ENGLISH 476: SENIOR SEMINAR
SHAKESPEARE, TRAGEDY, AND ADAPTATION
SPRING 2014

Dr. Christopher L. Morrow

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298-1103 (department)

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Office Hours: Tues. 11:00 am – 12:00 pm
1:45 pm – 2:30 pm
Wed. 3:15 pm – 4:30 pm
Thurs. 10:00 am – 11:00 am
and by appointment.

A person may sleep many years at the fountain of learning, and yet awake no physician.
Mary Trye, Medicatrix, (1675)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Shakespeare’s plays are not only some of the most widely read literary works, their influence extends well beyond the classroom to include art, film, fiction, music, and poetry. His plays not only appear in modern theaters, they also continue to circulate through allusions, re-workings, appropriations, and adaptations in other forms including contemporary drama, novels, short stories, poetry, paintings, films, and even rock songs and computer games. Whether it is in The Lion King, Warm Bodies, or Sons of Anarchy, the influence and presence of Shakespeare surrounds us and continues to shape our understanding of culture and humanity.

This senior seminar will examine Shakespeare and some of these modern appropriations of his life and work in order to explore Shakespeare’s contemporary cultural presence and relevance. This course will provide an intensive exploration of Shakespeare and adaptation by examining numerous re-workings of two of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies: Hamlet and Macbeth. We will consider how these works construct and are constructed by their relationship to Shakespeare. We will explore concepts such as authenticity, originality, and imitation. In doing so, we will move beyond questions of relative quality or fidelity between original and adapted texts to posing critical questions including: How are adaptations or appropriations defined? Who defines them? How do these adaptations relate to Shakespeare? What cultural role does Shakespeare play in these adaptations? How does their connection to Shakespeare affect our interpretation and even our enjoyment of them? How do they affect our understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare’s plays?

Within this broader framework of Shakespearean adaptations, we will specifically focus on the evolution of the tragedy. Tragedy, considered by Aristotle to be the highest literary form, propelled Shakespeare to his widespread and enduring popularity. However, unlike Shakespeare’s longevity, tragedy, according to some thinkers, has not been as fortunate. Critics in 20th century have argued that rationalism and pessimism brought about the death of tragedy. This course confronts the apparent contradiction between Shakespeare’s continued relevance and tragedy’s obsolescence. It will examine how these modern adaptations evolve, update, reject, or rewrite tragedy and what these appropriations suggest about the nature of tragedy in the 21st century.
The goal of this course is to provide students with a greater understanding of the critical and theoretical issues surrounding the dynamics of adaptation as it pertains specifically to Shakespeare as well as classical and modern concepts of tragedy. Finally, as a seminar, our goal is to continue to hone critical reading and writing skills and, more specifically, to situate our work in a larger scholarly conversation.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**
Additional Readings Provided via WesternOnline.

*Bring Relevant Textbook or Printout to Every Class*

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ASSIGNMENTS**

A senior seminar is a small group of advanced students engaged in original research and intensive reading and study. To that end, more is expected of you than your standard undergraduate literature course. Careful and critical reading in advance of class, frequent and substantial participation, and an extensive, original seminar paper are required in senior seminars.

**Participation:** As a seminar, this course relies on strong, nuanced, and consistent participation from each student in the class. I expect you to read each of the assigned readings in advance and attend class ready to discuss these readings in detail. Students are required to participate in discussion regularly by answering questions, posing questions, making analytical comments, and expressing his or her opinion. I will generally rely on voluntary participation but I also will call on students to contribute. Participation will be evaluated using the following general criteria:

- **A:** Student contributes *daily* and *significantly* and always actively focuses on class discussion.
- **B:** Student contributes *regularly* and always actively focuses on class discussion.
- **C:** Student contributes *sporadically* and/or always actively focuses on class discussion.
- **D:** Student contributes *rarely* and/or frequently does not stay actively focused on the discussion.
- **F:** Student does not contribute and does not stay actively focused on the discussion.
I do not expect nor require students to have the “right” answer or to provide ground-breaking analysis but merely to engage in the process of discussing and analyzing the literature. Remember that quality is better than quantity but quantity is better than no quantity.

