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# ENG 2011G-003: Literature, the Self and the World: Drama

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2011G-003

**SYLLABUS**  
**English 2011, Section 003, Fall 2009**  
**Literature, the Self and the World: Drama**  
 MW 3:00–4:15pm, Coleman 3609, EIU

Professor: Dr. Letitia L. Moffitt  
 Office: Coleman Hall room 3861 (south corridor)  
 Office Hours: See separate handout  
 E-mail: llmoffitt@eiu.edu  
 (for questions only; do not e-mail assignments without my permission)

**Objectives**

It seems nearly impossible to learn about drama without considering the work of William Shakespeare. As such, this course will focus on five of Shakespeare's plays, particularly examining plays whose core story has been adapted to film in unusual ways (a sci-fi version of *The Tempest*; *King Lear* set in feudal Japan, etc.). These plays are several hundred years old, yet they still manage to connect to both "self" and "the world" in widely varying forms. Why? Given that drama is inherently about interpretation and adaptation, what happens when we take a play out of its original time and place and reinterpret it for ourselves, for our own time and place? A key objective of this course is to explore these questions in various ways (including classroom discussions and written responses). A second key objective is for students to become very familiar with the themes of these plays as well as their language. That last part is important: if we know that *Ten Things I Hate About You* has roughly the same plot as *Taming of the Shrew*, why bother reading the Shakespeare? The answer is the language. We get something out of reading Shakespeare's original words that we can't get anywhere else in the world, and that's worth examining.

**Texts**

The five plays we will be reading are, in the following order: *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *King Lear*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

**Assignments**

Reading responses.....	Daily.....	25%
In-class participation.....	Daily.....	20%
Midterm.....	Wednesday, October 7.....	20%
Paper .....	Wednesday, November 18.....	15%
Final .....	Thursday, December 17.....	20%

**Reading responses and in-class participation:** Let's not kid ourselves: Shakespeare is very difficult to read. First of all, it's in dramatic form, which is inherently difficult to read because it wasn't *meant* to be read on the page but rather to be performed. Second, and more disconcerting, obviously the guy didn't write in standard 21<sup>st</sup> century American English. The temptation to read not one single word of the plays and instead rely on synopses (from Cliff Notes, Spark

Notes, or someone you know who has already read these plays) will be tremendous. Fair warning: if you do this, you won't do well in the class. Substantial portions of your assignments are based on your ability to deal with Shakespeare's actual language and not just a summary of the plot and characters.

Why is this important? It isn't just because I want to torture you with Elizabethan syntax and vocabulary. The whole premise of this class is built upon the idea that the same basic plot, characters and themes of one play can be reimagined in a completely different way. But the filmed versions of these plays don't just use different times and settings, they also use different *language*. In order to consider what the filmed version has in common with the original play—in other words, in order to determine the key universal themes—we also have to consider how they differ, what the language of one version brings versus the language of another.

Whenever you are assigned reading for class, you will be required to write a specific response to the reading that must be typed and printed and handed in to class the day we discuss that reading. You should proceed as follows:

- 1) Complete the *entire* reading. Yes, I know, it's difficult (sometimes to the point of being nearly incomprehensible) and time-consuming, but there is no way around it. I'm not going to prohibit you from looking at online summaries, but it is impossible for you to rely *only* on summaries (you'll see why in a minute), so there is no way around this: you *must* do the reading. Time permitting, I hope to go through at least some of each reading in class so that you'll get a feel for the material and have less work to do at home.
- 2) Pick one scene from the reading and "reinterpret" this scene (focusing on what the characters say) in any way you choose (aiming for 1-2 pages). You don't have to go line by line, so long as you capture the "essence" of the dialogue. Some possibilities:
  - You can simply rewrite the basic dialogue in standard English so that it is comprehensible and relatable to people in our time and place.
  - If you feel like being more creative, you can write out the dialogue in some other kind of "dialect" (text message-ese? gangsta? Dr. Seuss-like rhymes?) or with an unusual setting (outer space? WWII? Canada??).
  - Rather than writing this as dialogue, you could have one character in the scene describe it as though telling it to someone else in informal, conversational language.
- 3) During the class in which we discuss that particular reading, several students will volunteer (or be volunteered by me!) to share their reinterpreted scenes in small groups. The group will then reinterpret the entire act based on the student's scene. The class will then discuss how this reinterpretation evokes the major themes that develop in the play (and what *are* the major themes, anyway?). There will be other classroom activities related to the reinterpretation as well.

