



SYLLABUS

SHAKESPEARE THE DRAMATIST

Instructor: Jean Elliott

Contact Hours: 45

Language of Instruction: English

LONDON, ENGLAND

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 his plays can be seen and heard as well as read.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To learn the difference between prose and verse
- To understand how Shakespeare uses iambic pentameter both poetically and dramatically
- To gain a clearer understanding of how to approach a Shakespeare script
- To use the technical devices of Shakespeare's writing to understand his characters and their motivations
- To understand how actors can use Shakespeare's words to the greatest effect
- To appreciate how Shakespeare's actors worked and understood their directions
- To put a Shakespeare script "on its feet" and make it work
- To comprehend the range of Shakespeare's practical and poetic skills

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

Each script will be read and discussed before we see a production. We will take 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. You will need to know the difference between prose and verse. (If you

were studying film you would need to know the difference between a close-up and a wide!). We will examine 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, sounds and rhythms of the text. The course will be conducted by seminar discussion of both scripts and performances.

METHOD OF EVALUATION (GRADING)

1. **Class Work** [20%] Attendance, preparation, participation. Attendance in class and at the performances is mandatory. By 'preparation' and 'participation' I mean that you should have read the script before we discuss it in class (and surprise "tests" will be sprung on you to ensure that you have actually read the play); 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, including acting performances, set design, choice of costume, notable stage effects, and how well each component worked towards the realisation of the script.
2. **Two Written Assignments** [15% each] Discussion and analysis of a speech or part of a scene selected from the scripts we are studying.
3. **Mid-term Test** [10%] A short paper, written in class, and may be in extended note format.
4. **Final Paper** [40%] I will give you 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.

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.

Every class and play (whether on- or off-site) must be attended. Absence will only be accepted on grounds of sickness. Sickness must be notified in advance in person (by phone, note or email) either to Amanda or Mary. Any absence not for sickness, for example for travel purposes, will affect your grade.

COURSE OUTLINE

Course Outline will act as a Calendar for students. This Calendar may be subject to change.

Meeting twice a week throughout the semester as well as attending Shakespeare productions. Students are expected to read and review plays prior to the week they will be discussed.

Wednesday Sept 6: Introduction to each other. Introduction to the course, to Shakespeare, his company, his theatre, his plays.

Copies of *Much Ado About Nothing* to be handed out and to be read by Sept 11.

Monday Sept 11: Brief introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing*. Discuss the language of *Much Ado*: Prose, Blank verse, Iambic Pentameter and Rhetoric – basically how to speak the speeches.

Wednesday Sept 13: Discuss the script of *Much Ado*: plot and characters.

Monday Sept 18: Discuss script: Focus on Beatrice and Benedict's relationship.
Copies of *King Lear* to be handed out and to be read by Monday Sept 25.

Tuesday Sept 19 Evening: Attend performance of *Much Ado* at Globe Theatre.

Wednesday Sept 20: Discuss production of *Much Ado*. Every student will make an observation and venture an opinion on some aspect of the production. We will share our views (hopefully diverse) on performances, use of space, use of stage effects, costumes, director's interpretation etc. Brief introduction to *King Lear*.

Monday Sept 25: Discuss script of *King Lear*: plot and characters.

Wednesday Sept 27: Discuss script of *King Lear*: themes. **Hand out Written Assignment #1. I will give you a short piece of verse from *Much Ado* and *King Lear*. You will choose ONE of them and write an analysis, commenting on use of words and giving a personal opinion on its dramatic and emotional effect. To be handed in on Monday Oct 9.**

Evening: Attend performance of *King Lear* at Globe Theatre.

Monday Oct 2: Discussion of *King Lear* production: every student will make an observation and venture an opinion on some aspect of the production. We will share our views (hopefully diverse) on performances, use of space, use of stage effects, costume, director's interpretation etc.

Copies of *Othello* to be handed out and to be read by Monday Oct 9.

Wednesday Oct 4: No class (Scotland)

Monday Oct 9: Discuss script of *Othello*: plot and characters.
First written assignment to be handed in.

Wednesday Oct 11: Short mid-term test on *Othello*.

MID-TERM BREAK

Monday Oct 23: NB Class time altered: 1-2.30
Marked papers returned and a "post-mortem". Discuss script of *Othello*.

Tuesday Evening Oct 24. Attend performance of *Othello*

Wednesday Oct 25. Discuss production of *Othello*. **Copies of *Coriolanus* to be handed out and to be read by Monday Oct 30.**

Monday Oct 30. Globe Workshop. We will meet at the Globe Theatre, have a tour of the Theatre, followed by a one-hour Workshop on Shakespeare's verse/drama in one of the Globe Rehearsal Rooms led by one of the Globe actors.

Wednesday Nov 1: Discuss script of *Coriolanus*. Plot and characters.

Monday Nov 6. Discuss script of *Coriolanus*. Compare with *King Lear*.

Evening: Attend performance of *Coriolanus* at Barbican

Wednesday Nov 8: Discuss production of *Coriolanus*. **Copies of *Twelfth Night* to be handed out and to be read by Monday Nov 13.**

Monday Nov 13: Discuss script of *Twelfth Night*. Plot and characters. **Hand out Written Assignment #2. I will give you a short piece of verse from *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*. You will choose ONE of them and write an analysis, commenting on use of words, and giving a personal opinion on its dramatic and emotional effect. To be handed in on Wednesday Nov 22.**

Wednesday Nov 15: Discuss script of *Twelfth Night*. Themes.

Thursday Nov 16: Visit to Stratford-upon-Avon (Shakespeare's Birthplace, his grave in Holy Trinity Church, Hall's Croft).

Evening: Attend performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Monday Nov 20: Discuss production of *Twelfth Night*.

Wednesday Nov 22: Compare and contrast *Twelfth Night* with *Much Ado About Nothing*. **Second written assignment to be handed in.**

Monday Nov 27: Compare and contrast the tragedies *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*.

Wednesday Nov 29: Various topics.

Final Paper Topic Selection: Topic should be an idea that has sparked your imagination and curiosity. Use the scripts and productions we have seen to illustrate your topic. I want your personal responses and opinion. It is not a research paper, so do not use any outside sources.

Find relevant quotations from the script which best illustrate your discussion.

Possible ideas: Love, Women, Revenge, Jealousy, Destiny, Fate, Theatre, Play-acting, Costume, Words, Treachery...lots of other possibilities.

Monday Dec 4: Final Week

Final Paper to be handed in by Thursday Dec 7.

COURSE READINGS

Much Ado About Nothing

King Lear
Othello
Coriolanus
Twelfth Night

The scripts are provided by the Programme and must be returned in the final week.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Catharine Arnold: *Globe. Life in Shakespeare's London* (Simon and Schuster, 2015)
James Shapiro: *1599. A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (Faber and Faber, 2005)
Both books are fascinating and entertaining, and easy to read.
And in case anyone is dotty enough to believe that Shakespeare didn't exist (!), read
James Shapiro: *Contested Will* (Faber and Faber, 2010)