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ENG 5002-600: Studies in Renaissance Literature

Christopher Wixson

Eastern Illinois University

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Eng 5002: "Shakespeare": Ecology and Infection

summer 2021 / Section 600

Dr. Chris Wixson

syllabus



"Sickness is catching: O were favour so." – Helena, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

course philosophy

William Shakespeare wrote at a time in many ways similar to our own. Cast in the shadow of the aggressive spread of bubonic plague through London and often employing the terms of contagious epidemic, his plays interrogate ideologies of social distancing according to gender, race, sexuality, social class, and species. In this course, we will closely read two comedies and two tragedies by Shakespeare, which often find themselves in high school classrooms and were written during periods of lockdown or performed soon after the reopening of the public theatres. Our "lab sessions" will put them in dialogue with period texts, literary scholarship, and even a contemporary play (Toni Morrison's brilliant *Desdemona*). The course's subtitle makes clear our interpretive lenses. The word "ecology" is derived from the Greek words for "house" and "study" and denotes networks of relations. The concept of "infection" refers to the presence of various contaminants within such systems. Broadly concerning themselves with (as Hamlet puts it) "something rotten in the state," Shakespeare's plays depict how outbreaks of all kinds in our relationships to our natural and social environments, our dealings with one another, and our understandings of ourselves can cut either way — towards tyranny and tragedy or towards reform and rebirth. The ways in which the plays stage the friction between contagion and containment provide us with vocabularies and contexts to map our own contemporary landscapes. As such, Ben Jonson's epitaph has proven prophetic in that Shakespeare — "not of an age but for all time" — is alive and well in the 21st century.

"Shakespeare occupies a paradoxical place in contemporary culture. On the one hand his work is revered: quoted, performed, graded, subsidized, parodied. On the other hand — cue yawns and eye rolls, or fear of personal intellectual failure — Shakespeare can be an obligation, inducing a terrible and particular weariness as a cultural gatekeeper, politely honored rather than robustly challenged. Does anyone actually like reading this stuff? **Yes.** Shakespeare's plays are spacious texts to think with — about agency, celebrity, economics, friendship, sex politics, privacy, laughter, suffering, and art itself." —Emma Smith, *This Is Shakespeare* (2019)

Learning Outcomes

1. To provide strategies for reading and appreciating the works of William Shakespeare for the insight they provide about Early Modern England and our own time.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage the significant issues and questions raised by the plays through writing and class discussion.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical reading, analytical thinking, and argumentative writing.

course texts

The Taming of the Shrew, William Shakespeare (Bantam); *Four Tragedies*, William Shakespeare (Bantam); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare (Bantam); *Desdemona*, Toni Morrison (D2L); *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, Russ McDonald

an online course in practice

The online experience is a change from traditional face-to-face learning but especially enhances creativity, self-direction, and articulate expression in writing, all **essential skills** in the professional world. This course may well involve *slightly* more reading than you expect but *certainly* more writing than you may be used to. The time and labor investment is the same, but their expressions will “look” different and feel more independent, as will our course schedule. As with any summer course, compressing sixteen weeks of work into eight, the pace will be demanding.

Each week of the term will have a set of readings along with prompts for varied remote course activities in response that must be completed and submitted via D2L. All course materials (except for the TRS textbooks) will be located on D2L. We may seek opportunities *if possible* for synchronous interaction, though *never* if it will disadvantage students who do not have reliable devices/access to strong Wifi signals or who have difficult schedules related to jobs or child/elder care. As we all navigate the challenging contours of online study, let's work together to make the course a meaningful experience for us all.

contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

cmwixson@eiu.edu

****I check email very frequently so please don't hesitate to contact me with questions. However, I tend to go to sleep around 9:00 PM CST. As such, if you have a question that needs answering that night, get it to me by 8:30; otherwise, your answer will be in your mailbox around 6:30 AM CST the following morning.**

office hours

For those who are on campus, I am available to meet with you in-person (masked and distanced) in DFAC 1351. For those who are remote learning, I am available to meet with you via Zoom. I am generally free mornings and afternoons M-F so let me know if/when you would like to schedule time. **Email too can be a good and safe way to get questions answered, feedback on your writing, and guidance during the process of assignments.**

reading assignments

Needless to say, this course has a demanding reading schedule, *especially* in a compressed summer term. The complexities of language that characterize Shakespeare's plays (the source of their energy, wonder, and riches) **require** extra time and dedicated attention. In addition to any outside supplementary resources you use as part of your reading process, you will regularly be asked to read from the *Bedford Companion* for historical context, and, each week, I will provide Notes (what I would ordinarily share during class sessions). As such, success in this course **demand**s strong time-management and rigor in reading, writing, and thinking. Trust that Shakespeare will reward the investment.

