

English 363

Jonathan Burton, ENGL 363, Fall 2006, High School Shakespeare

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English 363W: High School Shakespeare

Course Summary

According to the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature, four of the top ten books taught in U.S. public high schools are by Shakespeare. No other author has more than one in the top 25. In this course, we will interrogate the American high school Shakespeare canon. Beginning with *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*, we will consider how and why certain works have become entrenched in the American education system, the effects of these choices, and the manner in which they have influenced pedagogy. Next we will look at two plays (*Merchant of Venice*, *King John*) that were once considered central to American literary education but have since been removed from American high school programs of study. We will consider what functions they played in 19th century American culture and why they have since been eclipsed by the four tragedies listed above. Finally, we will turn to two works that are almost never taught in high school (*As You Like It*, *Troilus and Cressida*), exploring how these plays might radically remake the high school students' (and hence Americans') notions about Shakespeare generally.

Required Texts

- Greenbatt, et. al., *The Norton Shakespeare*
- Critical essays distributed by the instructor

Assignments and Grading

1-page critical responses (x3) 15%
5-page paper on Shakespeare in American High Schools 20%
5-page paper on Shakespeare in the McGuffey Reader 20%
Performance and 3-page Review 20%
6-page paper on Shakespeare, the Movie 20%
Peer Editing/Draft Submission 5%

Course Goals

Students will be able to:

- make comparisons and contrasts between the works we read
- assess the impact of socio-historical contexts on literary works and evaluate plays within their historical and cultural contexts, in order to connect the drama with other areas of knowledge
- identify and produce performative interpretations of dramatic works
- draft and edit critical essays so that they are clear, focused, and well developed
- write critical essays demonstrative of the conventions of literary criticism and particularly analyzing and incorporating secondary sources.

Schedule

August

22 Introduction

24 Romeo and Juliet 2.2

29 Romeo and Juliet 4.3

31 Romeo and Juliet; Critical Response #1: J. Goldberg, "Romeo and Juliet's Open R's"

September

05 Julius Caesar 2.4

07 Julius Caesar 4.1

12 Julius Caesar; Critical Response #2: A. Sinfield, "Theaters of War"

14 Macbeth 2.3

19 Macbeth 4.3

21 Macbeth; Critical Response #3: J. Adelman, "Escaping the Matrix"

26 Hamlet 2.1

28 Hamlet 3.2

October

03 Hamlet; W.J.T. Mitchell, "Canon"

05 Peer Editing

10 Paper #1 Due

12 Merchant of Venice 2.8

17 Merchant of Venice 3.5

19 Merchant of Venice; Performance 5.1. 108-306

24 King John 2.2

26 King John 3.4

31 King John; L. Levine, "William Shakespeare in America"

November

02 Peer Editing

09 Paper #2 Due; As You Like It 2.7

14 As You Like It 4.2

16 As You Like It; Performance 4.3
28 Troilus & Cressida 2.3
30 Troilus & Cressida 4.5

December **05** Troilus & Cressida; Performance 3.1
07 Final Papers

Critical Responses

The first 3 written assignments in this course are responses to a critical essay on the play under discussion. In a brief essay of 500-750 words, you are to respond to an assigned critical essay circulated by the instructor.

Peer Editing

For papers #1 and 2, each student is required to come to class with a completed draft of his/her paper on the assigned editing dates. Failure to attend with a completed draft of the required length will result in the loss of a full letter grade on the final draft. Peer editing will involve worksheets with guiding questions distributed by the instructor. During this time, the instructor will also meet individually with each student.

Paper #1: Shakespeare in American High Schools

Drawing on W.J.T. Mitchell's discussion of canons, evaluate the prevailing high school Shakespeare canon of Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet. What forces do you think contributed to the formation of this canon of four tragedies? What cultural and/or political purposes does the canon serve? Is this necessarily a conservative canon? What range of ideas about "great works" or about Shakespeare's works might be drawn from these plays? Finally, does this strike you as a well-chosen or appropriate canon? Why, or why not? In responding to these questions, you should refer to (and offer close readings of) particular moments from the plays as well as our reading of secondary criticism.

