

## Preliminary Web Course Description

\*Please note: This is a preliminary web course description only. The department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.

### School of English and Theatre Studies

Course Code: ENGL6412	Course Title: Topics in Medieval/Renaissance Literature	Date of Offering: <b>Winter 2018</b>
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Course Instructor: Sky Gilbert	Course Format: lecture/discussions and seminars delivered by students
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This course will be a fundamental introduction to a thorough examination of Shakespeare's work in a rhetorical context. We will begin with a radical theory of Shakespeare authorship that suggests Edward de Vere was the true author of Shakespeare's works (this is relevant to this course as de Vere -- unlike the 'man from Stratford -- was both a scholar and Italianate courtier, active in the culture wars of the time). We will move on to examining Marshall McLuhan's doctoral thesis *The Classical Trivium* that clearly organizes the opposing rhetorical forces of Early Modern England and their positions in what appears as a lively and all-consuming rhetorical debate in Britain in the 16th century. *Loves Labours Lost* has often been called a 'euphuistic' play and so it will be examined in the context of the fashionable rhetorical style associated with John Lyly labelled euphuism, as well as humanistic rhetoric and Puttenham. Our study of Shakespeare's earlier work will end with *Venus and Adonis*, approached specifically in the context of sexuality and its relation to Erasmus' theories of the 'copious.' We will then leap to Shakespeare's later works and explore the radical notions that *Macbeth* might be a play about language rather than ambition, and that *The Tempest* offers clues to Shakespeare's deliberately secret identity. The thesis behind this course is that Shakespeare must be considered in

the context of the rhetorical debates of his time, and that to understand his work it is necessary for us to step out 20th century paradigms promulgated by Shakespeare establishment critics such as Harold Bloom. Is Shakespeare's work universal? Are those who celebrate Shakespeare's language over his 'invention of the human' misrepresenting him? Or is the language a key not only to themes of the work itself but the man hiding behind the words? Shakespeare's work certainly tempts us to examine the language he used to uncover the mystery of his personality -- as in Sonnet #76 "every word doth almost tell my name." Dare we act on this tantalizing clue?

#### Evaluation

- 1) student seminars (25%): students will be asked to lead a 45 minute seminar and hand in a 1200 word summary
- 2) response (30%) students will be asked to write a 600-900 word response to each weeks class
- 3) participation (20%) :
- 4) final paper - 3600 words (25%)

Other information that you wish share about the course (optional):

Textbooks: The Tempest, MacBeth, Venus and Adonis, Loves Labours Lost

Other readings: Coursepack and online readings