

ENGL 366B: Shakespeare: Histories and Tragedies

Instructor: Dr. Richard van Oort

Schedule: Fall 2019, TWF 9:30-10:20am

There is nothing alien about Shakespeare's writing. Sure, the language is a bit different from the way we speak today. But once you get a feel for the language, the ideas fall into place quite naturally. What is truly startlingly about Shakespeare—what makes him unique—is that his ideas are every bit as extraordinary as his language. Shakespeare was both a poet and a philosopher.



Now philosophers are not known for their accessibility. Let's face it, reading Kant or Hegel is not easy. The difficulty of their prose is a sign of the complexity of their ideas.

Shakespeare's ideas are every bit as original and complex as Kant's or Hegel's. But Shakespeare wrote plays and poems instead of philosophical treatises. This means that he appeals on many different levels simultaneously. Putting it very simply, you could say that he wrote for two kinds of audiences. One wanted to be entertained, but the other wanted to learn.

In this class we will certainly not ignore the first kind of audience, but our main approach will be from the perspective of the second. The aim of this class will be to see what we can *learn* from Shakespeare. That is, after all, what it means to be a student.

I have been a student of Shakespeare for many years and I would like to help you learn from the bard. I will do this by showing you what worked for me. I will try to do this in as systematic a fashion as possible. All the materials for this course (the lectures, the reading questions, the film clips, the essay topics, even the midterm and final exam) are designed to help you see Shakespeare in all his originality and complexity.

In the end, however, the best teacher is not me but Shakespeare himself. If you approach him with the desire to learn, you will not be disappointed. Who better to teach you than the foremost author in the world?



- If you would like to see a detailed outline of this course, [click here](#).
- If you would like to see what other courses I teach, [click here](#).