**Paper:** You will have two options for the paper. The first option will be to write a critical comparison between one of the original plays and the filmed interpretation of that play; the second option will be a creative option related to the reading responses (but considerably more developed) in which you "reimagine" one of the plays in a different time and place, discussing how your interpretation invokes some of the key themes of the original play. Essentially the two options are the same: in each case you will compare the original play to an interpretation of the play. I will provide a more detailed handout once we get a little closer to the due date.

**Midterm and final:** The midterm and final exams will require you to do the following:

- Identify certain passages from the plays (in which play did it appear, which character said it, what was the general situation) and discussing their importance. These will *not* be obscure, trivial passages designed to trick you; they will stem directly from our classroom activities.
- Discuss and compare key themes in the plays and their filmed interpretations.

In addition, during the first half hour of the final exam—and I daresay this may be the only time you ever have a final in which this happens—you will be shown a film! That's right: you will be shown a short film based on the last play we study, *Romeo and Juliet*. You will then write a short essay based on this film, along with the other questions on the exam as detailed above.

## Grading

**Reading responses and papers:** Reading responses will be graded as follows:

Check plus = well-crafted response that clearly shows the student did the reading and put a lot of thought and care into the assignment.

Check = writing that suggests that the student made a solid effort to fulfill the assignment in terms of both reading and writing, though perhaps more time and attention would have yielded an even more polished, thoughtful assignment.

Check minus = writing that shows the student turned in *something* (though it may not be exceptionally well crafted) and did *some* of the reading (though perhaps not all).

No credit = response not turned in on time, or a clearly inappropriate, poorly written (or handwritten) response. If you didn't read, or you're typing at the last minute, don't bother. You won't get credit and you'll be wasting your time, my time, printer ink and trees.

All marks on reading responses will be averaged at the end of the semester to determine the final reading response grade (20% of the total). Keep track of your own marks as the semester goes on—it isn't hard. Do not expect me to simply know off the top of your head what your grade is.

The paper will be graded based on the following rubric:

A = well-crafted paper that clearly shows that the student did the reading and put some thought into the assignment.

B = writing that shows that the student did the reading (or most of it—certainly made a strong effort!) and fulfilled the assignment reasonably well, though perhaps more time and attention would have yielded a more polished, thoughtful assignment.

C = writing that suggests that the student made an effort to fulfill the assignment in terms of both reading and writing, but didn't exactly go out of the way to understand the reading or craft a solid response.

D = writing that shows the student turned in *something* (though it isn't especially well crafted) and did *some* of the reading (though clearly not all).

F = no assignment turned in or a clearly inappropriate, pointless, poorly written assignment.

**Format:** Other than exams, all work must be typed and printed from a word processor (NO handwritten work accepted!) in readable font (12 pt. Times New Roman or equivalent), normal

margins (around 1" top and bottom, around 1.25" left and right), double-spaced, your name on each page, all pages numbered and fastened together with a staple (don't do that corner-fold-over thing and expect the pages to stay together). Don't get cute with margins or font size in order to stretch out a thin paper (and yet don't "pad" a paper with repetition and fluff). If you run out of things to say well before reaching the page minimum, you need to do a lot more than just fill up the empty space; you probably need to go back and put more thought into your paper as a whole.

All typed work also must be neat, readable, and free of hand-written corrections or blobs of correction fluid. It is important that you proofread your work thoroughly *before* you print the final version that you hand in. What this means is that you need to give yourself enough time to look for and correct any typing, spelling, grammar and punctuation errors, rather than dashing off the paper at the last minute. If you have a brilliant paper that is unreadable because of these kinds of minor errors, no one will ever realize its brilliance.

