

ENGLISH 303
SHAKESPEARE AND PHILOSOPHY

SPRING 2004

MR. PIERCE

TEXT: Any recent annotated Shakespeare; please bring to each class.
Essays in course pack.

Feb. 10	Introduction
Feb. 12	Skepticism, Annas and Barnes 1-30
Feb. 17	<i>Hamlet</i>
Feb. 24	Stoicism; Arnold essay
Feb. 26	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
Mar. 2	Cynicism; handout
Mar. 4	<i>Timon of Athens</i>
Mar. 11	Nature and evil; <i>King Lear</i>
Mar. 18	First paper due
Mar. 23	Determinacy of readings; <i>As You Like It</i>
Apr. 6	Text and performance
Apr. 13	Feminism; <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
Apr. 20	History and historicisms
Apr. 22	<i>Richard II</i>
May 4	Criticism and its critics; Levin essay
May 6	Reports on critics; second paper due
May 11	Reports on critics
May 13	Conclusion

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Timely familiarity with the assigned texts
Attendance and class participation
Six brief comments (1-2 pages each)
Report on a critical essay
Two papers 5-7 pages each

Each paper should explore some issue relevant to the course in one of the assigned plays. You should be developing your own ideas but should show familiarity with issues and arguments discussed in class and assigned texts. For each paper you should read at least two critical or scholarly texts relevant to your topic. If you do not have occasion to footnote to them, include them in a bibliography along with any other print or electronic sources. Please include the honor pledge. Refer to passages from the play by act, scene, and line numbers in the form 3.4.122-25.

Papers will be marked down for lateness unless you get an extension in advance or have a medical or similar emergency. If you are having problems with the paper or just want to discuss it, feel free to consult with me, and I would be glad to look at drafts. No work can be handed in after May 18 without an official Incomplete.

TOPICS FOR BRIEF COMMENTS:

For each play (except *King Lear*) write a discussion of a page or two. You may use the topic given below or one of your choosing, but have a clear, limited idea in mind. It is important to turn in this comment at the beginning of the period indicated unless you are absent for a good cause.

- Feb. 19 Find some debatable issue about *Hamlet*, and make a case for skeptical suspension of judgment about it. Thus you might argue that one cannot rationally choose between “religious retreat” and “brothel” as what Hamlet means when he says to Ophelia, “Get thee to a nunnery.”
- Feb. 26 Is Brutus a genuine Stoic sage, or is he self-deceived?
- Mar. 4 What is the nature of the relationship between Timon and Apemantus?
- Mar. 25 Find some reading or interpretation of a passage in *As You Like It* that you think is wrong and argue why. (It should be a real reading, not one you make up to attack.)
- Apr. 15 Choose some idea about the play that you believe strongly, and write as powerful an argument as you can for why you are wrong. (Don’t offer a fake argument; make it as good and persuasive as you can.)

Apr. 27 Explain why one view of history that you choose offers a good explanation for Richard's deposition –in the play rather than in historical reality. Thus you might argue that in keeping with the theory of providential history we can see God's hand at work.

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