Paper #2: Shakespeare in the McGuffey Reader

Read the excerpts from King John and The Merchant of Venice in the 1857 McGuffey's New Fifth Eclectic Reader (download available at <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/nietz>). Considering closely McGuffey's selections and editorial revisions, discuss why McGuffey chose these particular texts. Bearing in mind that these excerpts first appeared in an 1843 McGuffey reader, discuss how cultural contexts illuminate McGuffey's editing. How do his excerpts represent the individual plays, and what general impressions do they seek to give of Shakespearean drama? Finally, consider why these plays are no longer part of the high school Shakespeare canon. For this last question, consider "The Shakespeare File," published by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. What does this document suggest to you about the relationship between McGuffey's decision to include these plays and later decisions to exclude them?

In-Class Performances and Reviews

Working in groups, all students will present original, rehearsed interpretations of selected scenes from the plays we are reading. One week following your performance you will turn in a 3-page “review” of your performance considering the project in terms of your troupe’s collaboration with Shakespeare’s text. Reviews should be written in the third person-style of professional theater reviews and concentrate on how the scene works with the text, developing specific elements and/or muting others. Identify in particular decisions in terms of blocking, casting, costuming, gestures or intonation that enabled the production to convey certain ideas. In addition, you may evaluate the success of the production in achieving those ends.

Final Paper: High School Shakespeare, the Movie:

In recent film adaptations, a number of Shakespeare’s films (e.g., *Othello*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Twelfth Night*) have been re-set in American high schools. For your final paper, describe a high school adaptation of either *As You Like It* or *Troilus and Cressida*. Discuss how and to what ends your adaptation would draw on Shakespeare’s play. What points would you seek to make about the play, about Shakespearean drama, and/or about American culture. Describe any important cuts of lines, characters or scenes, and detail the on-screen action of at least one crucial scene, discussing how particular lines would be made to resonate with their new setting. In addition each paper should include as an appendix one of the following: (A) liner notes to your film’s soundtrack (of at least 10 songs) explaining where each song would be played and why (and accompanied by the soundtrack itself burned onto a disk); or (B) a complete fantasy cast, with at least 10 of your casting decisions justified with reference to specific points in the play/film.

Grading Criteria

A (90-100) – Excellent work; the assignments for this course have been completed in a proficient and timely manner. The written assignments are clearly organized, choose compelling evidence to substantiate the analysis, and engage with the subject at hand in a thoughtful and thought-provoking manner. Written work requires no substantive or stylistic revisions.

B (80-89) – Good work; the assignments for the course have been completed in a proficient and timely manner. The written assignments show substantial engagement with the subject at hand, but the analysis is either partially incomplete, invoking weak evidence, or manifests some difficulty with organization. Written work requires some substantive revisions, but few or no stylistic ones.

C (70-79) – Average work; the assignments for the course have been completed, but not necessarily in a proficient or timely manner. The written assignments show effort by the student, but the analysis is incomplete, uses inappropriate evidence (or a lack of evidence), or evidences a significant difficulty with organization. Written work requires significant substantive or stylistic revisions.

D (60-69) – Less than average; the assignments for the course have not been completed in a proficient or timely manner. The written assignments show a lack of effort on the part of the student and/or a lack of engagement with the assignments and subject matter of the course.

Written assignments lack analysis, evidence, and organization; extensive substantive and stylistic revisions are necessary.

F (<60) – Inadequate work; the assignments for the course have not been completed. Written assignments, when submitted, show a significant lack of effort on the part of the student, and a lack of engagement with the assignments and subject matter of the course. Such work is marked by the absence of analysis, evidence, and organization; engagement with the course materials is necessary before revisions are even possible.