**Deadlines:** Written assignments are due at the *beginning* of class on the due date. If your assignment is late by one day (that is, if you turn it in during the middle or end of the due date's class, after class, or at the beginning of the following class), its grade will go down one *full* grade level (that is, from A to B, etc.). If you don't hand in your paper at the beginning of the class following the due date, I won't accept it and your grade for that paper will be F. Do not e-mail me papers without my permission, or put them in my mailbox or slide them under my office door or leave them in the classroom if I'm not there, because I might not get them this way unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. I can't grade a paper that you honestly tried to get to me but somehow got lost; I can only grade what actually exists, *in my hands*, by the deadline.

**Important note:** I accept *no excuses* for late work, and I grant no excused extensions—not even for "good" excuses (sick/doctor's appointment/job interview/wedding/funeral). I am especially not interested in technological glitches (printer not working/computer not working/document lost to cyberspace). You have the class schedule in your hands right now, so you know when the papers are due. If you must miss a due date's class, for whatever reason, get a friend to hand in your paper or make other arrangements with me.

Remember, it is not my responsibility to get your work from you; it is your responsibility to get it to me. It's *your* work, not mine, and you are the one being graded on it; therefore, it is in *your* best interest to figure out how to make the deadline. I don't make say all of this to be mean, but simply because we are on a tight schedule and it is crucial that you don't fall behind. If you do, you may never catch up again! Besides, handing the paper in is the easy part; writing it is the hard part. Don't ace the hard part only to blow the easy part.

**In-class participation:** Everyone *must* volunteer at least once during the semester to have their reading response scene reinterpreted. If it's mid-semester and you haven't volunteered yet, you need to do so. I know that many students don't feel comfortable with oral participation in large classes or group work with unfamiliar classmates, but there are many ways to fulfill your participation requirement besides just doing a lot of talking. In general, participation means more than just saying whatever you feel like saying. It is also more than a matter of raising your hand and saying something, anything, just to "get it over with" in order to "fulfill" your participation requirement. Students who come to class on time, listen to others, help and

encourage others, ask or answer questions, contribute to discussions, focus on and engage in classroom activities—these are students who are actively participating.

### **A note on attendance**

You may have noted that there is no “attendance grade.” This isn’t high school; you don’t get “credit” in college just for showing up and having a pulse. As such, I won’t “call attendance” or have a “sign-in sheet.” Before you get excited and figure on having your afternoons free all semester, read on.

Every semester students come up to me and announce, “I was absent Wednesday!” or “I’m going to have to miss class Monday!” Then they stand there looking at me. I’ve been teaching for a while now, but I still have no idea what students are thinking when they do this. Am I supposed to applaud, or break into tears, or gasp in shock and horror? The next thing I get is a lengthy description of why they were or will be absent. Still this leaves me puzzled.

There seems to be a bit of a “disconnect” here: these students think the most important thing about absences is making sure the instructor knows the reason why they were absent. They seem to think that getting “excused” for absences is the primary goal. The truth is instructors often couldn’t care less about this—nor should you. If you miss a doctor’s appointment, do you give your doctor a lengthy explanation of why you missed it, because you’re afraid the doctor will dislike you and give you a “bad grade” on your checkup if you don’t have a good reason? Of course not; you reschedule the appointment.

The problem is, of course, that you can’t simply “reschedule” a day of class that you missed unless you have a time machine. And this is precisely what concerns instructors: not whether you have a “good reason” for missing class, but the fact that you are now behind everyone else in class. That is also what should concern *you*, the student. This should go without saying, but I’ll say it anyway: grades are not based on how I feel about you. Grades are based on the work you do toward a class’s objectives. If you miss class, you’ve missed work toward those objectives, and it doesn’t matter why you missed class—it’s exactly the same if you were at a funeral or at the movies. Moreover, you standing there trying very hard to make sure I know you had a good reason for missing class does absolutely *nothing* toward you actually gaining what you missed in class. It’s just wasting time.

