English 2891  Acting Human: Shakespeare and the Drama of Identity  Spring 2010  
(TTh., 9:30, PHY 1410)

Maynard (Sandy) Mack, Jr., 3228 Tawes, x53756.  Office hours: TTh 10:45-12:15 & by appt.  
E-mail: mmack@umd.edu
Maggie Fromm, 2107 Tawes. 0101, 0103. Office hours: Tues/Thurs 10:30-11:30 & by appt.  
E-mail: mfromm12@umd.edu
Laura Heninger Hill, 1105 Tawes. 0104, 0106. Office hours: Fri 2:00-3:00 & by appt.  
E-mail: heninger@umd.edu
Rebecca Lush, 2203 Tawes, 0102, 0105. Office hours: Fri 11:00-11:50 & by appt.  E-mail: 
rlush@umd.edu

Week (3 classes each week except for the week of 5/11):
Jan 26  Introduction & Henry IV, part one
Feb 2  Henry IV 2: H4 quiz
9  Henry IV 11: H4 paper due (3pp)
16  Henry IV & As You Like It
23  As You Like It
Mar 2  As You Like It
9  Hamlet
23  Hamlet 25: Ham paper due (3pp)
30  Othello
Apr 6  Othello
13  The Winter’s Tale
20  The Winter’s Tale 22: WT paper due (4pp)
27  Antony and Cleopatra
May 4  Antony and Cleopatra
11(1) Antony and Cleopatra & monologues

Examination: Friday, May 14, 8:00-10:00

This is a course in Shakespeare; in learning to read imaginative literature; in studying how 
Shakespeare’s characters strive, succeed, and fail, to establish human identities. In this order.

We are studying 6 plays in 15 weeks, so you will have time to get to know the plays well. From the 
start, practice “aggressive reading”: stop after each scene and ask yourself “What is going on here, 
how does the language make it happen, and why does it matter?” Take notes as you read. Passive 
re-reading will not help you. We have ordered good, inexpensive editions, but any serious modern 
edition will do; old editions with no notes will not! If you are thinking of buying a complete 
Shakespeare, speak to one of the course faculty first. You will need a bunch (30?) of 4x6” file 
cards for quizzes and responses in class. Get this size, please.

We expect you to attend every class, both lectures and discussions, and to come prepared. You 
need to plan your time so you will have read the whole play carefully before the first lecture on that 
play. There will be a quiz on the whole play the class we start on it; so plan ahead. We will often 
announce in advance a part of the play you need to focus on for the next class. This preparation 
involves careful rereading, active thinking and note-taking, working on things that are not clear, 
exploring how what is going on in the play relates to your world and yourself today. We will also 
have unannounced reading quizzes in lecture. No make-ups will be given, but the two lowest quiz 
grades will be dropped at the end of the term. If you are absent, that’s a zero, which hurts a lot, so 
be present and ready. Most of the quizzes will include passages to identify, so if you use plot 
summaries, don't linger over them: study the text itself.

Friday discussions are an essential part of this course and your attendance will affect your grade 
and, more important, what you learn. The goal of the discussion sections is for you to talk about 
and interrogate Shakespeare’s texts. This is your opportunity to ask questions that arise during 
lecture (don’t forget to write them down!), to test your own ideas about the texts, to gain new 
insights from your classmates, and to prepare for the papers by working intensively on 
Shakespeare’s language and characters’ struggle to find, create, or maintain an identity. Each 
discussion session requires from you intellectual courage and engagement, which will be measured 
by both your verbal and your written participation in Friday class.
There will be three papers; we will provide extensive guidelines for each. Grades will be figured: 15% for the 1H4 paper, 15% for the Ham paper, 20% for the WT paper, 20% for the final examination, 15% for performance in Friday classes, including your monologue, and 15% for quizzes in lecture.

You do not need to do secondary reading for this class. We would prefer that you spend all your time wrestling with the texts themselves. However, if you do read criticism, record the author, title, publisher, place, date, and page number—or URL. If another's thoughts are helpful in any way to you in your writing for the class, give credit in a note and a “sources used” list. Failure to do so will be considered plagiarism, a fundamental betrayal of the university's commitment to open exploration and trust, and we will report it to the Campus Judicial Program. You do not want to go there. Be able to write and sign the academic integrity pledge on every assignment: “I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination.” (See the statement by the Student Honor Council in the “Paper Writing Guide for English 289I.”)

The goal of this class is to do some of the work of the humanities and to help you develop your ability to read and respond creatively to rich, imaginative literature, specifically to Shakespeare’s plays, maybe the best ever written. Our belief is that by learning to read literature with honesty, humility, and enthusiasm, you can increase your ability to “read” the world and the people in it in the same manner. Being a good reader will not by itself make you a better person, but it will give you skills and power the moral direction of which will be in your hands. However, it is hard to encounter the fundamental human delights and struggles explored in Shakespeare’s plays without becoming a more compassionate person. We are not born human; we must learn how to be human. In its own way, the Early Modern Period (Shakespeare’s) has as much to teach us about the diverse ways human beings try to shape, enjoy, and survive their worlds as something contemporary from another part of the world. Drama cooks the whole idea of individual identity. Is acting just what actors do, or is it how we all create much of our identity, many of our “identities”? We all need to know more about the human condition now and in the past, so we can decide where we need to try to go in the future. Diversity is not a slogan, it is a fact of healthy evolutionary life—for slime molds, cows, and humans alike. Let’s aim for the last of these?

Writing about great literature is often painful, always difficult. It is an exercise in honesty, civil conversation: you are trying to teach us what you have discovered (listen to that word!) in Shakespeare's texts. We will approach each written assignment as an opportunity to increase your understanding of how Shakespeare’s language works, why his imaginative creations matter, and how they force us to explore the challenges of defining ourselves in a world of opportunities and lies. You will be trying to share your new understanding with people (your instructors and your discussion section peers) who know the plays well but do not have any idea what is going on in your mind.

--You may well have chosen this course as part of your CORE general education program. CORE Distributive Studies courses are designed to ensure that you will take a look at several different academic disciplines and the way they create and analyze knowledge about the world. A faculty and student committee approved this course because it will introduce you to ideas and issues that are central to a major intellectual discipline and because it promises to involve you actively in the learning process. Please take advantage of the opportunities this course offers you.
--If you have a registered disability that may require special accommodation, let us know immediately.
--If you will miss an assignment due date for religious observance, let us know in writing in the first two weeks of the semester.
--Assessments for this course will be both on CourseEvalUM and on paper in class.

If you see things that might keep you from doing your best work in this class, speak to one of us right away. We are reading wonderful plays and you owe it to yourself to try to stretch your mind (and heart) to hold the plays rather than shrink the plays to fit tidily into the person you were yesterday. This is a rich opportunity to get bigger; don’t waste it!

(Maynard Mack, Jr., Maggie Fromm, Laura Heninger Hill, Rebecca Lush)