

ENG 312

Fall 2007

STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE: The First Folio

Reading Assignments

Aug	28	Introduction; Looking for Lear
Sep	4	King Lear
	11	King Lear
	18	Looking for Richard: Richard III
	25	Richard III
Oct	2	Romeo and Juliet
	9	The Winter of Our Discontent (Midterm)
	16	The Fall of Our Content
	23	The Taming of the Shrew
	30	Hamlet on Halloween E'en
Nov	6	Hamlet
	13	Project Preparation/Sonnets
	20	A Midsummer Night's Dream
	27	TBA
Dec	4	Projects/Conclusions (Hannukkah)
	14 (Friday)	All's Well That Ends Well—and Vice Versa (Final) 2 - 4

Important Stuff

Grades

Paper I (Sep 25) 20%; Midterm (Oct 9) 20%; Paper II (Nov 20) 20%;
Projects, Participation, Briefs 20%; Final (May 8) 20%.

Author, Author

Okay, first things first. So who really wrote the plays? This question is a non-starter. Almost no reputable scholar who has examined the evidence objectively believes that anyone other than William Shakespeare, a pretty strange young man from the small but important town of Stratford, wrote most of the plays and poems attributed to him. (Some of the minor work is in dispute and some lines in a few plays may be the result of buddies or actors slipping something in while Will was at the pub.) In fact, it wasn't until the middle of the nineteenth century, almost two and a half centuries after his death, that anyone began suggesting that someone other than Will Shakespeare was the real author. All contemporary evidence points to him. Moreover, the distinctive quality of most of the plays, a quality that separates them from almost everything else that has been written, makes it pretty clear that the same person wrote all this and that that person's style doesn't really appear in the work of anyone else during the Renaissance. (Incidentally, the evidence marshaled against Shakespeare's authorship gets pretty silly. The character of Romeo, for example, is used as evidence that the play was written by the Earl of Oxford at Rome. [Rom E.O. Get it?] Or the use of the word *honorificabilitudinitatibus* in *Love's Labours Lost* becomes a code. When unscrambled, the code spells out "hi ludi tuiti sibi, F. Bacono" or "these plays from themselves come from F. Bacon" [i.e., the great Elizabethan philosopher and Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon]. Of course, such evidence inevitably proves that Bacon also wrote Dante's *Divine Comedy* almost three hundred years earlier, since it includes the word.) If you really like conspiracy theories, then the best thing to believe is that Shakespeare's first name was really Liam, that he was born in Ireland, and that he loved St. Patrick's Day.

Objectives

If you complete all assignments with diligence, intelligence, an open mind, and a sense of humor in Studies in Shakespeare, by the end of the term you should be able (1) to discuss the ways Shakespeare used language; (2) to compare and contrast Shakespeare's use of such dramatic genres as comedy, tragedy, and history; (3) to evaluate characterization in Shakespeare's plays; and (4) to reach a tentative conclusion about the truth of Harold Bloom's argument that Shakespeare is both the best and most influential writer in history.

Texts

Although the English Department is currently using the Bevington edition available in the bookstore, you may certainly use any other reasonable edition. *Shakespeare for Dummies*, for example, would not be a reasonable edition. (In fact, it's not even an edition.)

Papers

Any paper of fewer than five to eight pages probably does not have a very promising idea behind it. Papers should focus on a literary--not a biographical--issue (i.e., language, characterization, theme, style, structure). You should assume that your paper's reader is someone who has read the play and is nearly as intelligent as you. Therefore, there is no reason to paraphrase (i.e., retell the story). Your goal is to help your reader gain deeper insight into the play. Ideally, papers will not repeat discussions we have in class, unless you do so to show how extraordinarily misguided the class's discussion was. Papers will be graded primarily on five bases: (1) the interest, freshness, and relevance of the paper's central idea (i.e., thesis); (2) the thoroughness and rigor of the paper's development; (3) the adequacy and relevance of the supporting detail; (4) the logic and coherence of the paper's organization; and (5) the attention paid to editing out errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Attendance

What could be more important than showing up to discuss Shakespeare's plays? If you find these works boring, uninteresting, or mediocre, you might want to reconsider the whole idea of a college degree. Auto mechanics and plumbers make excellent money and provide a real service to their communities. If you miss class for any--any--reason (i.e., lunch with W, elevation to cardinal in my church, a flight to Cleveland to break up your ex-beau's wedding), you are responsible for all material distributed during that class, all information provided during that class, and any assignments made during that class.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

Don't cheat. Remember Macbeth did and look where it got him. And remember that you took an academic honor pledge.

Attitude

Get enough sleep, eat breakfast, don't whine, and don't frivol. Come to class prepared to discuss the readings. I reserve the right to call on anyone in class to read lines or offer an opinion (i.e., an informed opinion) on issues we're discussing. I believe that you have a moral and intellectual responsibility to yourself and your colleagues to question any material you find confusing. Remember, however, that some ideas are innately complex or paradoxical or confusing. The key is to recognize and define the nature of that complexity, paradox, and confusion. And remember that Shakespeare is no Clive Cussler.

Briefs

A brief is precisely that: a one-page (i.e., brief) reaction/response paper to the week's readings or class conversations. It can be that brilliant idea that popped up right after class as you were driving home or an insight you have during your reading. You must submit at least ten and no more than one each week. At least one brief must be your attempt to write Shakespearean dialogue in blank verse. Briefs may also be creative responses to the texts (e.g., excerpts from Juliet's diary, a letter from Lear to Cordelia on her tenth birthday, or a love letter from Richard III).

Projects

As part of a small group, you will prepare one of the plays we are not reading this term for presentation to the class on May 25. The presentations will be judged by your peers—and by me—on your group's creativity and on your ability to interest us in the play. You will also do a writing or visual project on *King Lear*.

Parent Calls

Call your folks at least once a week.

Grandparents Warning

Social scientists have found compelling correlations between the dates assignments are due and the health of grandparents. You might want to warn your grandparents as early as possible about the days when you are expected to take exams or submit papers so that they can prepare themselves for serious health crises.

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