ENGLISH 362: Shakespeare I
Professor Michael MacDonald
T/Th 2:30-3:50 in ML 246
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 4:00-5:00 in HH 250
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“Strenuous Magic”: Shakespeare’s Arts of Persuasion

According to C.S. Lewis, an “invisible wall” separates modernity from the world of Renaissance humanism: an obsession with the art of rhetoric. The inaugural event of the Renaissance, after all, was the rediscovery of the rhetorical treatises of Cicero (1464) and Quintilian (1416). Any attempt to appreciate the plays of Shakespeare – the greatest products of Renaissance rhetorical culture – must therefore begin by breaking down this invisible wall and grasping the centrality of rhetoric to his dramaturgical art. This introductory survey of Shakespearean drama will therefore focus on the rhetorical dimensions of his early comedies, histories and tragedies. As we shall see over the course of the semester, Shakespeare understood rhetoric not merely as an art of style and ornamentation but as an “infinite science” (Cicero) with the power to dominate human affairs, for better (as in comedy) or for worse (as in tragedy). As Brutus observes in Julius Caesar, “Slaying is the word, it is a deed in fashion…”

Required Texts

The Taming of the Shrew; A Midsummer Night’s Dream; Romeo and Juliet; King Henry IV, Part I; Richard III; MacBeth; Hamlet

Syllabus

September
12 Administration
14 Introduction to Shakespeare
19 The Taming of the Shrew
21 The Taming of the Shrew
26 The Taming of the Shrew (film)
28 Midsummer Night’s Dream

October
3 A Midsummer Night’s Dream
5 A Midsummer Night’s Dream (film)
10 Romeo and Juliet
12 Romeo and Juliet
17 No class
19 No class
24 Richard III
26 Richard III
31 Richard III (film)

November
2 King Henry IV Part I
7 King Henry IV Part I
9 King Henry IV Part I; examination
14 MacBeth
16 MacBeth
21 MacBeth (film)
Requirements

10% participation and response paragraphs
20% examination
30% class presentation
40% final essay

Response Paragraphs
Write a one-page paragraph in which you 1) identify the most important passage in each act of the play (or the acts under discussion that day); and 2) explain why these passages are important to the play. Be prepared to discuss your paragraph in class. Please submit responses at the end of each class. Responses will be read but not graded or returned (you will receive credit for completing the assignments). Format: double-spaced, 1” margins, 12 point type, Times New Roman font. Handwritten or late responses will not be accepted.

Class Participation
Students are expected to contribute to discussion every day. In order to facilitate the exchange of ideas, students will be asked to 1) discuss their responses in class and, on occasion, 2) lead class discussion of assigned passages.

Class Presentation (4pp.)
Write an essay in which you analyze the play under discussion. Do not simply summarize the plot. Instead, offer an interpretation of the work and assess its value and importance. Be sure to support your argument with relevant citations from the text. Since you will be reading your essay like a conference paper, strive for a formal but accessible style of presentation. Please submit your presentation the day it is read in class (for grading). Format: double-spaced, 1” margins, 12 point Times New Roman font.

Examination
The final exam will ask you to identify passages, define key terms, and answer questions about Shakespearean studies in general.

Final Essay (12 pp.)
Write an essay in which you compare and contrast any two plays discussed in class. Do not simply summarize their plots. Instead, offer an interpretation of the works and assess their significance. Be sure to support your argument with relevant citations from the text. Format: double-spaced, 1” margins, 12 point Times New Roman font.

Policies
= attendance is mandatory (see attendance policy in the UW Undergraduate Handbook). Absences without a doctor’s note (or adequate explanation) will be penalized 2%.
= students are expected to be attentive and courteous. Gossiping, note-passing and other types of discourteous behaviour will not be tolerated.
= please do not use laptop computers in class