

ENG296Y0 / Summer Abroad 2026
Topics in English Literature: Shakespeare
Professor Urvashi Chakravarty

Course Description

This course explores selected works by Shakespeare in the social and theatrical context of his time – and of our own. We will read several plays, covering some major dramatic genres (comedy, history, tragedy), and we will watch several theatrical productions to explore the contexts of theatrical interpretation and adaptation and the material conditions of staging and performance. We will undertake field trips to engage and complicate our understanding of Shakespeare's time and Shakespeare's legacy, and we will explore how Shakespeare's plays both reflect early modern social and political considerations and speak to the most urgent and pressing issues of our current moment, attending to questions of gender and sexuality; race and colonialism; and the early modern global world.

Required Course Texts

We will read four plays by Shakespeare, and the selection is determined in part by UK theatre offerings in Summer 2026. You will need a strong scholarly critical edition of each play (i.e. one with glosses, footnotes, and a robust introduction, such as the Cambridge, Oxford, or Pelican editions). If you already have Shakespeare's works in a collected edition (e.g. *The Norton Shakespeare*), please feel free to use that. The plays we will be reading are:

Much Ado About Nothing
Richard II
Othello
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Please try to read these plays before you arrive in Oxford, if possible!

There will also be selected secondary scholarly and public-facing readings; these will be available on Quercus.

Course Requirements

Performance Reviews and Reflections (2 pages each; 2 x 15% = 30%)

You will write two performance reviews and reflections in response to the productions we visit, attending carefully and specifically to the interpretive implications of the performance decisions they undertake. These will be due shortly after viewing the performance, so that you can capture your observations whilst the production is fresh in your mind.

In Class Participation (20%)

Class participation is an essential component of this class and consists of having read and thought carefully about the reading for the day; coming to class prepared to make observations about your insights; and participating in discussion (10%). Perfect attendance is expected. There will also be three short in-class participation assignments close reading a passage; these cannot be made up if you miss class, but the lowest score will be dropped (worth 5 points each, for a total of 10%). Note that these are low-stakes assignments which

will receive minimal written feedback; you are encouraged to speak with me to discuss your assignment and how to improve if needed.

Discussion Leadership (10%)

You will lead discussion on one occasion, alongside two of your classmates, on the section of the play under discussion for the day. Discussion leadership consists of selecting one or more passages from the day's readings and unpacking them for the class through one or more critical questions. You should aim to close read your passages and draw conceptual and thematic connections across the play as a whole and you should aim to present/lead discussion for no more than 10 minutes. You will sign up for a discussant slot at the start of the course and will send your selected passage(s) and critical questions to me by 5PM the day before your discussant slot.

In Class Essay: 20%

You will write a substantive essay in class in which you develop a strong critical argument based on careful and specific textual analysis. Prompts will be circulated ahead of time.

Final In-Class Test: 20%

You will have a final in-class exam, consisting of shorter responses glossing a choice of textual passages (similar to the in-class assignments) and an essay based on an unseen textual prompt (similar to the in-class essay).

Guidelines for Assignments and Lateness Policy

In-class assignments can **never** be made up but the lowest of three scores will be dropped. The essay and final exam cannot be made up except in cases of **documented emergency ONLY (illness or bereavement)**.

Equity and Inclusivity

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

Participation and Discussion Contract

Please have all readings with you when you attend class. In class, I will often solicit and will always welcome your thoughts, responses and questions; the work we do in this course is collaborative, and I look forward to thinking with you all about these texts, and to learning from the intellectual work you undertake with your colleagues. As we work through the exciting and often challenging texts we will be reading, please remember that our classroom must remain a productive and thoughtful space at all times. I expect that you will:

- Come to class having read and thought about the text carefully and prepared to discuss the day's assigned reading, to ask questions and offer ways of analyzing the text critically, and to work with your classmates in generating and interrogating readings of the work in question;
- Listen attentively and thoughtfully to your colleagues and classmates;
- Be sensitive to diverse viewpoints and to the varied social, cultural, educational and economic perspectives represented in the room (these may include, but are not limited to, ethnic, religious or racial identity, cultural background, gender identity, sexual

orientation, economic position, physical ability, visible or non-visible disability, age, educational experience and social and political views);

- Use inclusive and equitable language; and
- Speak, write and respond respectfully and thoughtfully, using first-person 'I' statements when you disagree with someone or wish to clarify your own position.

