SHAKESPEARE’S ENGLAND AND ITALY

Instructor:

Dr. Bernadette Andrea,
Department of English
University of Texas at San Antonio
<bernadette.andrea@utsa.edu>

Course Description:

This course will examine the English fascination – and even obsession – with Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This period, known as the Renaissance, was inspired by Italian innovations in art, literature, politics, and science from the fifteenth century onwards. Starting in the sixteenth century, English men (and some women) traveled to Italy, bringing its Renaissance themes and forms back home to infuse the literature of Shakespeare’s era. Roughly at the same time, one of the most influential treatises of the Italian Renaissance, Baldassar Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano, was translated into English as The Book of the Courtier. Set in the court of Urbino, it profoundly influenced Renaissance modes of politics, and informed – sometimes through parody – the theater of Shakespeare’s day. Beginning with narratives from early modern English travelers and with a close reading of Castiglione’s The Courtier, we will turn to a range of English dramas focusing on Italy: from Shakespeare and his contemporaries to the first Englishwoman playwright for the public stage, Aphra Behn. Italy in the English plays we will study is often no more than a projection of English desires and fears regarding gender relations, sexuality, religion, and politics. But it is more than that: Italy as Renaissance England’s “near” other was compelling as a model and a foil. Our engagement with these plays will be enriched by the setting of our class in Urbino, the site of The Courtier, and by possible trips to Verona and Venice (settings for Shakespeare’s Italianate plays). This course is cross-listed as ENG 3223 or 3233 (Shakespeare), ENG 4113 (Renaissance), HUM 3033 (Renaissance Humanities), and HON 3233 (Honors Seminar). Undergraduate students may enroll in one of these sections for credit. Additional sections may be added for graduate students who are interested in the course.

Course Texts:

I have ordered the following texts for the UTSA bookstore; you may also obtain them elsewhere. The first two editions are required (Hadfield and Castiglione). You may use other scholarly editions for the plays (Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster, Behn).

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<th>Author</th>
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Course Outline:

- **Week One: English Travelers in Renaissance Italy**

- **Week Two: Urbino in England**
  - Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch and Charles S. Singleton (Norton Critical Edition, 2002). [This edition is required, as we will be reading the critical essays along with the primary text.]

- **Week Three: Shakespeare’s Italian Plays** [Any scholarly edition of these plays is acceptable.]
  - *Two Gentleman of Verona* (1594)
  - *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1595–96) [Verona]
  - *The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice* (1596–97)
  - *The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice* (1604)

- **Week Four: Seventeenth-Century English Drama in Italy** [Any scholarly edition of these plays is acceptable.]
  - Ben Jonson, *Volpone, or the Fox. A Comedy* (1605) [Venice]
  - John Webster, *The Tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi* (1623)[Almalfi]
  - Aphra Behn, *The Rover* (1677)[Naples]
Students are encouraged to read as many of these plays as possible in advance of the course.

Assignments for the class will consist of regular in-class writing on the required reading for the day, short response papers at the end of each week, and a final research paper due after the end of the course. These assignments will build on each other, with students receiving extensive feedback from me. Class participation will weigh into the final grade.

The following optional background reading is available in E-book format through the UTSA Library: