Course title: Shakespeare in Performance (August 2003)

Course number: INGL 3165

Instructor: Professor Joan McMurray

Texts:

**BBC Shakespeare Plays** (available in Lázaro Library FILMOTECA)
In class films and videos


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Course description:

Shakespeare in Performance is a study film and video versions of the poet’s plays. The main goal is to teach students how to judge the quality of modern performances; films and videos are used simply because we do not have access to live performances. Some of the films on the syllabus are adaptations; others are complete versions which follow the established texts of the plays. In each film students will examine critically and objectively the speeches, gestures, costumes, and appearance of the actors, the scenery created for the production, the use of audio and visual devices such as music, and sound effects, visual representations based on passages from the plays (i.e., “word pictures”), and methods used to develop the story.

From what we know about Shakespeare’s life, he was totally committed to the stage and his work as a playwright. As a young man he became an actor, in later life he was part owner of a theatre and an active member of the most important performing companies in the 16th and 17th centuries, (The Lord Chamberlain’s Company and later The King’s Players). And, most important for us, he was a writer of comedies, tragedies, histories, and tragi-comedies for immediate performance by his company. He did not, however, leave separate writings about his profession, and for this information we must rely on passages from the plays themselves. Passages in **Hamlet**, for example, which shed light on the theater and performance are Polonius’ list of popular dramatic forms (2.2.385-390), Hamlet’s advice to group of actors (3.2.1-40), his description of plays as “abstracts of the time” (2.2.508-510), and various accounts of the upper and lower class audiences who frequented the theater. Another source is at the beginning of **Henry V** where the character of prologue apologizes for the limitations of the stage and thus describes the physical structure of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre. We will use the material from Shakespeare’s
plays to measure how modern performances conform to, modify, or ignore Shakespeare’s informal rules.

The main “text” for Shakespeare in Performance is the BBC Shakespeare Plays video collection available in Lázaro Library’s FILMOTECA. Unfortunately the library has limited facilities for viewing the videos, but students are allowed overnight check-out privileges. Try to organize groups with your classmates to share the videos. The place you select to view the material should allow you to re-wind sections for review and critical interpretation. Books available on reserve in the Richardson Seminar Room are *The BBC Shakespeare Plays: Making the Televised Canon* (1991) by Susan Willis and *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997) with texts edited by leading American and British scholars. While the materials used the course are filmed versions of the plays, students are responsible for knowing the characters, setting, stories, and dramatic structures. In other words, you do not have to read the plays word for word in the original language. I will, however, hand out a list of key passages from each play which will be read for meaning and appreciation.

The films selected for analysis range from early 20th century classics such as Lawrence Olivier’s 1954 *Hamlet* and *Henry V* and modern versions such as Kenneth Branagh’s 1989 *Henry V*, 1993 *Much Ado About Nothing*, and 1999 *Hamlet*. In some instances the class will view several versions of a single scene and be asked to write comparative essays about them.

Students are required to attend class, prepare assignments as scheduled, and take all quizzes, tests, and examinations. Unannounced quizzes will be given perhaps on a weekly basis and are a means of keeping the class on the right track and testing students’ understanding of the material. If I find that certain topics, artistic forms, or individual passages are universally difficult or obscure, I can devote additional time in class to them. Grades will be determined by class participation, quizzes, and written examinations. Students missing three or more classes will have their grades lowered and should probably drop the class.

The professor is willing to make modifications necessary to comply with La Ley de Servicios Educativos Integrales para Personas con Impedimentos (Ley 51 del 7 de junio de 1996). These modifications may include changes in the physical facilities, creation of special materials, or revision of evaluation methods. The disabled student is required to identify his/her disability during the registration period or in the first class, and, after becoming familiar with the syllabus and course requirements, suggest the appropriate modifications to the professor.
SCHEDULE FOR THE FIRST FOUR WEEKS OF CLASS.

• AUG. 13—lst class
• Week #1:

• Week #2: Aug. 25—*The Comedy of Errors* **
• Week #3:
  Sept. 1—Labor Day
• Week #4:
  Sept. 8—*The Taming of the Shrew* **
• Week #5, Sept. 15—*Titus Andronicus* (assignment)
• Week #6, Sept. 22—*Titus Andronicus* —

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (assignments)

• Week #7, Sept. 29—*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*
• Week #8: Oct. 6—*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* —

*Julius Caesar* (assignment)

• Week #9: Oct. 13—Columbus Day
• Week #10: Oct. 20—*Julius Caesar* —
• Week #11: Oct. 27—*Julius Caesar* —
• Week #12:
  Nov. 3—*Henry V* [Read summaries and selected passages from *Richard II* and the *Henry IV* plays.]
• Week #13: Nov. 10—*Henry V* (assignment)
• Week #14: Nov. 17—*Henry V* —
• Week #15: Nov. 24—*Henry V* —

*Hamlet* (assignments)

Nov. 27—Thanksgiving

• Week #16: Dec. 1—*Hamlet* —
• Week #17: Dec. 8—*Hamlet* —
• Week #18: Dec. 15—last class

18 weeks