All of these policies apply to both speaking and writing practice in class as a whole. Professional and collegial behaviour are expected and required in all spaces and towards all members of this community.

If at any point you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email, or come to my office hours; I welcome all concerns and comments in order to ensure that this class is a positive and constructive learning environment and experience for you all.

Email

Outside class and office hours, email is the best way of contacting me. Please use your University of Toronto email address, include 'ENG 296' in the subject line of your email, and state your query/request clearly and professionally; this is the best way of ensuring that you receive a timely response that meets your needs. Please remember that academic emails constitute **professional correspondence**, and your form of address and choice of tone and style should reflect this. Please ensure that you have checked the syllabus for the answer to your question before emailing me.

Accessibility Services

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. You will already have been in touch with Accessibility Services; please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss any accommodations with me.

Technology (mobile phones, tablets and laptops)

Please note that **mobile phones are not permitted in class**; phones should be turned off and put away for the duration of class to avoid distractions for yourself and those around you. If you have an emergency which necessitates keeping your phone on and out when we meet in person, let me know at the beginning of class. **Laptop/tablet use is strongly discouraged.** Removing laptops significantly reduces the temptation of email and social media, which is not only disruptive to you but to those around you; in addition, recent studies have shown that taking notes by hand aids in retention and focus (which means more successful outcomes for you in this class). Please note that if you use your laptop or tablet to access non-course-related websites in class, you will be asked to turn off your device and stow it away, and your course participation grade will be adversely affected to a significant degree.

Academic Integrity

The University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences in papers and assignments include using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement, submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor, making up sources or facts, or obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment. On tests and exams cheating includes using or possessing unauthorized aids, looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test,

misrepresenting your identity, or falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.

To that end, work submitted for this class must be your own and must be written specifically for this class. If you draw on language or ideas from another person or source, those references must be properly cited. If you have questions about how to avoid plagiarism, please feel free to speak with me or to your TA. Margaret Proctor's article 'How Not to Plagiarize' is a valuable resource: <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/>

Please note that the use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) is prohibited. Any use of such tools in this course will constitute cheating, and (it goes without saying) is a complete waste of your time and university fees. One of the aims of this course is to think about and reflect on literary texts and to formulate persuasive arguments in writing; using generative AI tools robs you of that opportunity.

Policy on Recording

This course will not be recorded. Students may not create audio or video recordings of classes.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Although I have divided our discussion of each play by day and act number, you must complete your reading of the entire play by the first day of discussion, if not before you reach Oxford. Please note that any secondary readings should be completed by the date listed.

WEEK 1: *Much Ado About Nothing* and the Limits of Comedy

MONDAY 3 AUGUST:	Introduction <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> , Acts 1-2
TUESDAY 4 AUGUST:	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> , Acts 3-4 (Discussants 1-3) Howard, 'Renaissance Antitheatricality and the Politics of Gender and Rank in <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> '
WEDNESDAY 5 AUGUST:	<u>In class assignment #1 on <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i></u> <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> , Act 5 (Discussants 4-6) Bailey Sincox, 'Making Something Out of <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> ' Looking ahead to Shakespeare's Globe trip
THURSDAY 6 AUGUST:	<u>Trip to Shakespeare's Globe to see <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i></u>
FRIDAY 7 AUGUST:	No class <u>Performance Reflection/Review due on Quercus by 11:59PM</u>

WEEK 2: *Richard II*, the Nation, and History

MONDAY 10 AUGUST: Discussion of Shakespeare's Globe production of *Much Ado About Nothing*

In class assignment #2 on *Richard II*

Richard II, Acts 1-2

(Discussants 7-9)