Therefore, whenever you are absent, instead of doing the “I was/will be absent!” announcement and then launching into a description of why, first consider the following questions:

- What day(s) were you absent or will you be absent?
- Check the syllabus: what does it say you missed or will miss on the day(s) you are absent?
- Based on this, what will you do about any assignments that are/were due? For example, if you know you’ll be absent on the day a paper is due, check the syllabus: you’ll see that I don’t give extensions; therefore, in this case you will need to get a friend to hand in your paper for you or make other arrangements.

- Based on the syllabus, what other missed activities can you make up? How do you propose to make up this work, if that is possible? Think of a specific plan, noting what times and days you can make my office hours and how specifically you intend to make up the work. Note that your plan must schedule all make-up work within a reasonable time frame—to be specific, within one class period of the last day of absence, as any longer would constitute an extension (and you know my policy on that).
- What work *cannot* be made up—for example, because it involves in-class activities that cannot be reproduced, or because I don't give make-ups for that particular activity? (Read the syllabus carefully to see what work cannot be made up. Moreover, the laws of physics apply to me the same way they do everyone else: I cannot compress a 50-minute class into 20 words or fewer in answer to an off-the-cuff “what did I miss?”)

These questions should give you an understanding of how much work you've missed because of a given absence. If you discover that you've already missed a lot of work that cannot be made up, you might want to be careful of your attendance in the future. You should be keeping track of your work throughout the semester, so you'll know if you've stayed on top of things. If you are calculating your averages for reading responses, for instance, and you determine that the response you missed because you were sick won't have much of an affect on your grade (after all, you'll be doing a *lot* of these, and missing one won't likely make a huge difference unless you're borderline), then there is no need to stress out about making sure I know that you were really, really sick and not simply lazy with a bad attitude. Use common sense, as always.

Why am I going on and on about this? My point is not that you should slavishly drag yourself to class with a fever of 104. It is natural to expect that events may force you to miss class. My point is simply this: attend as many classes as you humanly can; if you miss class, for whatever reason, make sure you do what you need to do to keep up with the work, and expect there to be consequences that range from negligible (if absences are isolated incidents) to severe (if you make a habit of it). It is up to *you* to figure out what to do about your absences, not me. Do not expect me to propose solutions as to how you can get your assignments done. You're the one taking the class, so you need to do the work. People who understand this tend to do well in college. People who don't...don't. (And if you do miss lots of classes throughout the term, please don't bother coming to me on Week 14 and asking how you can make it up. You should know the answer to that already: build a time machine. That's the only acceptable solution.)

Keep this in mind as well: attendance means substantially more than having a pulse, and the point of coming to class isn't just to “get credit” for being there. If you show up to class but then fall asleep, send text messages, work on assignments for other courses, etc., you might as well have stayed home, because you aren't really “attending.” (Look it up in Webster's: the first definition for “attend” is “to pay attention,” not “to be present.”)

### **Plagiarism warning**

Plagiarism means word-for-word unacknowledged copying of another writer's work *or* unacknowledged paraphrasing of another writer's ideas. This can range from something as small as using a sentence from a website without properly acknowledging the source, all the way up to

turning in someone else's paper as your own. The minimum penalty is a grade of "F" on the assignment. In addition, you may fail the course, be placed on probation, or even be expelled.

Most students would never even think of turning in someone else's paper as their own. But this is not the only way plagiarism occurs. It is important to understand that plagiarism is based not just on intent but on deed. This means that it is not acceptable to say, for example, "I didn't mean to plagiarize; it just so happens that what I wrote sounds very similar to this source I read. I went to this website to get ideas for my paper, and what I read must have influenced me without me realizing it." Does that sound familiar? Well, guess what: that's still considered plagiarism, because you paraphrased someone else's ideas without citing the source.