In order to participate at the level required, you will need to read the assignments carefully and critically. Here are some helpful guidelines for reading critically:

- Read the work of literature or article in advance (not right before class),
- Reread the work or sections of the work that are tricky or dense,
- Take reading notes – both summative and critical,
- Identify and question subtextual ideas and concepts,
- Draw connections between the primary and secondary readings,
- Draw connections between the Shakespearean texts and the adaptations, and
- Come to class with at least one conceptual comment about the reading.

In addition to daily participation, students will periodically be required to write discussion questions and to take unannounced reading quizzes that will factor into the participation grade.

**Discussion Questions:** Good questions should be open-ended, have multiple answers, and provoke discussion which helps us understand not only the work in question but how the work shapes our understanding of Shakespeare, tragedy and adaptation. Avoid questions based on one’s personal “opinion,” explanatory questions, hypothetical questions, questions about like or dislike, and questions that can be answered with yes, no, or some other simple sentence.

**Quizzes:** There will be a series of quizzes covering the reading assigned for that particular day. Questions on the quizzes will primarily be objective but some analytical questions will appear from time to time.

**Exploratory Essays:** For this assignment, students will write four short (1.5-2 page) exploratory essays. Two essays will engage conceptually with the primary works: identifying, close reading, and critically analyzing one or two key elements, anxieties, questions, or concepts for further exploration and grounding and contextualizing your analysis in relevant secondary readings from the class. The other two essays engage conceptually with an adaptation of one of the adaptations: identifying, close reading, and critically analyzing one or two key elements, anxieties, questions, or concepts for further exploration and grounding and contextualizing your analysis in Shakespeare’s play and relevant secondary readings from the class. Each paper should contain a tentative argument about the work in question and also assert/demonstrate how this issue has a larger scholarly relevance and significance. I would encourage students to treat these essays as a possible seed for the longer seminar paper. Essays but be uploaded in .doc or .rtf format to WesternOnline by the dates and times below.

- **Essay #1 on Macbeth Due:** January 31st by 11:59 pm
- **Essay #2 on Serena OR ETW Due:** February 21st by 11:59 pm
- **Essay #3 on Hamlet Due:** March 7th by 11:59 pm
- **Essay #4 on R&G OR To Be Due:** April 2nd by 11:59 pm

**Scholarly Essay Project:** As the core assignment of the course, you will write a 12-15 page scholarly essay that advances a sustained critical argument regarding Shakespeare, tragedy, and adaptation, engaging at least 5 critical/theoretical sources (beyond assigned readings) relevant to
your topic. I encourage you to extend one of your shorter papers into this project. You are not allowed to combine two or more shorter papers into the scholarly essay. This paper will require you to engage in and contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation surrounding your topic.

This assignment will require:

- a 3-4 page scholarly essay proposal that outlines your argument and integrates at least 3 of your sources,
- rough draft (12 page minimum),
- a 250-word abstract of your essay,
- 1-2 page (single-spaced) reader’s report for a peer essay, and
- Revised 12-15 page scholarly essay.

**Scholarly Project Due Dates:**

**Proposal:** April 13th by 11:59 pm (WesternOnline)

**Abstract & Rough Draft Due IN CLASS and on WesternOnline:**

- April 23rd (M/W section)
- April 24th (T/TH section)

**Reader’s Report Due IN CLASS:**

- April 30th (M/W section)
- May 1st (T/TH section)

**Final Draft Due in my office and on WesternOnline by:**

- Monday, May 5th by 3:00 pm (M/W section)
- Tuesday, May 6th by 3:00 pm (T/TH section)

**Essay Policies:** All essays should be typed, double-spaced and conform to MLA guidelines for format and in-text citation. Both secondary and primary texts must be cited both in the text and on a work cited page. Late essays will be assessed a 5% penalty for every calendar day they are late. No essays will be accepted after Thursday, May 8th. Late rough draft penalties will apply to the grade of the final draft.

