(I ordered very cheap editions [most are $3.45] of these plays, and they are available in the bookstore.)

Recommended Texts: The Riverside Shakespeare
Shakespeare’s English Kings, Peter Saccio
The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare, Russ McDonald
(Saccio and McDonald are available in the bookstore)

Perspectives

In an address delivered in 1976 Alistair Cooke called Shakespeare “the king of the foxes.” The label derives from an ancient saying: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing”–a saying Sir Isaiah Berlin elaborated on to distinguish between those “who relate everything to a single central vision” (hedgehogs like Plato, Dante, Dostoevsky) and those “who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory . . . seizing upon a vast variety of those who expect clear messages expressed systematically in the plays, for “the king of foxes” fills his plays with “leaping life,” in Joan Rees’s words, and exploits the English language in an extraordinary way. Thus no one formula exists on how to read a Shakespeare play; no one critical method will mine all the riches. How then does one approach these works? In the initial reading (note that “initial” implies reading the works more than once), strive to achieve a sense of the play as a whole: its main lines of action and the interrelationships of its characters. Are you clear as to what happens and why it happens as it does? If not, subsequent readings will allow you to refine your understanding of interrelationships among the characters, discern subtleties in structure, identify image patterns, note stylistic variations along with other elements.

As you read and re-read the plays, be especially alert to these considerations: (1) Shakespeare wrote plays–not sermons, editorials, or textbooks. Therefore, looking for the meaning of a play in one particular passage is futile. Also dangerous is assuming that any character’s viewpoint represents Shakespeare’s. Another factor that one must recognize about plays is that words are only part of any play; silences and numerous non-verbal dramatic devices contribute crucially to our perceptions and understanding. (2) Shakespeare wrote plays in accordance the dramatic and theatrical conventions of his time. What may appear absurd or unrealistic often becomes clear with reference to those conventions. Regardless of whether you have an Elizabethan or modern stage in mind, try to visualize each scene on stage as you read. These works are not novels; they beg for living, breathing actors to infuse them with life. (3) Shakespeare’s language is highly
charged. The challenge comes not so much from encountering and trying to grasp archaic words and constructions (many of which come clear through repetition) but from being able to respond to language that has more resonance than we are accustomed to in our daily lives. Granted, Shakespeare’s language grows more remote to us with each passing year, but through reading the plays (not Cliff’s Notes), re-reading, and envisioning the action, we develop a familiarity with that language. Keep in mind as well the number of Shakespeare films that have appeared in recent years: Kenneth Branagh’s Henry V, Much Ado about Nothing, Hamlet, Love’s Labor’s Lost; Franco Zeffirelli’s Hamlet with Mel Gibson (not to mention the older Romeo and Juliet and the Burton-Taylor Shrew); Lawrence Fishburn’s Othello; Al Pacino’s Looking for Richard; Trevor Nunn’s Twelfth Night; Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo+Juliet; A Midsummer Night’s Dream with Callista Flockhart; and Hamlet (again!) with Ethan Hawke; Julie Taymor’s stunningly brilliant Titus with Anthony Hopkins (sort of a Mad Max-meets-Shakespeare-as-directed-by-Federico Fellini), Billy Morrissette’s Scotland, PA (a comic take on Macbeth), the not very highly praised O, and the witty and delightful Shakespeare in Love—the mind boggles. While Shakespeare may be dead (and he was Newsweek’s “Dead White Male of the Year” for 1997), his works remain alive and well and if not playing at a multiplex near you at least on your video store’s shelf.

Under study this term

Shakespeare wrote ten plays that we refer to as English history plays. Of them the two tetralogies—1, 2, 3 Henry VI; Richard III; and Richard II; 1, 2 Henry IV; Henry V—command the majority of attention from Shakespeare scholars (the remaining two are the early King John and the late Henry VIII). These tetralogies constitute the course of study this term. All plays must be read in their entirety in their early modern English prior to the first day they are under discussion. Relying solely on prose synopses will diminish your appreciation of Shakespeare’s works and severely weaken your ability to do well on tests. Cliff’s Notes fails to serve as authorized text. You must bring the playtext with you to class for each day a play is under discussion. Failure to do so diminishes your ability to perform well on tests as does failing to take notes during lecture/discussion.

Requirements

Written work:

Papers: Students will submit two short six-ten page analytical/explication papers, one prior to midterm and a second due toward the end of the term. Please note that the five-paragraph essay with its tripartite A, B, C thesis that you wrote in freshman English classes does not constitute academic discourse at the senior level and is wholly unacceptable (see Realities below). Students need to develop their theses for the papers.

I make suggestions throughout the course as to possible areas for development, but I do not assign topic/theses. Paper grades constitute 35% of the final grade.

Response papers: In addition, for each play under study students will submit at the beginning of class two-page typed response papers on the specific days designated below.
Response papers are exactly that—your initial and exploratory analytical response to the material under discussion for the day, not how you feel about it, nor whether you think it is good or bad, nor whether you like it or not, nor how it relates to your personal life, nor how it parallels a contemporary situation. For example, on 2 September you will be responding to your initial reading of 1 Henry VI—what it says about people and issues of authority, what you read it as saying about contemporary (i.e. Renaissance) England, what its imagery expresses, what recurrent patterns you find, what incidental or overall questions the play raises or confusions it causes you. Response papers allow students to engage in the writing process prior to facing the longer papers. I make minimal comments on these papers.

