

## English 219.3

### SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES



Sir John Falstaff and Mistress Quickly  
from the frontispiece to Francis Kirkman's *The Wits, or Sport Upon Sport* (1672)

TuTh, 8:00-9:15, Friends 205

Course Instructor: Dan Breen

Office: Muller 302

Phone: 274-1014

Office Hours: Tues. 11-12; Wed. 2-4; Thurs. 11-12 and by appointment

Email: [dbreen@ithaca.edu](mailto:dbreen@ithaca.edu)

### Course Texts:

Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edition (W. W. Norton and Company, 2008).

Supplementary readings will be handed out in class.

### Aims and Goals:

Students and readers of Shakespeare have for centuries admired his ability to create impressively realistic and vital characters; to express, in Samuel Johnson's words, "human sentiments in human language." Typically this "humanity" tends to be discussed within the contexts generated by the protagonists in Shakespeare's tragedies, who seem so relatable to modern readers because of the ways in which they present compelling glimpses of the inner workings of their psychologies and insist that the audience understand them as individual human beings. This course offers a different perspective on Shakespeare's "humanity" by using the comedies to explore the more social aspects of his characters' experiences. While tragedy is concerned to illustrate how human beings draw upon their own emotional, spiritual, and intellectual resources in response to crisis, comedy is much more attuned to the question of how different social groups identify and solve problems collectively. Among the questions the course will address are the following: what space for the individual voice does the essentially social framework of Elizabethan comedy allow? Is comedy a conservative or a radical genre? How does comedy force a compromise between punishment and forgiveness?

### Requirements:

Your written work will consist of two major essays (4-5 pages) and a short analytical exercise (2-3 pages). It is important to understand that each of these assignments is **required** in order to receive credit for the course.

### Essay Policy:

#### 1) Revisions

You may revise **one** major essay for full credit (ie, the grade on your revision would replace the grade on your initial version). The short analytical exercise is meant essentially to be diagnostic and is therefore ineligible for revision.

#### 2) Due Dates

Essays are due in class on the date stipulated below in the Class Schedule.

You may request a one-week extension **in advance of the essay's due date**; however, essays for which extensions are granted **may not be revised**.

#### 3) Plagiarism

Any incident of academic misconduct will be taken very seriously and treated in accordance with the guidelines stipulated in the Ithaca College Student Policy Manual, section 7.1.2.6. These guidelines are available at:

[http://www.ithaca.edu/link\\_index.php?url=http://www.ithaca.edu/attorney/policies/vol7/Volume\\_7-70102.htm&source=handbook](http://www.ithaca.edu/link_index.php?url=http://www.ithaca.edu/attorney/policies/vol7/Volume_7-70102.htm&source=handbook). See also the College policy on plagiarism in the Policy Manual, section 7.1.4.1, available at [http://www.ithaca.edu/attorney/policies/vol7/Volume\\_7-70104.htm](http://www.ithaca.edu/attorney/policies/vol7/Volume_7-70104.htm)

### Class Participation:

Class participation will also be an important part of your grade; the course is, after all, designed as a seminar. Most of the important work we do will develop as a result of our conversations, and it is essential therefore that each of us comes to class having read the assigned material carefully, and prepared to participate in thoughtful discussion.

It is also important to recognize, however, that not everyone feels comfortable taking part in analytical discussions. In this course, then, there are three ways in which students can improve their class participation grades:

1. By participating in the analytical discussions we have each class

This includes:

- Asking questions about the material
- Offering a reading of a passage, or making a larger analytical point
- Responding to comments made by others

2. By volunteering to read passages aloud

Many of our discussions will focus on specific passages that are crucial to some aspect of the development of the play. We will always begin these discussions by reading these passages aloud. Students who volunteer to read these passages will earn credit toward their class participation grades.

3. By performing well on in-class quizzes

We will have approximately six in-class quizzes this semester (roughly one every other week).

In addition, there are certain basic standards to which students must adhere in order to maximize their class participation grades. Students must attend class regularly (see the attendance policy below for clarification), must observe basic standards of classroom decorum, and must bring to every class a text of the essay, poem, or play we'll be studying. Students who do not bring a text will be considered to be unprepared for class.

### **Midterm and Final Grades:**

Your **midterm grade** will be calculated according to the following percentages:

First major essay: 40%

Midterm exam: 30%  
 Class participation: 20%  
 Short analytical exercise: 10%

Your **final course grade** will be calculated according to the following percentages:

Major essays: 30%  
 Midterm exam: 20%  
 Final exam: 20%  
 Class participation: 20%  
 Short analytical exercise: 10%

### **Attendance Policy:**

You are allowed **four** absences, no questions asked—use them carefully. Beginning with the fifth, however, your **final course grade will drop one full letter grade** for each additional absence (eg, from B+ to C+, or A to B). Students who miss eight classes before the withdrawal deadline (**Friday, November 6**) will be automatically dropped from the course. Students whose accumulated absences total eight or more before the end of the semester **will not pass the course**. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. If you are seriously ill or need to attend to a personal emergency, you obviously won't be penalized.

### **Class Schedule**

#### **August:**

Thurs. 27—Course Introduction

#### **September:**

Tues. 1—Introduction to Shakespeare:

Gates, “Dead White Male of the Year”; Woolf, “The Strange Elizabethans”; “Notes on An Elizabethan Play” (photocopy)

Thurs. 3— Introduction to Shakespeare:

Gates, “Dead White Male of the Year”; Woolf, “The Strange Elizabethans”; “Notes on An Elizabethan Play” (photocopy)

Tues. 8—Shakespeare, sonnets 30, 65

Thurs. 10—Shakespeare, sonnets 80-81, 73

Tues. 15—Renaissance Theories of Comedy:

Udall, Prologue to *Ralph Roister Doister* (photocopy)

Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, Book I, chs. XIII-XV (photocopy)

**\*\*\*Short Response Paper Due\*\*\***

Thurs. 17—Renaissance Theories of Comedy:

“I. G.,” selections from “A Refutation” (photocopy)

Jonson, selections from *Bartholomew Fair* (photocopy)

Tues. 22—Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Acts I-II

Thurs. 24—Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Acts III-IV

Tues. 29—Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Acts IV-V

**October:**

Thurs. 1—Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Acts I-II

Tues. 6—Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Acts III-IV

**\*\*\*First Major Essay Due\*\*\***

Thurs. 8—Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Acts IV-V

Tues. 13—**MIDTERM EXAM**

Thurs. 15—**Fall Break—NO CLASS**

Tues. 20—Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Acts I-II

Thurs. 22—Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Acts III-IV

Tues. 27—Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Acts IV-V

Thurs. 29—Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, Acts I-II

**November:**

Tues. 3—Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, Acts III-IV

Thurs. 5—Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, Acts IV-V

Tues. 10—Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Acts I-II

**\*\*\*Second Major Essay Due\*\*\***

Thurs. 12—**NO CLASS**

Tues. 17—Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Acts III-IV

Thurs. 19—Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Acts IV-V

Tues. 24—**Thanksgiving—NO CLASS**

Thurs. 26—**Thanksgiving—NO CLASS**

**December:**

Tues. 1—Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Acts I-II

Thurs. 3—Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Acts III-IV

Tues. 8—Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Acts IV-V

Thurs. 10—Loose ends, etc.

**\*\*\*The Final Exam for this class will take place at a date and time TBA\*\*\***