**DISTRIBUTION AND GRADING SCALE**

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COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: Regular attendance is not only mandatory but essential for success in this course. Students are expected to attend class on a regular basis and will be held accountable for any material covered in class, including class discussion, announcements and any changes to reading schedule and assignments. Students are responsible for getting information and class notes from a fellow classmate. Preparation is a crucial part of attendance. Therefore, students are required to bring the appropriate text to every class meeting.

Each student is allowed three absences for any reason – “legitimate” or otherwise – ranging from illness to oversleeping. I do not require students to explain nor document these absences and I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. Allowances to the overall number may be made in extreme circumstances (e.g. serious prolonged illness). These circumstances will need to be documented, and the student must contact me within 4 class meetings of the first absence.

Possible Attendance/Preparation Penalties:

- Failure to bring the appropriate text to class will result in a 7.5% penalty to participation grade per instance.
- After three absences, each subsequent absence will result in a 3% penalty to your final grade.
- Students who miss more than eight total classes will receive an automatic F for the course.

Tardiness: I am not bothered by individuals who are occasionally late for class or must occasionally leave class early — the key word being occasionally. However, if you anticipate that you must consistently arrive late or leave early, you need to replace this course with another.

If you arrive after I take roll, it is your responsibility to speak with me after class to ensure I record your attendance. If you do not speak with me, you may be inadvertently counted absent. If you miss more than half of the class due to tardiness, it will count as an absence.

Scholastic Dishonesty: Scholastic dishonesty of any kind on any assignment undermines the quality of education at WIU and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Scholastic dishonesty includes cheating, fabrication, falsification, multiple submissions, and plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty of any kind will result in an F in the course and will be reported to CAGAS. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes scholastic dishonesty. I will also be happy to answer any questions you may have. You should also consult the University policy at http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Americans with Disabilities Act: “In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through the Disability Resource Center and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor’s attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Resource Center at 298-2512 for additional services.” These accommodations will be gladly given. Please contact me ASAP.
**University Writing Center:** The UWC is available to assist you with general and specific questions on any of the writing assignments for this course. Consultants can add another voice to your writing at any stage in the writing process from brainstorming to polishing the final product. Please call for an appointment (298–2815) and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment to your session. A visit to the UWC should be a supplement to (rather than a replacement for) talking about your paper with me.

**Classroom Behavior:** Students are expected to behave with respect toward the course, their fellow students, and the instructor. We will be reading a variety of pieces which contain subject matter that may be deemed offensive to some people, including, for instance, profanity, depictions of sex, and depictions of violence. I expect students to be able to read and discuss this material in a mature way and maintain an appropriate deportment during class. Private conversations and other disruptive behaviors – such as texting – interfere with teaching and learning and will not be tolerated. Texting during class is strictly prohibited. After an initial warning, violation of this policy will result in dismissal from the class and a 15% penalty to your participation grade. Continued disruptive behavior can result in an assigned classroom seat, penalty to final grade, and/or expulsion from the class.

For information on Students’ Rights and Responsibilities, visit [www.wiu.edu/provost/student/](http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/)

**Email:** Email correspondence is a quick and easy way to communicate during this semester. I will use it frequently to communicate with the class, and I encourage you to use it to contact me to set up an appointment, ask questions, make comments, etc. I do consider email to be formal communication so I expect emails to be properly addressed, to maintain a professional tone, and to be grammatically correct. If your question or request is too large to be handily resolved over email, I will ask you to set an appointment to discuss it in an individual conference.

**Office Hours:** Students are encouraged to visit during office hours. These are available to use without setting an appointment. Additionally, if I am in my office, feel free to drop in to see if I am available to meet. If you are not able to meet during office hours, please email me, and we can set an appointment.

I always enjoy speaking with students about their writing, the readings for the course, or literary topics large or small! Additionally, if you are working on a paper and have questions or would like feedback, I am happy to work with you on your paper at any stage of the writing process.