writing assignments

This course requires writing of different kinds. The latest research and thinking in Humanities pedagogy is that committed, regular writing is essential to meaningful growth in courses in literature, especially at advanced levels. As such, we will *regularly* be writing as well as sharing *in* writing in order to deepen engagement with these texts. Doing so will enable you to move forward from the experience of this course a better reader and writer, more confident and proficient in organizing and constructing strong interpretive arguments. The tasks will include:

*Short pieces of writing for Lab sessions that are opportunities to demonstrate your engagement with the plays through close reading and analysis of *specific passages* as well as *other written texts from the period* with which Shakespeare's are in dialogue

*An Academic Book Review of a scholarly essay that is engaged, engaging, original, and articulate

*Substantive, Insightful, and Respectful Participation via Forum posts — equivalent to contributions to class discussion

*A Final Synthesis Assignment

****WARNING:** The intellectual pre-writing work for these assignments will be challenging and time-consuming. The prompts are available so that you may (and should) start early. In addition, because these are demanding texts, it is expected that you will be working closely with me during your writing process for each. **The goal for all of them is to demonstrate your understanding of the course readings and your adeptness at applying/synthesizing that knowledge in new ways.**

final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Two Labs	30%
Eight Discussion Forum Posts	24%
Academic Book Review	16%
Final Synthesis Assignment	30%

(Written feedback on the lab and essays will be sent via email.)

class participation

Participation in an inquiry-based, advanced literature seminar means careful, full preparation of the reading, insightful contributions to discussion threads, and risk-taking in writing and thinking. Saying you are "frustrated" with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible.

These texts are demanding but rewarding; while there will be struggle with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

late assignments

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late labs/essays will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept them, and the grade becomes a "O."** If you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.

tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact me.

Eng 5002: Shakespeare: Ecology and Infection

Dr. Christopher Wixson

course calendar

** Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you access it frequently on D2L so as to note any revisions. Get into the habit of *regularly* checking email and D2L.

Week One (June 1) "Shakespeare" and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Read: Bedford pp. 109-14; 123-7; 134-7; 221-4 (The Theatre and The City)
pp. 81-5 (Comedy)

A Midsummer Night's Dream / Notes A-D (D2L)

Discussion Forum Posting Guide (D2L)

Write: *Midsummer* Discussion Forum Post #1 Due by Wednesday, June 2 at 11:59 PM

Midsummer Discussion Forum Post #2 Due by Friday, June 4 at 11:59 PM

Week Two (June 7) *The Taming of the Shrew*

Read: *The Taming of the Shrew* / Notes A-B (D2L)

Bedford pp. 253-63; 265-8 (Marriage, Gender, and Economics)

Write: *Shrew* Discussion Forum Post #1 Due by Wednesday, June 9 at 11:59 PM

Shrew Discussion Forum Post #2 Due by Friday, June 11 at 11:59 PM

Week Three (June 14) *Midsummer* / *Shrew* Lab

Write: *Midsummer* / *Shrew* Lab Due to D2L by Friday, June 18 at 11:59 PM

Week Four (June 21) *Midsummer* / *Shrew* Academic Book Review

Read: Academic Book Review Assignment Sheet / Essays (D2L)

Write: *Midsummer* / *Shrew* Academic Book Review Due Friday, June 25 at 11:59 PM

Week Five (June 28) *Othello*

Read: *Othello* / Notes A-B (D2L) / "Blackness and Moors" (D2L)

Bedford pp. 85-90 (Tragedy); pp. 273-77 (Social Structure)

Write: *Othello* Discussion Forum Post #1 Due by Wednesday, June 30 at 11:59 PM

Othello Discussion Forum Post #2 Due by Friday, July 2 at 11:59 PM

Week Six (July 5) *Macbeth*

Read: *Macbeth* / Notes (D2L)

Write: *Macbeth* Discussion Forum Post #1 Due by Wednesday, July 7 at 11:59 PM

Macbeth Discussion Forum Post #2 Due by Friday, July 9 at 11:59 PM

Week Seven (July 12) *Desdemona* / *Macbeth* Lab

Read: Morrison's *Desdemona* and "Foreword" (D2L) / Notes (D2L)

Write: *Desdemona* / *Macbeth* Lab Due to D2L by Friday, July 16 at 11:59 PM

Week Eight (July 19) Final Synthesis Assignment Writing Week

Read: Final Synthesis Assignment Sheet / Essays (D2L)

Write: Synthesis Abstract Discussion Forum Post Due by Thursday, July 22 at 11:59 PM

Final Paper Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday, July 23 at 11:59 PM**