It is very easy to avoid this problem. If you look at any source during your writing process, be aware of how influential that source may be. If you think that the source may make its way into your paper in any way, whether word-for-word or as a paraphrase of a general idea, *cite the source* using proper MLA citation format. If you don't know how to use MLA format, ask me for help (and we will go over this in class as well). That way, the worst you can be accused of is using an inappropriate source (if, for example, you used Wikipedia or a blog)—and you aren't likely to get an "F" for that, whereas you will definitely get an "F" if you don't cite the source.

The bottom line: absolutely do not consider plagiarizing any part of any assignment, in any way. It's simply not worth it. If you are having trouble writing an assignment or meeting a deadline, or if you aren't sure what might be considered plagiarism, please come and talk to me about it.

### **Second-to-last items**

***Keep this syllabus and refer to it whenever you have any questions about the class.*** A good half of the questions that are asked during the course of a semester have already been answered here. Do not let this document somehow fly out of your hands the second you leave the room! I will never understand how this happens, but somehow every semester it does.

At the same time, if you are ever unsure about anything related to the class, ask me about it. It is simply unacceptable to say "but I didn't know what you meant so I couldn't do the work." Related to this, ***use common sense.*** I can't write everything into a syllabus, or it would be even longer than it already is. Nobody wants that. It does not say in this syllabus that you have to bring your book to class, for example, but come *on*. You gonna be in a literature class without bringing your *book*? Duh. There's that common sense thing I told you about. The point of college isn't for me to tell you everything you have to do. It's for you to *figure out* what to do.

### **Final words**

Thought it may not seem like it from this antiseptic and decidedly humorless syllabus, I am *very* excited to be working with you this semester on this course. (Come on, we get to watch movies and act silly in class. What more could you want?) ☺



**General schedule (subject to change as necessary)**

<u><i>Date</i></u>	<u><i>What we'll do in class*</i></u>
Mon., Aug. 24 .....	Introductions & syllabus
Wed., Aug. 26 .....	Film 1 part 1
Mon., Aug. 31 .....	Film 2 part 2
Wed., Sept. 2 .....	<i>Tempest</i> Act I
LABOR DAY	
Wed., Sept. 9 .....	<i>Tempest</i> Acts II&III
Mon., Sept. 14 .....	<i>Tempest</i> Acts IV&V
Wed., Sept. 16 .....	Film 2 part 1
Mon., Sept. 21 .....	Film 2 part 2
Wed., Sept. 23 .....	<i>Othello</i> Act I
Mon., Sept. 28 .....	<i>Othello</i> Act II
Wed., Sept. 30 .....	<i>Othello</i> Act III
Mon., Oct. 5 .....	<i>Othello</i> Acts IV&V
Wed., Oct. 7 .....	MIDTERM
Mon., Oct. 12 .....	Film 3 part 1
Wed., Oct. 14 .....	Film 3 part 2
Mon., Oct. 19 .....	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> Intro & Act I
Wed., Oct. 21 .....	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> Acts II&III
Mon., Oct. 26 .....	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> Acts IV&V
Wed., Oct. 28 .....	Film 4 part 1
Mon., Nov. 2 .....	Film 4 part 2
Wed., Nov. 4 .....	<i>King Lear</i> Act I
Mon., Nov. 9 .....	<i>King Lear</i> Act II
Wed., Nov. 11 .....	<i>King Lear</i> Act III
Mon., Nov. 16 .....	<i>King Lear</i> Acts IV&V
Wed., Nov. 18 .....	PAPER DUE; film 5 excerpt
THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Mon., Nov. 30 .....	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts I&II
Wed., Dec. 2 .....	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act III
Mon., Dec. 7 .....	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts IV&V
Wed., Dec. 9 .....	Prepare for final
Thurs., Dec. 17, 2:45–4:45pm .....	FINAL EXAM

\*What this means, of course, is that by that day, you will have completed the reading as listed and will have written your reading response on this section of the reading. These are not difficult instructions. If this is unclear, ask about it now. I will not accept “the schedule was confusing and I did the wrong reading” as an excuse.