SYLLABUS

Modern readers and audiences approach Shakespeare with great expectations. His reputation as the world’s greatest playwright has been so firmly established that there are very few who have not read at least one of his plays—willingly or not! Theatrical records and surveys show that audiences, actors and directors all still rate him as the best. Ticket sales and publishing figures all support the fact that the Bard can still pack them in. Most people are not disappointed as the experience of reading or attending one of his plays is usually most rewarding. That is to say, the material (the plots, the themes, characters and situations) can stand on its own without pages of footnotes or talkative English instructors. Plays are written to be enjoyed, to be experienced and Shakespeare’s are no exception. After 400 years, he is still “good theater” as the reactions of playgoers will attest.

As with any work of art, however, close study and careful examination can add to the enjoyment and appreciation. In this course, we shall take the time for such close attention. We will first study the plays examining them in terms of structure, theme and form. After that, we will look at some of the craft which went into their composition considering dialogue, staging and development. To prepare us better for this, we will consider one background book:

Russ McDonald: The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare

With this introduction, we will turn our attention to five of Shakespeare’s Plays:

The Tempest
A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Much Ado About Nothing
Romeo & Juliet
Macbeth

Our coverage will be detailed and thorough as we will examine each of the dramas in the terms outlined in our background book. During the course of these discussions, each of you will be assigned features to study or examine more closely. These reports will be given in class and will add to the discussions which will be the main occupation of the course.