

Department of English & Writing Studies
Theatre Studies Program

English 2191F (001)
Shakespeare in the Age of Me Too and Taylor Swift
Fall 2026

This syllabus may alter slightly as the course develops.
Stay abreast of updates by checking your email and attending class.

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Prerequisites: At least 60% in any 1000-level or above “E” or combination of two 1000-level or above “F/G” courses from any department in the faculties of Arts and Humanities, Information and Media Studies (FIMS), or Music, or from the Department of Anthropology, the Department of History, the Department of Political Science, or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Land Acknowledgement

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Course Description

This course studies issues of intersectional identity, consent, and privilege in five plays by Shakespeare, with particular attention to the plays in production. Two of the texts will be in repertory at Stratford (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Othello*) and we will see *Dream* together in live performance.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- analyze relations of power and choice as they play out in Shakespeare's drama in relation to race, gender, social rank, sexuality, and religion;
- analyze how genre shapes perceptions of individual and collective boundaries;
- describe a variety of performance choices and explain how they shape interpretation of character, theme, and/or situation;
- frame and develop evidence-based arguments, both orally and in written form.

Course Materials.

All texts are required and are available at Bookstore. Feel free to use other editions and/or second-hand copies and/or a complete works, but you must bring physical copies of these texts to class that you can underline, circle, highlight, asterisk, add comments to in the margins and between the lines, and otherwise deface (or to put that differently, make entirely your own).

Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (\$12.99)
Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (\$12.99)
Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (\$12.99)
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (\$12.99)
Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (\$12.99)

Plays We Will Study (all of these are required reading):

Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*
Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
Shakespeare, *Othello*

PLEASE NOTE!

We're seeing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* LIVE at the Stratford Festival on Saturday, September 26 at 8:00 p.m.! Tickets are \$25+tax, \$34+tax, or \$45+tax. The return bus, per student, will cost \$20. It will leave at 6pm from Lambton Drive, near Alumni Hall at Western University and return to the same spot.

Note that we're attending closing night of a hugely popular show so tickets will sell out. Please book your theatre ticket and return bus (if needed) *today*. To book, go to <https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/offer/UWO-Offer>. Make sure that you have your ticket sent to you by email and that you purchase a bus ticket (if needed) at the same time.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

1200-word performance analysis of *Dream* (15%)

Commonplace book (15%)

1500-word essay (15%)

5 x in-class quizzes (10%). Four quiz grades out of five will count towards the course grade.

*Not eligible for additional academic consideration.

Final exam (35%)

Participation (10%)

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website.

Additional Information

Late Paper Policy

If you submit a paper after the due date, the paper will be counted as late. The grade will be reduced by a penalty of two marks (2%) for each calendar day that it is late.

Extensions will only be considered if supported by a request for accommodation sent by students' Academic Counsellors in their home faculty (see below, "Academic Consideration").

Statements

Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration can be used for any assignment.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are **not** eligible for additional consideration.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term **always** require formal supporting documentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized use of AI tools such as ChatGPT to create content that is submitted as one's own. In this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. Students must however critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploration, however students are expected to

uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding plagiarism. Assignments should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

1200-word performance analysis (15%) – due October 23

Commonplace book (15%) – due December 9

1500-word essay (15%) – due December 9

5 x in-class quizzes (10%) – scheduled as in the calendar below. Four quiz grades out of ten will be counted towards the course grade. *Not eligible for additional academic consideration.

Final exam (35%)

Participation (10%)

Timetable

SEPTEMBER

9 Introduction

14 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

16 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

21 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

23 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. First in-class quiz.

September 26, 8pm – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Stratford Festival

28 Post-performance discussion

30 No class – National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

OCTOBER

5 *Measure for Measure*

7 *Measure for Measure*.

October 10-18 – THANKSGIVING AND READING WEEK

19 *Measure for Measure*. Second in-class quiz.

21 *Measure for Measure*. Discussion of Gregory Doran, dir., RSC staging (2019). View it on Digital Theatre Plus (available through Weldon databases – this is a proprietorial site and not available by means of a Google search).

October 23 – Performance analysis due

26 *Troilus and Cressida*

28 *Troilus and Cressida*.

NOVEMBER

2 *Troilus and Cressida*.

4 *Troilus and Cressida*. Discussion of Gregory Doran, dir., RSC staging (2018). View it on Digital Theatre Plus (available through Weldon databases – this is a proprietorial site and not available by means of a Google search). Third in-class quiz.

9 *Troilus and Cressida*

11 *Hamlet*

16 *Hamlet*

18 *Hamlet*. Fourth in-class quiz.

23 *Hamlet*. Discussion of Peter Pasyk, dir., Stratford Festival staging (2022). View it on Digital Theatre Plus (available through Weldon databases – this is a proprietorial site and not available by means of a Google search).

25 *Othello*

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

30 *Othello*

2 *Othello*. Fifth in-class quiz.

7 *Othello*. Discussion of Richard Twyman, dir., English Touring Theatre (2018). View it on Digital Theatre Plus (available through Weldon databases – this is a proprietorial site and not available by means of a Google search).

