

Shakespeare and Popular Culture

ENGL-UA 412.001
MEDI-UA 412.001
TWR, 3:30-5:40pm
25 West 4th, Room C-8

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Office: 244 Greene, Room 710
Office Hours: Tuesday, 5:40-7:00pm and by appointment

Course Description:

This course investigates the complex and reciprocal relationship between Shakespeare and popular culture from the sixteenth century to the present. We'll closely examine key people, institutions, events, and media that have shaped how popular audiences have encountered Shakespeare over the years, from the publication of the First Folio to the nineteenth century's spectacular stage productions to the influential film interpretations of the twentieth. In addition, we'll consider how Shakespeare responded to popular culture through his works, along with how and to what purposes those works continue to be refigured.

As we move through periods and media, we'll explore a number of approaches to the study of Shakespeare's plays and poems, combining questions of literary studies, book history, cultural history, and the digital humanities with formal literary analysis. Topics and themes to be discussed include the circulation, adaptation, and appropriation of Shakespeare's plays, the interpretive decisions behind textual editing, the relationship between "high" and "low" culture, the mass market, national identity, politics, and gender.

Required Texts:

Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. Gail Kern Paster and Skiles Howard. Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.
----. *Hamlet*. Ed. Robert S. Miola. New York: Norton, 2011.
----. *Henry V*. Ed. James D. Mardock. U of Victoria: Internet Shakespeare Editions, 2015.
(available online—no hard copy required)
----. *Macbeth*. Ed. Robert S. Miola. New York: Norton, 2013.
----. *The Tempest*. Ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman. New York: Norton, 2003.
Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Grove Press, 1971.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

	Participation	20%
Sun., Jul. 19, 5pm	Paper 1: Close Reading	10%
Thurs., Jul. 30	Midterm exam	15%
Sun., Aug. 2, 5pm	Paper 2: Comparative Argument	15%
Thurs., Aug. 13	Final exam	20%
Sun., Aug. 16, 5pm	Paper 3: Cultural Analysis	20%

Participation

Attendance: Because we're covering a lot of material in a short amount of time, it's important that you attend every session. Each unexcused absence reduces your participation grade by one-third of a letter grade. More than three unexcused absences results in failure of the course. Three instances of tardiness count as an absence.

Reading and discussion: You should come to class with your book, and you should be prepared to participate in discussion about the assigned reading.

Weekly posts: You'll be expected to post by 10:00 p.m. each Monday a response to that week's assigned play. Your response should identify and discuss how the play's meaning is being deployed through a related internet meme.

Dramatic reading: During our study of *Macbeth*, you'll be asked to develop with a small group an interpretive reading of a passage, to be performed in class on Thursday, August 6.

Written Assignments

Style and format: Papers should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in 12-point Times font, with pages numbered and your last name on every page.

Late assignments: will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade for each day late.

Academic integrity: Words and ideas that come from another person must be cited in your writing. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, which will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. Please consult nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html.

Paper 1 Close Reading (3-4 pages): Write an essay in which you characterize the import of a passage from *Hamlet*, explaining how that import is informed by the passage's diction, structure, imagery, semantics, and/or context. Your paper should advance an easily-articulated thesis that draws on evidence from the text and to which each part of your paper contributes.

Paper 2 Comparative Argument (4-5 pages): Choose a film adaptation of one of our readings and consider how the director treats a particular element from the text (a scene, a character, an aspect of the plot, etc.). Discuss how Shakespeare represents this element, then discuss how the director interprets it. In other words, your essay should offer a comparative close reading of a passage from the play and the corresponding moment or element in the adaptation. The goal is not to write a review but to move between play and adaptation, reflecting on the relative symbolic effectiveness of their strategies in representing your chosen element.

Paper 3 Cultural Analysis (5-6 pages): Explore the adoption of one of Shakespeare's characters or plays in contemporary culture (an advertisement, a television show, a young adult novel, etc.). Your essay should examine the relationship between the way the play produces meaning and the larger cultural uses to which that meaning is being drawn on or complicated through its contemporary instantiation. Aim to provide close readings of both specific passages from your chosen play and of the cultural object you're examining, leading back to questions of how, to what purpose, and with what effect Shakespeare's reputation is being sustained.

