

Course description

Descriptif du cours

Department : Department of English

Instructor (s): Dorra Touzri

Academic year: 2020-21

Level: 2nd Year Prepa

Course title: Elizabethan Drama: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Semester 1)

Course outline: This course will be centered on the close reading of *Hamlet*, a major Shakespearean tragedy which made up the richness of the Elizabethan theatre, and constituted the major dramatic achievement of the age. Insight into Renaissance philosophy will certainly guide students to a richer understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's plays. Thus, a clear account of Elizabethan thought, and the historical and cultural context in which Shakespeare's works thrived, will give substance to the students' analysis of the Shakespearean text. The course's main objective then is to show students how a text's meaning is informed by the cultural and historical contexts in which it is produced and received; and help them articulate how literature both reflects and shapes culture, society and history.

This tutorial equally aims at initiating students to modern critical approaches to Shakespeare's drama which have radically challenged traditional classical interpretations focusing mainly on character in their study of Shakespeare's works. Modern interpretive readings (feminist, psychoanalytic, political, and existential, etc.) will thus be suggested so as to help students assimilate how changing social assumptions may affect the audience's (readers') reception of Shakespeare's works.

The passages are chosen on the basis of their dramatic importance, philosophical pertinence, and relevance to the spirit of the age. Students are requested not only to read and analyze the passages, but also to comment on them and enrich class discussion. The close reading of the selected passages should help the students assimilate and appreciate Shakespeare's dramatic and artistic genius. The consultation of books and articles suggested

in the bibliography is compulsory as it helps students better assimilate the dramatic genre and its purposes, and develop their writing skills and critical spirit.

Course Outline:

Weeks 1&2:

- The Renaissance: Historical, social and philosophical context.
- Elizabethan drama: Substance and main dramatic conventions.
- Initiation to Shakespeare's main works.

Week 3:

- Opening scene.

Week 4:

- Act I scene 2: "O that this too too sullied flesh would melt"

Week 5:

- Act I scene 5: The Ghost's speech

Week 6:

- Act II scene 2: "What a piece of work is a man."

Week 7:

Act II scene 2: "What a rogue and peasant slave am I!"

Week 8:

Act III scene 1: "to be or not to be"

Week 9:

Act III scene 1: The nunnery scene.

Week 10:

Act III scene 3: The prayer scene.

Week 11:

Act III scene 4: The closet scene.

Week 12:

Act IV scene 4: "How all occasions do inform against me and spur my dull revenge"

Week 13:

Act V scene 1: The grave-digger scene.

Week 14:

Final scene

Course objectives: Hamlet's openness to all kinds of possible interpretations make it the most theatrical of plays. That theatricality contributes significantly to *Hamlet's* inexhaustible capacity for being interpreted afresh. The course's main objective is thus to make students familiar with many different ways in which *Hamlet* has been interpreted on stage and on the page. The course will enable them to form their own response and help them see that although the play is deeply rooted in the preoccupations of Elizabethan England, it is sharply relevant today.

Method of evaluation: Presentations / Term papers / Final exams

As part of the study of the play, students are asked to write essays, either under examination conditions or for coursework (term papers). Students are expected to set out their thought on a particular aspect of the play, using evidence from the text. They should be able to develop an argument, in an organized, coherent and persuasive way.

References:

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