discussions happen. And so, while you will earn your grade for your presentation based on your performance on the day, you will be earning grades for your performance during every other class session.

You must attend. I understand that s**t happens, and you are allowed one missed day with no penalties. The second missed day drops your grade 5%, the third a further 5% for a total of 10%, and the fourth fails you, unless you withdraw. Please note we’re meeting only twice a week, and if you miss three days, you’ve missed 6 total hours. If you miss four, you’ve missed 8 total hours, which is more than a fifth of the course. You’ve also not done the work your peers are doing.

You must read: the play twice, at minimum, the contexts, and the articles, even if you’re an undergraduate student. Read like a student! That is, you’re not passive. You’re thinking, analyzing, responding, ruminating, digesting, reviewing, etc. All of the items we will read are dense, whether they’re the plays or the articles, etc. So read carefully and slowly. Work on your reading habits. Think of the difference between the way the general public “reads,” and the way you “read,” or should read, being an English upper level student.

You must prepare. Respond to everything you read in a thoughtful and energetic manner. Annotate the plays, the context readings, and the articles. I may ask to see! Prepare thoughts, questions, and insights to offer during every class. Read the
professors play prompts, the contexts, and the articles, and prepare cogent and fully
developed answers to them, so that if, for example, I ask you to respond first to a
particular prompt, you can do so “on the fly,” based on notes, rather than uhm and
ah and think about it on the spot. Be prepared to contribute intelligently to the
conversation. This is a conversation class, and your voice (and yes, I do mean you!) is
responsible for the success of the course. All students will be expected
demonstrate in their discussion and feedback that they have read and retained the
context readings. This is an opportunity for you to learn how other people write,
and to use that perspective to develop your own clarity of argument, organizational
skills, etc.

Late Work and Extra Credit Policy:

No late work will be accepted. There is no extra credit.

DSS:

Please let me have your DSS paperwork as soon as possible so we can discuss how
to address your needs.

Grade Percentages:

A: 85-100
A-: 80-84
B+: 75-79
B: 70-74
B-: 65-69
C+: 61-64
C: 58-62
C-: 55-57
D: 52-54
F: 0-51
Schedule

**September**
Tues. 25 *Intro to Class*

**Tues. 28** *Troilus and Cressida Discussion* (Prof Led)

**Thurs. 30** *T&C Context Pres* (Undergrad Led)

**November**

**Tues. 30** *Intro to Shakespeare*  
Discussion of New Historicism  
(read Canvas doc and Greenblatt article)

**Thurs. 3** *Comedies and Problem Plays*

**Tues. 4** *T&C Article Pres* (Grad Led)

**Thurs. 6** *Measure for Measure Disc* (Prof Led)

**October**

**Tues. 7** *Merchant of Venice Discussion* (Prof Led)

**Thurs. 9** *MOV Context Pres* (Undergrad Led)

**Tues. 11** *No School*

**Thurs. 13** *MM Context Pres* (Undergrad Led)

**Tues. 14** *MOV Article Pres* (Grad Led)

**Thurs. 16** *Twelfth Night Discussion* (Prof Led)

**Tues. 18** *MM Article Pres* (Grad Led)

**Thurs. 20** *The Tempest Discussion* (Prof Led)

**Tues. 21** *TN Context Pres* (Undergrad Led)

**Tues. 25** Proposal Workshop  
Undergrads: either participate in workshop or submit Prospectus on Canvas by noon

**Thurs. 23** *TN Article Pres* (Grad Led)

**Thurs. 27** *No School*

**December**

**Tues. 2** *Tmpst Context Disc* (Undergrad Led)

**Thurs. 4** *Tmpst Article Disc* (Grad Led)

**Dec. 9th, 08:59 AM** Final Papers due. Upload on Canvas - Assignments