

AI 182 “INFINITE VARIETY”: SHAKESPEARE’S WOMEN

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Competencies offered: A-1-X, H-3-X, A-5

Course Description:

Shakespeare’s 37 plays provide a tapestry of human experience unequalled in richness by any other Western writer. Nowhere are this writer’s insights more profound than in his examination of the power and powerlessness of the women in his plays.

“The basic distinction in human social order since the beginning of recorded history has been gender. Beyond any other characteristic gender has determined role and function... Above all, gender difference has influenced the way we think, the way we perceive reality.” (Marilyn French)

This course examines the question of gender relations (and issues of legitimacy, sex, love and power) by examining the roles of the female characters in three of Shakespeare’s plays:

Part 1: “False to his bed?” Chaste constancy and erotic paranoia: Beatrice and Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Part 2: “What shall I do with my doublet and hose?” Girls will be boys: Rosalind in *As You Like It*

Part 3: “Sharper than a serpent’s tooth” Villainy and virtue: Goneril, Regan and Cordelia in *King Lear*

Student requirements:

Students are required, in addition to participating in in-class discussions and presentations, to submit the following:

- A final Research Paper
- An eight-entry journal

Expected outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will have

- A general awareness of the Shakespeare’s plays and the social and moral climate in which these plays were written
- Some detailed knowledge of at least three of Shakespeare’s plays
- An increased ability to articulate how contemporary human experience parallels or differs from that of a previous cultural period
- A greater appreciation of the humanities, particularly with respect to literature
- An increased awareness of the relevance and impact of gender difference in literature and society

Required Learning Tools:

Texts:

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. New York: Washington Square Press (Folger Shakespeare Library), 1997

---. *King Lear*. New York: Washington Square Press (Folger Shakespeare Library), 1993

---. *Much Ado About Nothing*. New York: Washington Square Press (Folger Shakespeare Library), 1995

Handouts:

These will be distributed throughout the course. They include, but are not limited to, readings from the following texts:

Berger, Harry Jr. *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.

Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Drakakis, John, ed. *Alternative Shakespeares*. London: Methuen, 1985.

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.

Gay, Penny. *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women*. London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1994.

Osborne, Lawrence. *The Poisoned Embrace: a Brief History of Sexual Pessimism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Shaapiro, Michael. *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Traub, Valerie. *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Wheeler, Richard P. *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Zimmerman, Susan A. ed. *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Course Outline:

Week 1: Introduction

Introduction: "What is a Shakespeare?"

Introduction to the topic

Introduction to the Competencies

General discussion of the Research Paper and the generating of topics

The nature and purpose of the Journal

PART 1: “FALSE TO HIS BED?”

Week 2: *Much Ado About Nothing*

Introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing*

Female Chastity

The world of Shakespeare’s Messina

The women in Shakespeare’s Messina and the men who love them

1st Journal entry due

Week 3: *Much Ado About Nothing*

Hero’s dilemma

Beatrice’s dilemma

Is Claudio a villain?

“I would eat his heart in the marketplace”

The power of forgiveness

Small-group discussions and presentations

Research Paper check-in

2nd Journal entry due

PART 2: “WHAT SHALL I DO WITH MY DOUBLET AND HOSE?”

Week 4: *As You Like It*

Introduction to *As You Like It*

The world of the play: fathers, daughters and family structure

Female morality in Shakespeare’s England

Shakespeare’s cross-dressing theatre: the plight of women

Small-group discussions and presentation

3rd Journal entry due

Week 5: *As You Like It*

Rosalind and Celia in disguise

The disguised woman confronts her lover: Rosalind’s power over Orlando

Small-group discussions and presentations

Research Paper check-in

4th Journal entry due

Week 6: *As You Like It*

The “love” scenes between Rosalind/Ganymede and Orlando

5th Journal entry due

PART 3: “SHARPER THAN A SERPENT’S TOOTH”

Week 7: *King Lear*

Introduction to *King Lear*

The world of the play: daughters, disobedience and dowries

The absent woman: where is Lear’s daughters’ mother?

The first scene of the play: things fall apart
Small-group discussions and presentations
Research Paper check-in
6th Journal entry due

Week 8: *King Lear*

Evil? Wicked?: the journeys of Regan and Goneril
The blurring of gender: what power do the women have in this play?
The prodigal daughter: Cordelia returns
Small-group discussions and presentations
7th Journal entry due

Week 9: *King Lear*

“She’s dead; dead as earth”: the death of the female principle
Research Paper check-in
8th Journal entry due

Week 10: Conclusion

Review of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *King Lear*
Research Paper presentations
Research Paper due

Assessment:

Assessment of student competence will be based on

- Intelligent, informed participation in discussions and presentations: 30%
- Journal: 30%
- Research Paper: 40%