Resources:

In addition to my office hours, you may find general writing assistance at the Writing Center: nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html.

For physical, mental and emotional health issues, the NYU Student Health Center and Wellness Exchange are available to you: nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/student-health-center.html and nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/wellness-exchange.html.

Week 1—Elite versus Middling Sorts: Theater and Society in Shakespeare’s Time

- Tues., Jul. 7 Introductions and course overview
- Wed., Jul. 8 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (ca. 1595)
- Thurs., Jul. 9 From the Bedford edition of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:
 “Popular Festivals and Court Celebrations,” p. 89-125
 “Fairy Belief” and selections, p. 307-324

Week 2—From Stage to Page (And Back Again): Shakespeare in Print

- Tues., Jul. 14 *Hamlet* (ca. 1601)
- Wed., Jul. 15 Field trip: Fales Library (Bobst Library, 3rd floor)

 Ben Jonson, “[Preface to the First Folio]” (1623)*

 From the Norton edition of *Hamlet*:
 Appendix 1 and 2, p. 140-149
- Thurs., Jul. 16 “The Actors’ Gallery,” p. 153-163

 Laurie Osborne, “Narration and Staging in *Hamlet* and its Afternovels,” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, p. 114-133 (2007)*
- Sun., Jul. 19 Close Reading due 5pm

Week 3—Authoring Shakespeare, Authoring Nation

- Tues., Jul. 21 *The Tempest* (ca. 1610-11)
- Wed., Jul. 22 From the Norton edition of *The Tempest*:
 Nicholas Rowe, “The Magic of *The Tempest*,” p. 119-121 (1709)
 Lytton Strachey, “Shakespeare’s Final Period,” p. 134-137 (1922)

 Nicola J. Watson, “Shakespeare on the Tourist Trail,” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, p. 199-226 (2007)*
- Thurs., July 23 From the Norton edition of *The Tempest*:
 Robert and William Brough, [*Raising the Wind*], p. 315-321 (1848)
 Robert Browning, “Caliban upon Setebos,” p. 335-336 (1864)
 George Lamming, “A Monster, a Child,” p. 148-168 (1960)
 Peter Hulme, “Prospero and Caliban,” p. 233-249 (1986)

Week 4—Celebrity, Culture, and Canon: Channeling the Bard, Part I

- Tues., Jul. 28 Midterm exam (take-home, open-book)
- Wed., Jul. 29 Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* (1966)
Guest lecture by Christina Squitieri
- Thurs., Jul. 30 Film viewing for Comparative Paper
- Douglas Lanier, “Recasting the Plays: Homage, Adaptation, Parody,”
Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture, p. 82-109 (2002)*
- Sun., Aug. 2 Comparative Paper due 5pm

Week 5—Celebrity, Culture, and Canon: Channeling the Bard, Part II

- Tues., Aug. 4 *Macbeth* (ca. 1606)
- Wed., Aug. 5 From the Norton edition of *Macbeth*:
Samuel Johnson, *Miscellaneous Observations*, p. 227-232 (1745)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “[On *Macbeth*],” p. 233-235 (1819)
Thomas De Quincey, “On Knocking at the Gate,” p. 235-238 (1823)
Harry Levin, “Two Scenes from *Macbeth*,” p. 238-255 (1982)
Stephen Orgell, “Macbeth and the Antic Round,” p. 255-270 (1999)
- Thurs., Aug. 6 David Garrick, “Letter,” p. 87-88 (1762)
Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies*, p. 88-90 (1783)
Edwin Forrest, “Letters,” p. 98-99 (1849, 1860)
William Macready, *Reminiscences*, p. 99-105 (1888)
- Lawrence Levine, “William Shakespeare and the American People,”
American Historical Review 89, p. 34-66 (1984)*

Week 6—Shakespeare on Screen

- Tues., Aug. 11 online edition of *Henry V* (ca. 1599)
- Wed., Aug. 12 *Henry V*, dir. Kenneth Branagh (1989)
- W. B. Worthen, “Performing Shakespeare in Digital Culture,” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, p. 227-247 (2007)*
- Thurs., Aug. 13 Final exam (in class)
- Sun., Aug. 16 Cultural Analysis due 5pm