ENGLISH 362: SHAKESPEARE 1
Fall 2006

Instructor: Vikki Forsyth
Class Times: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 12:30 – 1:20
Location: Douglas Wright Engineering building room 3518

Calendar Descriptor
'Shakespeare 1': A study of the plays written before 1599-1600, excluding Julius Caesar

Brief Course Synopsis
The aim of this course is to examine the works Shakespeare produced in the first part of his career. Shakespeare's social and political concerns, his experiments in different genres and their limitations, his concern with stagecraft, and his development of techniques of characterisation will be some of the topics to be considered.

Texts for Study
The following plays will be considered in the order in which they are listed:

King John
Henry IV parts 1 and 2
Henry V
The Merry Wives of Windsor
The Comedy of Errors
The Merchant of Venice
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
A Midsummer Night's Dream
As You Like It
Love's Labours Lost
Titus Andronicus
Romeo and Juliet

As you will see from this list, the course is organised generically rather than chronologically. You may use any edition of these plays. Due to the number of set texts, you might find it more economical to buy a complete works rather than each play individually. The classes will be a mixture of lectures and discussions. Please bring your copy of the relevant play with you to every class, and be prepared to contribute to class discussions. Please also note that Monday the 9th of October is a holiday so there will be no class.

Assessment
The course is assessed by a midterm exam written in class time (20% of final grade), a final essay (40%), and an end-of-term exam (40%).

The Midterm will be held in class time on Wednesday the 18th of October. You will be required to write one essay in 50 minutes from a choice of two questions. These two questions will be chosen at random from the following four questions:

How does Shakespeare use techniques of comedy in his history plays?
Assess the importance of the idea of the family in Henry IV parts one and two.
Is it true to say that in Shakespeare's history plays history is dictated by personality, or (to put it another way) that the personalities of the protagonists play key roles in shaping their destinies and in the audience's sense of the history unfolding?
Do actions speak louder than words? Discuss Shakespeare's use of visually significant
stagecraft or symbolically significant action in any two of his history plays

As the two questions to appear in the midterm will be selected at random from this list of four, if you want to prepare for the essay in advance you will have to prepare three of these questions.

The Essay is due on Wednesday the 22nd of November. This should be about 2500 words in length, typed, double-spaced, and dealing closely with at least two plays. The list of essay topics will be distributed shortly.

'Green' submission of essays is welcome – that is, submission of essays that are printed double-sided or printed on paper already printed on the other side.

The Final Examination will be scheduled by the Registrar's Office for a slot during the official University examination timetable. It will last for two-and-a-half hours and have three parts. The first section will ask you to identify and comment upon a passage from a Tragedy (from a choice of passages). The second section will ask you to identify and comment upon two passages from Comedies or Histories (again from a choice of passages). The third section will ask you to write one essay from a selection of questions on Comedy or Tragedy. The class on the 17th of November will offer practice in exam technique (especially for identifying and commenting on passages); the last class on the 4th of December is also for students to ask questions about the exam.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the course, please ask. My office hours are Monday 1:30 – 3:30 and Wednesday 1:30 – 2:30.

Avoidance of Academic Offenses
Note on Avoidance of Academic Offenses: all students registered in courses at the University of Waterloo and its Federated University and Affiliated Colleges are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their actions. Students who are unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who need help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g. plagiarism, cheating), or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to policy #71, Student Academic Discipline, (www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). Students who believe they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve in accord with Policy #70, Student Grievance, (www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm).
Does Shakespeare have faults?

'But he redeemed his vices, with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised, than to be pardoned' (Ben Jonson, *Timber*, published posthumously (but Jonson died in 1637))

'Shakespeare with his excellencies has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit' (Samuel Johnson, *Preface* to his Shakespeare, 1765)

'By thus lowering Shakespear's genius to the standard of common-place invention, it was easy to show that his faults were as great as his beauties; for the excellence, which consists merely in a conformity to rules, is counterbalanced by the technical violation of them' (William Hazlitt, 'Characters of Shakespear's Plays', 1817)

'Others abide our question. Thou art free' (Mathew Arnold, 'Shakespeare', 1885)

Does Shakespeare have faults? Can you think of any aspects of his work that you do not like, or find inartistic? After you have read through this handout, do you think the criticisms offered here are fair, or do you agree with Hazlitt and Arnold that Shakespeare manages to be brilliant in spite of breaking critical rules, and is in fact above criticism?

Some people think he was a lazy writer:

'I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, (what soever he penn'd) he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, would he had blotted a thousand.' (Ben Jonson, *Timber*)

'The plots are often so loosely formed, that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued, that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design' (Samuel Johnson, *Preface*)

With reference to Shakespeare's typical fifth acts, which he considered exceptionally lazy, Johnson commented that 'he shortened the labour to snatch the profit' (*Preface*)

Do you think Johnson has a point in his criticism, or has he completely missed the point of Shakespeare's dramaturgy?

Some people think his plots are strained and inappropriate:

Nahum Tate, who rewrote *King Lear* in the Restoration period so that Cordelia does not die at the end, objects that in the original Shakespeare 'incumbred the stage with dead bodies, which conduct makes many Tragedies conclude with unseasonable jests' (*Preface* to his *King Lear*, 1681)

Charlotte Lennox, a friend of Dr. Johnson's, argued that Shakespeare did not always choose his subject material very well, as in this comment on *Measure for Measure*: 'That Shakespeare made a wrong choice of his subject, since he was resolved to torture it into a
Comedy, appears by the low Contrivance, absurd Intrigue, and improbable Incidents, he was obliged to introduce, in order to bring about three or four Weddings, instead of one good Beheading, which was the Consequence naturally expected' *(Shakespeare Illustrated*, 1753)

Are these criticisms valid, or do Tate and Lennox just not understand the conventions of the Elizabethan stage? Is it fair to consider a play successful because it pleased audiences in its own time (as Measure for Measure and Lear did), or should it also satisfy our own ideas of what makes a good play? What happens when our ideas differ from those of the original audience?

**Some people think Shakespeare is a poet:**

'Shakespeare possessed the chief, if not every, requisite of a poet – deep feeling and exquisite sense of beauty, both as exhibited to the eye in the combinations of form, and to the ear in sweet and appropriate melody' *(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetry, the Drama, and Shakespeare*, 1818)

Do you agree with Coleridge that Shakespeare possesses these qualities?

Unlike Coleridge here, Tate, Lennox and Johnson, in their criticism of Shakespeare's plots, are thinking about the effect of plays in the theatre. Do you think it is better to think of Shakespeare as a dramatist or as a poet? Why?

**Dr Johnson famously thought that Shakespeare depicted human nature:**

'Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. . . *Shakespeare* is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour of manners and of life' *(Preface)*

Do you agree with Johnson? Since the events he depicts are clearly larger-than-life in may cases, in what sense can Shakespeare be thought of as holding the mirror up to life?

**Some people think he was not well educated:**

Ben Jonson, in his commendatory poem in the First Folio of Shakespeare's works, writes that Shakespeare had 'small Latin, and less Greek'.

But Mathew Arnold turns this into a virtue: 'Self - school’d, self - scann’d, self - honour’d, self - secure' *(‘Shakespeare’)*

Does it matter that Shakespeare was not as well educated as most other Renaissance writers? Might this be, as Arnold suggests, a positive virtue in Shakespeare?