Response papers are due on the first day of discussion. They cannot be made up (i.e., turned in late under any circumstance in the event of your absence); however, I will not count the two lowest grades which means that should you be absent and receive a “0” for two assignments, you will not be penalized for having missed those response papers. Hence, you must submit a minimum of six responses to receive full credit for this part of the course. I will score the papers on the quality of the response with a ✓ for a basic response, a ✓+ for a more in-depth response, and a ✅ for a superior response, a rough equivalent of a "C," "B," and "A." Response papers account for 20% of the grade.

Tests: Students will have two tests, one on each tetralogy. The second test will take place during the final examination period. Tests will consist of identifications of background materials, technical terms, characters, places, and/or quotations; a series of short essay questions on specific issues in the plays; and/or a longer essay combining discussion of several plays and the ideas and issues therein. You will need a large format blue book (available in the bookstore) and pen to take the tests. Test grades make up 35% of the final grade.

Attendance and participation: Once I have put names with faces, I rarely take roll formally; however, I note your absences, enter them into my gradebook daily, and take attendance into account as part of the final grade (response papers serve as a means of taking attendance as well). Be forewarned that a majority of the material for tests comes from lectures and class discussion. Poor attendance results in poor performance on the tests as does failing to take notes. Significant absences (more than four) will reduce the final grade by a half letter grade. Excessive tardiness (more than four) will also reduce the final grade by a half letter grade.

Because I base my approach to Shakespeare study on the critical, social, and historical contexts surrounding the plays as a means to deciphering them, I lecture a good bit of the time yet recognize that class discussion and queries remain an integral part of the learning experience. I, therefore, expect students to participate meaningfully in the exploration of the plays and take student participation into account as part of the final grade. To participate fully requires that you bring your book to class daily. Failure to participate in discussion will lower the final grade by a half letter grade.

Attendance and participation constitute 10% of the grade.
Realities

This course is a 4000-level (i.e., senior-level) course and fulfills the Shakespeare requirement for the English major. As such it aims at and directs itself primarily to the English major, which in no way means or implies that the non-major will not perform well. Generally, non-majors outnumber English majors in any given class. Although it contains some introductory material, the course examines issues and ideas within the plays from a socio-historical context and studies the works primarily as literature rather than theater. At the same time, it raises questions regarding production, and time permitting, we may enact scenes from the plays.

Because this is a 4000-level course, I expect students in it to have competence in composition, grammar, and mechanics, and to know proper quotation formatting and citation methods for the quotation of verse and prose passages from dramatic works of this period along with MLA style. You will find general writing guidelines, along with formatting and citation methods, on the web page. To aid both majors and non-majors, we will devote one class period to discuss writing analytical literary essays. I do not assign students theses for these papers. However, I make suggestions about potential theses during discussions of the works under study. Students may also meet with me individually for guidance, but I will not read entire drafts of papers.

Sometimes students who have not written an analytical paper since their freshman English sequence or have not had an upper division English course—and that includes English majors—may not perform as well as they might on their first paper. When that occurs, rather than penalizing the student with a low grade, I indicate an “NG” for “no grade.” Students must then rewrite that paper for a grade after consultation with me.

Plagiarism: The University considers plagiarism a serious academic offense. The FIU Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism, consisting of the deliberate use and appropriation of another’s work without any indication of the source and the passing off of such work as the student’s own. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas or materials taken from another is guilty of plagiarism. Any student helping another to plagiarize may be found guilty of academic misconduct. (2001-2002, 136)

Plagiarism will result in an “F” in the course as well as the filing of an Academic Misconduct report that goes to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs where the report will go into a permanent file. The report bars the student from retaking the course under the “forgiveness” policy. Plagiarism may result in a student’s dismissal from the University. Dismissal means that the student can never be readmitted to the University. If the student engages in no further misconduct during his/her academic career, she/he can apply to have the misconduct record expunged.

I reserve the right to make changes in this syllabus to meet the needs and demands of the course.
ENL 4320  Shakespeare: Histories
Fall 2003
TR 11:00-12:15

Dr. Mary Free
345 Academic I
305-919-5962 (voice mail)

Hours: 9-10 TR and by appointment or drop-by
E-mail: free@fiu.edu
Web page: fiu.edu/~free

26-28 August  General Introduction and Backgrounds on drama and the history play
2-9  September  1 Henry VI–First Response Paper (RP) due 2 September
11-18 September  2 Henry VI–2nd RP due 11 September
23-25 September  3 Henry VI–3rd RP due 23 September
20 September-7 October  Richard III–1st paper due 30 September; 4th RP due 2 October
9 October  TEST
14-21 October  Richard II–5th RP due 14 October
23-30 October  1 Henry IV–6th RP due 23 October
4-13 November  2 Henry IV–7th RP due 4 November
11 November  Veteran’s Day–NO CLASS
18 November-4 December  Henry V–8th RP due 18 November; 2nd paper due 2 December