

CORE 200: LIBERAL ARTS READING SALON

Dr. Richard Edinger, Thematic Option Honors Program

Lecture W 4-5:50 pm 63573D

For Lunatics, Lovers, and Poets

Brush up your Shakespeare

Start quoting him now

- Cole Porter, "Brush Up Your Shakespeare"

How much do you know about Shakespeare? How much do you think you *should* know? To an incredible extent, cultural literacy relies on a degree of Shakespearean literacy. That is, references to Shakespeare are pervasive, and the better "read" you are in Shakespeare, the better you may be able to read large swaths of culture. From contemporary plays like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, films like *Ten Things I Hate about You*, episodes of *Star Trek*, or graphic novels like *Sandman*, not to mention mere lines, images, jokes, or names, there is an infinitesimal amount (as the production never ceases) of texts and artifacts that draw on Shakespeare and assume a bit of knowledge about him.

The goal of this course is to create a low-pressure space in which we can read and explore Shakespeare as well as a select number of his "descendants." Shakespeare's central place in our education system has meant that his plays have been mandated, and thus seem a hurdle to overcome. This is stuff, we've been told, you have to know, so you have to suffer through it. Our approach in this course will be to reframe the need to know Shakespeare as a way to gain a deeper understanding (or sometimes a basic understanding) of not just some of his works but so many others that refer back to him in some way. Together, let's work through the difficulties of his language, the complexities of his themes, and the sophistication (and occasional crassness) of his wit to better understand why and how his texts have become so integral and essential. If we're lucky, we may even learn what makes them enjoyable!

We will read some Shakespeare plays, of course, and ask: What's the big deal? Along the way, we will mix in some fascinating adaptations and re-workings, some by authors that want to challenge Shakespeare's dominance as one of the loudest white male voices. We will watch a "high culture" film production with the most renowned actors and a "low culture" teen comedy version to question Shakespeare's role in the high/low binary and our own hierarchical judgements. Non-western works as well as graphic novels, music, advertising, video games, and other media forms will also be on the table as potential material to consider. What makes Shakespeare so charged – culturally, politically, aesthetically, even linguistically – that we constantly find ourselves returning to him?

CORE 200 lasts for twelve weeks (instead of the usual fifteen) and meets once each week for two hours in a seminar setting. The Salon encourages the sharing of ideas and thoughts and highlights common themes and interdisciplinary connections as they emerge from discussion. Discussions that grow out of reading groups can become the starting point for future research. The two-unit Salon is an integral part of the Thematic Approaches to Humanities and Society minor. A special feature of the Reading Salon is that some of the books to be read by the participants will be selected by the students. The course is graded Credit/No Credit.

Proposed Readings (final list to be determined by class)

Aimé Césaire. *A Tempest*.

Neil Gaiman. "A Midsummer Night's Dream." *Sandman*.

Shakespeare. *Hamlet*.

---. *Henry V*.

---. *The Merchant of Venice*.

---. *The Tempest*.

Jane Smiley. *A Thousand Acres*.

Tom Stoppard. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Proposed Films (final list to be determined by class)

Throne of Blood. Dir. Akira Kurosawa.

Richard III. Dir. Laurence Olivier.

Selections from *The Hollow Crown*, *Slings and Arrows*, *Star Trek*, and *Kiss Me Kate*.