9 Review.

December 9 – Commonplace book and final essay due

PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

We will be seeing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Stratford Festival on Saturday, September 26 at 8pm. The purpose of this assignment is to strengthen your critical analysis of Shakespeare in performance. Write an essay of 1,200 words that analyzes the Stratford production. If you're unable to attend the *Dream* trip, please contact the instructor to discuss an alternative performance-oriented assignment.

I'm not especially interested to know whether or not you liked the production. This sort of evaluative judgement will probably emerge over the course of your essay, but the primary emphasis must be on *analysis*. Think about some aspect of *Dream* that you found interesting or troubling or otherwise remarkable as you read the play. When you turn to your essay, focus on one or two production choices from the show that you consider especially important in terms of how the Stratford company interpreted the play. You might be struck by choreography, lighting and sound effects, striking gestures or props, costuming decisions, or unexpected emphases introduced by actors that introduced a reading of the play that hadn't occurred to you. In your essay, describe the production choice(s) concisely, and then analyse how it or they shaped a certain interpretation of the action, either in terms of the overall action, or in that particular scene. You might analyze the choices in terms of the tone of the production (happy, melancholy), power dynamics between characters on stage, individual characterisations, homoerotic tensions, the treatment of revenge – the potential interpretive significances are up to you.

Your essay will be graded according to the following criteria:

An ability to notice and build into your analysis significant production details;

An ability to construct an argument that analyses how these staging choices shaped a particular interpretation of the play;

An ability to communicate your insights effectively: I will be looking for grammatically correct sentences, coherent essay structure, and careful presentation (no typos, titles italicized, pages numbered, essay titled, footnotes and bibliography presented according to MLA guidelines, etc).

I would recommend taking a notepad and pen into the theatre with you, so you can discreetly jot down striking details as they occur: you might otherwise have trouble remembering how exactly a scene or moment was played. You should also keep the theatre programme that you'll be given when you enter, as it will tell you who played which parts, who directed the show and wrote the music for it, and perhaps also provide some insight into what the company was trying to achieve. We'll discuss the production in class on September 28, and your essays are due on October 23.

The price of the theatre ticket is listed above in the Course Materials section and return bus transportation from Western is \$20.

To book your Stratford theatre tickets and bus transportation visit

<https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/offer/UWO-Offer>. Make sure you get your theatre and transportation tickets emailed to you (don't collect them at the box office).

COMMONPLACE BOOK

BACKGROUND

The Commonplace book was a central Renaissance method of gathering and organizing material from reading for use in composition at a later date. While there were many variations in methods of commonplacing, they all involved the consistent practice of collecting excerpts while reading—either by marking the margins of text for later copying or by copying as one read. These quotations were then transferred to a commonplace book in which they were organized by topic. Indeed, the English word “topic” derives from the Greek term for place, *topos*.

The use of commonplaces, or in Latin, *loci communes*, is derived from the rhetorical practice of invention: the process of finding arguments to support your case in a formal speech.

This method became generalized to include the collection of quotations, or *sententiae*, drawn from important authors which might be used for illustration or ornament. There are two important metaphors used to describe the process: bees gathering nectar from flowers and transforming it into honey; and the process of consuming and digesting books (thus *Reader's Digest*). As this tradition evolved during the Renaissance, the aim was to produce a style of writing marked by *copia*—a varied style, with frequent and subtle allusion to classical and scriptural authority, displaying the writer's familiarity with and command of learned and literary culture.

THE COMMONPLACE BOOK ASSIGNMENT

Use of the commonplace book is intended to be a central part of the course, and of each student's reading. During the course you should compile a collection of quotations from the plays read which you find interesting or captivating. Gather fifteen quotations from each play, for a total of seventy-five commonplaces.

Each quotation must be assigned to an appropriate topical heading. The practice of assigning quotations to different headings is an important part of the exercise, because it guides your reading in the future. You should make your collection either in an exercise book, with separate pages assigned to each topic, or electronically. In either case, you should cite for each commonplace the play from which it comes with relevant act, scene, line numbers (e.g., *Twelfth Night*, 1.2.45-7). No individual commonplace can be longer than four lines.

The Topics you choose are part of the fun – the creativity – of this project! They should reflect your *own* personal interests and can be as quirky as you like. I've seen Topics in past years such as "Mean Girls", "Eyes Only for You", "The OG Haters", and so on. Don't feel that every Topic has to be quirky – "Queer Desire", "Truth", "Travel", "Fear of Death", or "Musicality" (etc, etc) all work well, too. The idea is that the Topic is meaningful to *you* and that you collect quotation under these Topics as you continue to read through the syllabus.

Couple of tips:

- List a quotation under only one Topic, even if it fits two different Topics. Pick the Topic that you think it best suits;
- Once you start a Topic, try to populate it with quotations from other plays. Don't pick "Sexual Betrayal" and only quote *Measure for Measure*, ignoring the many, many quotations on that Topic that you could find in any other play on this course;
- You'll be graded on your choice of Topics as well as the quotations you gather. Choose original Topics that mean something to you. A commonplace book carries its author's DNA; it's like a fingerprint. No two are the same and I want to get a sense from your commonplace book of what struck you as important and interesting as you read through the plays;
- No individual commonplace should be longer than four lines.

EVALUATION

The commonplace exercise is worth 15% of your final grade. You will be assessed on the number and variety of your quotations, their appropriateness to their assigned topic, and the originality of your topics. No individual commonplace should be longer than four lines.