

English 20: 3305A **Shakespeare's Plays from the Text to the Stage**

A lecture course. Prof. Donald Beecher Fall, 2020 Tues. and Thurs. 1:00-2:30

This course will investigate a half dozen of Shakespeare's best-known plays from a variety of critical perspectives. But our principle concern is how reading translates into theatrical production. After all, the end product was a stage play employing actors to speak the lines on behalf of the characters they represent, creating a trompe-l'oeil, as it were, of real persons engaged in the events of their own lives. Play books then become not only literary masterpieces but prompt books unrealized and unactualized until they are recited and enacted. This entails lifting the words from the page and transforming them into lived lines in a lived story. Just how to generate the finished product begins with what the words are saying and how they must be read, but also with the stage directions, as well as the resources and limitations of the acting space, and the constitution of the playing company, in Shakespeare's case with boys acting all the female roles, and without the benefit of elaborate stage properties or visual backdrops. Actors must not only body forth characters in speech and acting, but fill in back narratives and suggest the scenic spaces in which they are living. Hence, just as the play begins with a written narrative and plot, it ends as a lived experience in the mind's eye—reimagined and played out on the brain's stage as experienced social conflict and suspense in search of an ending. This course is not a history of Shakespearean theatre history or a study of historical productions per se, but students may very well wish to investigate these issues in actual productions, for every performance is a proposed solution to all these questions.