Course Policies

1. Attendance: You are granted a maximum of three absences during the course of the semester. Final grades will be reduced by 3% for each additional absence, and 3 tardies are counted as an absence. A perfect attendance record will earn an additional 3% on the final grade.
2. Paper Submission: All papers are to be typed, double-spaced with standard one-inch margins in 12-point Times Roman. Papers should reflect careful reading and thinking about your subject. DO NOT summarize the plot of a work, or merely rephrase your class notes in your papers.
3. Late submissions will receive a lower grade unless the student has a documented reason (such as illness, familial emergency) for the lateness. An essay that would normally earn an “A” will receive an A- if it is one day (not one class) late, a B+ if it is two days late, etc. An assignment is not considered submitted until it is in my hands.
4. Revision: Papers that have gone through peer editing and final drafting are eligible for a final re-write in response to the instructor’s comments. Students who wish to complete such revisions must notify the instructor within one week of the paper’s return and submit the revision within two weeks of the paper’s return.

Scholastic Honesty

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course and will result in failure. Please note the University definition of plagiarism, as explained in the Undergraduate Catalog: “To take or pass off as one’s own the ideas, writings, artistic products, etc. of someone else; for example, submitting, without appropriate acknowledgment, a report, notebook, speech, outline theme, thesis, dissertation, or other written, visual, or oral material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others, whether such source is published, including (but not limited to) another individual’s academic composition, compilation, or other product, or commercially prepared paper.” If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, collaborative projects, documentation of sources, or related issues, please feel free to ask.

Learning Environment

WVU is committed to social justice. I support that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestion as to how to further such a positive

and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

Performance Sign-Up Sheet

Merchant of Venice (10/19)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

As You Like It (11/16)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

Troilus and Cressida (12/5)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Critical Response #1: Jonathan Goldberg, “Romeo and Juliet’s Open R’s”

After carefully reading Jonathan Goldberg’s essay on Romeo and Juliet, prepare a brief essay of 500 to 750 words assessing Goldberg’s argument. Include a very brief (i.e., 4-sentence) summary of the argument before proceeding to evaluate particular points and/or terms of the argument. Be sure to turn to specific points/lines within both the article and the play.

Consider the following prompts (Do not attempt to answer all of these questions, but do engage with at least two.):

- To what extent do you agree with Goldberg? Why?
- What new possibilities does Goldberg's argument enable?
- How might you expand upon Goldberg's argument?
- Does anything in the play contradict or complicate Goldberg's argument?
- Are there specific terms within Goldberg's argument that you find particularly useful or problematic?

Grading for this assignment will be determined by the following rubric:

Requirements

- A - Complies with or exceeds specified requirements in terms of length and content
- B - Complies with all or most of the specified requirements in terms of length and content
- C - Neglects to fulfill some of the specified requirements either in regard to length and/or content
- D - Neglects to fulfill a substantial proportion of the requirements in regard to length and/or content
- F - Fails to fulfill the specified requirements in regard to length and/or content

Passage Analysis

- A - Supports thoughtful, original analysis with textual evidence
- B - Offers limited analysis with textual evidence; or thoughtful analysis with no textual evidence
- C - Offers vague or illogical analysis; or makes unsupported claims or claims contradicted by the reading(s)
- D - Summarizes the argument and/or plot points
- F - Offers only a flawed summary of the article and/or plot points

Argumentation

- A - Moves through a logical, significant, and linear thesis-based argument
- B - Gestures toward and partially sustains a significant thesis-based argument
- C - Offers an obvious or illogical argument
- D - Fails to sustain a larger argument
- F - Offers no larger argument or conclusion

Conclusions

- A - Draws an innovative conclusion, synthesizing earlier ideas and offering a larger argument
- B - Draws a conclusion that makes connections between passages
- C - Draws a conclusion that does not repeat earlier analysis
- D - Draws only redundant conclusions
- F - Offers no conclusion

Mechanics

- A - Features clear, sophisticated, and grammatically correct prose and organizing topic sentences
- B - Features clear prose with organizing topic sentences and minimal grammatical errors

C - Features prose with frequent grammatical errors, inappropriate style, and/or poor organization

D - Features prose that lacks clarity due to frequent grammatical errors and/or poor organization

F - Features disorganized prose with frequent grammatical errors