

LS 811: Shakespeare – Tradition or Modernity?

Fall 2014 | Dr. William Dow

Is the Shakespearean canon traditional or modern? Why are his plays such rich fodder for contemporary comment on the modern world and how did they reflect his society? This course will explore the existing traditions of theatre and classical literature that shaped Shakespeare's writing. How, in the Elizabethan renaissance, Shakespeare responded to the direct source material from the classical tradition and created an early modern, 'living theatre'. We will look at the biographical, social, and political realities that influenced his response to classical traditions and helped create a new modernism. We will also explore modern film and theatre productions and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. What connections are evident between our social and political reality and the contemporary artistic response to the tradition of Shakespeare? We will explore, through the valance of Shakespeare, the evolution from 'tradition' to 'modern' and question whether there is an on-going artistic continuum from the ancient world to the present day, and what themes seem to maintain a timeless modernity. The class will consist of reading, coupled with critical viewing of live and video presentations, which will facilitate engaged discussion of the relationship between tradition and modernity. We will explore and practise theatre techniques that help modern directors and adaptors create their unique, artistic response to the tradition.

Required Texts:

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World*. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2004.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth Texts and Contexts*. Edited by William C. Carroll, Bedford St. Martin's, Boston. 1999. ISBN-10: 0312144547 ISBN-13: 9780312144548

Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Texts and Contexts*. Edited by Gail Kern Paster and Skiles Howard, Bedford St. Martin's, Boston. 1999. ISBN-10: 0312166214 ISBN-13: 9780312166212

Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*. Edited by Claire McEachren (Arden Shakespeare, Third Series) ISBN-10: 1903436834

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet Texts and Contexts*, Edited by Dympna Callaghan, Bedford St. Martin's: Boston 2003 ISBN-10: 0312191

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Edited by Gerald Graff and James Phelan, Bedford St. Martin's:
Boston
2009. ISBN-10: 0312457529 ISBN-13: 9780312457525

Assessment:

Assessment will be based on seminar participation and written work.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

The first three Thursdays we will attend a performance at Bard on the Beach, which we will discuss on the Saturday. In subsequent weeks the discussion of the plays will involve an in class presentation of a modern adaptation or production, and a discussion of historical influences from the Early Modern context in which Shakespeare was creating his own 'pop culture'. Each participant will take a turn introducing a modern production and an overview of the Early Modern context for one of Shakespeare's plays.

Week 1

Sept. 4--View Bard on the Beach *Midsummer Night's Dream*

Sept. 6 (Saturday)--Discussion of production

Week 2

Sept. 11--View Bard on the Beach *The Tempest*

Sept. 13 (Saturday)--Discussion of production

Week 3

Sept. 18--View Bard on the Beach *Equivocation*

Week 4

Romeo and Juliet

History and Context

Modern production or adaptation

Week 5

Continue discussion of *Romeo and Juliet*
Introduce *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Week 6

A Midsummer Night's Dream
History and Context
Modern production or adaptation

Week 7

Much Ado about Nothing
History and Context
Modern production or adaptation

Week 8

Continue discussion of *Much Ado about Nothing*
Introduce *Macbeth*

Week 9

Macbeth
History and Context
Modern production or adaptation

Week 10

Continue discussion of *Macbeth/ Equivocation*

Week 11

Discussion *Will in the World*
Introduce *The Tempest*

Week 12

The Tempest
History and Context
Modern production or adaptation

Week 13

Final presentations

THEATRE/VIDEO VIEWING

Bard On The Beach (Vanier Park):

The Tempest Director: Meg Roe

Midsummer Night's Dream Director: D. P. Gibson

Equivocation Director: Michael Shamata

Romeo and Juliet Baz Luhrman (1996);

Midsummer Night's Dream Shakespeare Retold (BBC 2005) Adapted by Peter Bowker

Tempest Paul Mazursky (1982) John Cassavettes, Raul Julia

Much Ado About Nothing Shakespeare Retold (BBC 2005) Adapted by David Nichols

Much Ado About Nothing Joss Whedon (2012)

Macbeth Shakespeare Retold (BBC 2005) Adapted by Peter Moffat