Renaissance Drama

ENL 4161                                                                           Dr. Mary Free
Spring 2004                                                                       345 Academic I
Renaissance Drama                                                             305-919-5962 (office/voice mail)
TR 9:30-10:45
free@fiu.edu
Hours: 11-12 TR and by appt. or drop-by

*Renaissance Drama*, Andrew McRae

Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The primary **objective** of this course is to acquaint students with the vast array of drama contemporaneous with Shakespeare’s work during the Elizabethan (late Renaissance) and Jacobean periods. As a result, it aims for breadth, and students will read ten plays this term. A secondary **objective** is to provide students a sense of London as seen/scene. To that purpose the course focuses on an historical approach to set the London scene and introduce the tensions fomenting in the court, the literary world, and religion during this time. Doing so provides a visual context for approaching the stage and its drama as contested and contesting sites. A third **objective** lies in instilling students with the understanding of drama as something meant for the stage as well as a literary artifact that helps define an historical period.

The course explores the works of Shakespeare’s contemporaries and competitors and investigates the interrelationships among the varied voices of English drama. These works examine and question the interrelationships between power and authority, both royal and plebeian, and the threats thereto, be they from apprentices, general commoners, the proto-middle class, or masterless men. They also illustrate the political, social, and institutional scenes that surround them. Through them we see the material as well as psychological forces and pressures at work on both the playwrights and their works during this period. The sub-categories of the class drama include different types of tragedy including historical tragedy, Jacobean tragedy, revenge tragedy, and domestic tragedy along with citizen comedy, and parody/satire.

**Learning Outcomes** follow from **objectives**. By becoming familiar with a period long removed, students emerge from the class with a greater appreciation for this period that they carry into courses on more contemporary literature. Material learned here translates into the **learning outcome** of creating life-long learners who enrich their lives through the reading, comprehension, and interpretation of the literary arts.

Romancing Renaissance Drama

How 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 these works, be especially alert to the following considerations: (1) we are reading plays, drama—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 the
Another factor that one must recognize about drama is that words form only part of any play; silences and numerous non-verbal dramatic devices contribute crucially to our perceptions and understanding. These playwrights wrote plays in accordance with the dramatic and theatrical conventions of their time. What may appear absurd or unrealistic often becomes clear with reference to those conventions. Think for a moment about our reactions to films from an earlier period; we often find the acting, costuming, language, special effects, film techniques amusing if not laughable. Or consider the plotting in soap operas. Regardless of whether one has an Elizabethan or modern stage in mind, try to visualize each scene on stage as you read. These works are not novels; they force us to be nuanced readers. While a novel or short story sets scenes for you—a lake, a chamber room, a beach—usually provide keys to characters’ emotional states—John screamed; he uttered the words like an automaton—and tells us action—she fainted, Arabella dropped to her knees—drama forces us to read scene, emotion, and action from the words the playwrights give us. The language is often 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 or context) but from being able to respond to language that has more resonance than we encounter in our daily lives. Granted, the late Renaissance and Jacobean eras grow more remote to us with each passing year, but through reading these works, re-reading, and envisioning the action, we develop a familiarity with that age. Keep in mind as well that murder, physical and psychological abuse, incest, ambition, abuse of power, fools and folly are still with us; we just talk differently and employ different strategies.

Requirements

Written work: Students will submit two short five-seven page analytical papers, one prior to midterm and a second due toward the end of the term. Please note that the five-paragraph essay that you wrote in freshman English classes does not constitute academic discourse at the senior level and is wholly unacceptable (see Realities below). The papers must be on works studied in this course this term. Paper grades constitute 35% of the final grade.

In addition, for each play under study students will submit at the beginning of class two-page, typed response papers on the first day a play is under discussion. Response papers are exactly that—your analytical response to the material under discussion for the day, not how you feel about it, nor whether you think the work is good or bad, nor how it relates to your personal life, nor how it parallels a contemporaneous situation, nor whether you think a comedy fails to be funny or a tragedy tragic in your opinion. In other words do not think of the response as a movie or drama review. For example, on 13 January you will turn in a response paper on Robert Greene’s Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, a popular and influential romantic comedy. Consider what it teaches you regarding life at court, what kinds of imagery you find, what patterns emerge, what questions it raises for you, what confusions it causes you. The next response paper is on The Jew of Malta due 22 January and so on. Response papers allow students to engage in the writing process prior to facing the longer papers, aid in studying for tests, and often become the germ for a longer paper.

Response papers cannot be made up (i.e., turned in late) in the event of your absence (you may turn them in early in case of known absence); however, I will not count three of the lowest grades which means that should you be absent and receive a “0” for up to three assignments, you will not be penalized for doing so. Hence, you must submit a minimum of seven papers to receive full credit for this portion 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 will account for 20% of the grade.

Tests: Students will have two tests, the first prior to midterm and the second during the final examination period. Tests will consist of identifications of background materials, technical terms, characters, places, and/or quotations; 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 large format blue book 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 do note your absences and enter them into my gradebook daily and take attendance into account as part of the final grade. Be forewarned that a majority of the material for tests comes from lectures and class discussion. Poor attendance will result in poor performance on the tests as will failure to take notes. Significant absences (more than six) will reduce the final grade by a half letter grade.

Since I base my approach to these plays on the critical, social, and historical contexts surrounding them as a means to deciphering them, I lecture a good bit of the time yet recognize that class discussion remains an integral part of the learning experience. I, therefore, expect students to participate meaningfully in the exploration of the plays. To do so 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. It fulfills the Early Period 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 literature class. Although the course contains some introductory material, it 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 literary analysis, composition, grammar, mechanics, and proper citation methods both for secondary material and for the quotation of blank verse and prose passages from dramatic works of this period. I will distribute some writing guidelines to aid both majors and non-majors and will briefly discuss writing analytical literary essays. I do not assign students theses for papers. However, I do 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 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” on the paper. Students must then rewrite that paper for a grade after consultation with me.

The University considers plagiarism a serious academic offense. Plagiarism will result in an “F” in the course as well as the filing of an academic misconduct report that will go to the Vice-Provost’s Office of Academic Affairs. Plagiarism can result in a student’s dismissal from the
Dismissal means that the student can never be readmitted. I reserve the right to modify this syllabus to meet the demands of the course.

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Play titles refer to English Renaissance Drama, chapter titles to Renaissance Drama (RenD)

6-8 January             Orientation and Backgrounds
13-20 January           Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, Chapter 2 RenD, 1st Response Paper (RP) due 13 January
22-29 January           The Jew of Malta, Chapter 5 RenD, 2nd RP due 22 January

***************23 January–Last Day to Apply for Spring Graduation–23 January***************

3-5 February            Edward II, Chapter 6 RenD, 3rd RP due 3 February
10-11 February          Arden of Faversham, Chapter 3 RenD 4th RP due 10 February, 1st paper due 12 February

February 17-19           First Test–Part One, 17 February; Part Two, 19 February
24-26 February          Shoemakers’ Holiday, 5th RP due 24 February

***************28 February–Last Day for DR Grade by 1:00 pm**************

2-4 March              Bartholomew Fair, 6th RP due 2 March
9-11 March             The Knight of the Burning Pestle, Chapter 4 RenD, 7th RP due 9 March
16-18 March            The Roaring Girl, 8th RP due 16 March

*************22-27 March–Spring Break****************

30 March-1 April          A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, 9th RP due 30 March
6-13 March              ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore, 10th RP due 6 March, 2nd paper due 13 April

*********************Tuesday 20 April–Final Test–9:30 am**************************
N.B. Professional and personal circumstances may necessitate modifying the above schedule.