**Shakespeare, Three Ways: History, Literature, Performance**

First-Year Seminar: One credit

ARTSCI 1138.xx

Professor Sarah Neville

Department of English

465 Denney Hall

**Course Description:** This S/U course on *Julius Caesar* will teach students three ways of approaching Shakespeare’s plays: as historical documents that tell us about the time and place of their creation; as literary texts that explore themes or ideas; and as sets of instructions for the creation of a live performance. Over the course of the semester, we will talk about what Shakespeare thought he was doing in writing a play about Roman history; about how old books were made and preserved; about staging violence and insurrection; and about how a play written more than 400 years ago comes “alive” in performance to speak to current events.

**Course Requirements:** Students are expected to come to each class prepared by having done that week’s reading in advance and discuss one or more of that week’s discussion board question prompts. Students should supplement their in-class participation by short weekly posts (~150-200 words) to the week’s theme on the discussion board. In-class and discussion board participation is worth 50% of your S/U grade.

In addition to participation, students will complete two short writing assignments of 750 words each. The first assignment involves selecting textual evidence from *Julius Caesar* to support a claim that a literary critic has made about the play (25%). The second assignment involves explaining how you would stage a moment in *Julius Caesar* to show the validity of a critical claim that a scholar has made about the play. What performance choices could make an audience be able to understand this literary critic’s argument?

**Grading: Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory**

In-class/Discussion board participation: 50%

Assignment 1: 25%

Assignment 2: 25%

**Course Objectives:**

In this class, students will learn how

* To explain the ways that literary texts are historically situated;
* To improve their skills in writing critically about literature; and
* To critically evaluate theatrical productions.

**Biographical Statement:**

I have been teaching in the English Department at OSU since 2014. I usually teach courses in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, book history, and medieval and Renaissance science and technology. I won the Paul W. Brown Excellence in Teaching award in 2020. My research focuses on the way that scholarly and scientific authority is constructed through printed books and how that authority manifests in popular culture. I’m particularly interested in the way that meanings accrue to Shakespeare’s plays in performance, which I explore through the student theatre company I run, Lord Denney’s Players. LDP shows use performance as a laboratory space to investigate some of the critical and textual questions that have bedeviled Shakespeare critics for centuries.

## Accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities

### The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions, related to COVID-19 or otherwise), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. (COVID-Related accommodation requests can be filled out on the [SLDS COVID site](https://slds.osu.edu/covid-19-info/covid-related-accommodation-requests/).) After registration, please make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](http://slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu/); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

**Academic misconduct:**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term ‘academic misconduct’ includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.’

**Weekly Readings:**

**Theme: History**

Primary Text: James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*

1. Shakespeare’s World
	* *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, selections
2. Shakespeare’s London
	* *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, selections
3. Shakespeare’s Theatre
	* *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, selections
4. Shakespeare’s Sources
	* Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, selections
5. Printing books in the Renaissance – Assignment 1 due
* Visit to Special Collections, OSU Rare Books and Manuscripts, Thompson Library

**Theme: Literature**

Primary Text: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. S. P. Cerasano (Norton Critical Edition)

1. *Julius Caesar*, Act 1
2. *Julius Caesar*, Act 2
3. *Julius Caesar*, Act 3
4. *Julius Caesar*, Act 4
	* John W. Velz, “Role-Playing” (in Cerasano)
5. *Julius Caesar*, Act 5 – Assignment 1 due
	* Jan Blits, “Caesar’s Ambiguous End” (in Cerasano)

**Theme: Performance**

Primary Text: National Theatre production of 2018 (dir. Nicholas Hytner), featuring Ben Whishaw (Brutus) and Michelle Fairley (Cassius), available through the OSU library’s subscription to the National Theatre Collection

1. Staging violence: performing 3.1 and 3.3
	* R. A. Foakes, “Assassination and Mob Violence” (in Cerasano)
2. Staging props: performing 3.2 on stage and film
	* Andrew Sofer, “Properties” (provided on Carmen)
3. Staging gender: performing 2.1 and 2.2
	* Gail Kern Paster, selection from *The Body Embarrassed* (provided on Carmen)
4. Living performance: how plays are “read” by audiences – Assignment 2 due
	* James Shapiro, “2017: Left/Right” in *Shakespeare in a Divided America* (provided on Carmen)

**Required Texts:**

* James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599* (HarperCollins, 2005)
* William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. S. P. Cerasano (Norton Critical Edition, 2012)