TUESDAY 11 AUGUST: *Richard II*, Acts 3-5

(Discussants 10-12)

Harry Berger, Jr, 'A Modern Perspective: *Richard II*'

Andrew Hadfield, 'Race in Shakespeare's Histories'

WEDNESDAY 12 AUGUST: **IN CLASS ESSAY**

Concluding discussion of *Richard II*

Looking ahead to trip to the National Portrait Gallery and the Tower of London

THURSDAY 13 AUGUST: Trip to the National Portrait Gallery and the Tower of London

WEEK 3: *Othello*, Empire, and the Globe

MONDAY 17 AUGUST: Discussion of National Portrait Gallery and Tower of London

In class assignment #3 on *Othello*

Othello, Acts 1-2

(Discussants 13-15)

TUESDAY 18 AUGUST: *Othello* Acts 3-5

(Discussants 16-18)

Ian Smith, 'Othello's Black Handkerchief'

WEDNESDAY 19 AUGUST: Concluding discussion of *Othello*

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Acts 1-3

(Discussants 19-21)

Margo Hendricks, "'Obscured by dreams": Race, Empire, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'

Cameron Hunt McNabb and Mia Henrich, 'Teaching Shakespeare and Ecocriticism'

Looking ahead to trip to Stratford-upon-Avon

'Shakespeare Connected – Shakespeare and Literary Pilgrimage'

THURSDAY 20 AUGUST: Trip to Stratford-upon-Avon

WEEK 4: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Future(s) of Shakespeare

MONDAY 24 AUGUST: Discussion of trip to Stratford-upon-Avon

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Acts 4-5

(Discussants 22-23)

TUESDAY 25 AUGUST: **FINAL EXAM IN CLASS**

WEDNESDAY 26 AUGUST: Trip to Shakespeare's Globe to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

THURSDAY 27 AUGUST: Discussion of Shakespeare's Globe production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Course Reflections and Wrap-up

FRIDAY 28 AUGUST: No class
Performance Reflection/Review due on Quercus by 11:59PM

Extra Credit

There will be an option to earn extra credit in this course. Extra credit may be earned by viewing a live performance or recording of a Shakespeare production and writing an additional performance review and reflection to be submitted within 48 hours after the performance in question. Note that you will, of course, need to have read the play carefully before you attend the performance. You may also elect to watch a live recording of a Shakespeare performance; many are available through U of T Libraries at no cost. Please consult with me about your chosen Shakespeare performance in this case. The extra credit assignment is worth a maximum of 5 points.

Here are some options for additional productions of Shakespeare you may wish to see whilst in Oxford (whether or not it's for extra credit in this course!)

Romeo and Juliet, Oxford Shakespeare Festival, Oxford (3rd-15th August,
<https://www.oxfordcastleprison.co.uk/whats-on/siege-theatre-presents-romeo-juliet/>)

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Creation Theatre at Wolfson College Cricket Ground, Oxford (until 14th August, <https://creationtheatre.co.uk/show/a-midsummer-nights-dream-2/#1748179287568-b5592452-80a4>)

Twelfth Night, Creation Theatre at Wolfson College Cricket Ground, Oxford (until 16th August, <https://creationtheatre.co.uk/show/summer-shakespeare-twelfth-night/>)

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon (until 30th August, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/a-midsummer-nights-dream>). Note that this is co-produced with a children's theatre so the target audience may/will be different to the others. If you wish, you may attend the 1:30PM Performance on Thursday 20 August when we are in Stratford-upon-Avon)

Love's Labour's Lost, Shakespeare's Globe, London (until 13th September,
<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/whats-on/loves-labours-lost/>)

As You Like It, Shakespeare's Globe, London (from 14th August,
<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/whats-on/as-you-like-it/>)

Please note that you must make all arrangements on your own, including selecting a performance and date, booking and paying for a ticket, and making any potential travel arrangements. Please note that performance schedules can be irregular and that if you are interested in any of these options, you should aim to make a booking as soon as possible and certainly before you reach Oxford as spots fill up quickly.