

### Aims of the Course

#### **The main aims of the course are to achieve:**

1. An understanding of the plays of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists in the light of contemporary literary theory.
2. An understanding of the relationship between textual interpretation and performance.

#### **To accomplish these aims, we shall be examining:**

- a) The nature and conditions of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.
- b) The exploration of plays in the light of genre, new historicist, feminist, psychoanalytical and other literary theories. *There will be an emphasis on reading the plays in their historical context.*
- c) At least six or seven productions in London and Stratford.

One of the challenges of this course will be to balance the academic study of the plays with a sustained focus on Shakespeare in performance. Michael Bogdanov, an adventurous ex-RSC director, who has since worked all over the world, says, "Shakespeare wasn't literature, he was theatre. His work became literature later on when people transcribed his plays on to paper." Our attempt to redress this imbalance will be made through visits to the theatre and analysis of productions on video. We may see plays other than our prescribed texts in order to gain as broad a picture as possible of Shakespeare's entire oeuvre. [Bogdanov's view – shared by most critics and practitioners – has come to be challenged recently. That is, recent scholarship suggests that Shakespeare did write to be read. More of this in class discussion.]

### Format of Classes

Some lecturing, whole discussions, group discussions with reports back to the whole class, student presentations, screening of videos, and possibly one guest lecture. We shall also make a visit to Shakespeare's Globe for a workshop on Elizabethan theatrical conventions. Most of our discussion will concentrate on a close textual analysis of certain scenes, thematic overviews ("how is meaning produced?", "how relevant are the plays to us still today"?), and on productions and their interpretations of the text. While Shakespeare wrote in what philologists would call modern English (compare the medieval English of Chaucer) and the inexperienced reader can comprehend substantial passages with little help, his language does present problems to the contemporary reader and spectator. **This is why you need to read the plays at least twice, making judicious use of footnotes.** It would be a pity if we had to spend a lot of time in class "translating" his speeches into modern English. Most of our energies should be devoted to the wealth of interpretations that a close reading of the plays can yield.

### Modes of Assessment

1. Three essays (60%)
2. Quizzes (pass/fail), class presentations and reports, and class participation (20%)

### 3. Final exam (20%)

*Regular attendance and punctuality are important. You must attend all productions. Deadlines for papers must be met. Your final grade may be adversely affected by poor attendance and punctuality, and failure to attend productions and meet deadlines.*

*Please note also that laptops cannot be used during the class.*

#### **Calendar of Productions**

**Thu 18 January, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Novello theatre, tube Covent Garden.**

**Thu 25 January, *Cymbeline*, Lyric Hammersmith, tube Hammersmith.**

**Fri 2 February, *Richard III*, Stratford-upon-Avon.**

**Tue 6 February, *Twelfth Night*, Old Vic, tube Waterloo.**

**Tue 13 February, *Taming of the Shrew*, Old Vic.**

**Wed 14 March, *The Tempest*, Novello theatre.**

**Thu 5 April, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Roundhouse theatre.**

#### **Texts to be Studied in Class**

All the above plays need to be read and will be discussed as texts and performances in class. Some will be discussed in more depth than others.

*You are advised to have your own copy of any recognised **annotated** edition of the plays (e.g. New Shakespeare, Arden, New Cambridge, Oxford, Signet). A Collected Edition of Shakespeare's plays will **not** be adequate because they are usually insufficiently annotated.*

**It is of critical importance that you bring your own texts to class. With the seating arrangements at the London Centre it is difficult to share texts. In any case you will probably be making notes in your texts.**

Photocopies of critical and other supplementary material will be provided. You are expected to read and assimilate this material. It will be used in class discussion.

#### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case by case basis. Students must register with the Office of Academic Support Services and provide appropriate documentation to the college before any academic adjustment will be provided.