Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Renaissance/Early Modern English Stage

The Renaissance witnessed both an explosion in theatrical innovation and an increasingly global world—the beginnings of global trade, the “discovery” of the New World, and bouts of both conflict and cooperation among the world’s powers. By reading plays that stage encounters between Europeans of different religions, between Europeans and the Islamic Ottoman Empire, among natives of “India,” and among Europeans, Native Americans, and African slaves, we will explore how and why the stage became such a significant site for the representation of cross-cultural encounters. Some questions we will explore include: how do these plays represent conflict—between self and other and over goods, territory, and labor forces—and what possibilities for reconciliation do they imagine? How do these plays understand the differences encountered as a result of travel, trade, and exploration? Why did the theatre develop a fascination with the exotic? In what ways did what it means to be European, Christian, or even a good wife or husband get defined and altered by these encounters? In keeping with the theme of encounters, this course will stage a number of creative encounters from the period: between works from different European nations and between plays and the prose works with which they were in dialogue. We will also read at least one account of how Arabs viewed Europe.

Course Aims: The primary objectives of this course are to introduce you to the range of ways that the theater in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century England represented cross-cultural encounters and to develop a nuanced understanding of how these plays participated in the early modern understanding of an increasingly complex and global world. To accomplish these aims, we will have to become careful readers ourselves, attentive to the forms, strategies, and content of the works we are “discovering.” Much of the course will focus on close reading and careful analysis of the plays’ engagements with other peoples, places and things and their creative approaches to understanding and representing them. We will be focusing on the ways that these plays are themselves political engagements that not only reflect or represent already existing English attitudes, but also actively contribute to the struggle to describe and understand this world by re-envisioning and reanimating familiar stories as well as by producing new narratives and even inventing new dramatic genres.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Attendance and Participation:
This seminar is a collaboration. Thus, regular attendance (including arriving to class on time) and thoughtful engagement with the course materials are crucial to its success. Be generous with your ideas and questions, and show up with texts in your hand and ready to think in new ways. Careful preparation is a key component of participation. Complete all readings, viewings, and assignments before you come to class in order to be ready to participate in that day’s discussion. Come to class with questions you have about the material and/or with specific issues or passages from works you would like to discuss. Be ready to contribute meaningfully to our discussions.

If you are absent, I will assume you have a good reason. You do not need to tell me why. (The exception is if something very out of the ordinary happens that requires you to miss more than two classes in a row.) The course, however, moves quickly and the material is challenging, and those that miss seminar will likely find it difficult to keep up. Whenever you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed from one of your classmates and for keeping up with the assignments.

My preference is that you bring hard copies of all reading materials to class. You will be permitted to use laptops in class to read course materials (if you have a very strong preference to do so) and to take notes, but not for any other purpose. All other electronic devices should be off—-not ringing or vibrating in class and not visible to you or others.

Performances: Each of you will participate in the performance of a scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. I will divide you into groups. Each group will need to meet at least once outside of class to discuss what issues you want to emphasize in your performance and how you might do so, and to divide up parts. This advance preparation will be crucial to the workshop we have with members of Fiasco Theatre, an exciting opportunity for you to work with members of a professional theatre company. You will get to experience the process through which lines from a play get brought to life. This assignment will also allow you to experience the collaborative effort that produces theatre as well as what it feels like to embody and perform lines from a play with other actors. The class as a whole will benefit from seeing parts of the scenes performed. Your participation will contribute to your participation grade.

Written Work: A variety of forms of written work will be required for the class. I detail them below. All written work will share in the project of moving toward accomplishing the stated goals of the course, of making connections among the different works and discussions of them, and, of course, making new discoveries about why studying this material matters to us. Because this course is rapidly paced, it is particularly vital that work arrives on time and in good form.
**Reading Responses:** In order to help you prepare to participate in discussion and to give you the practice of writing on a regular basis about course materials, you will also be asked to complete a response paper roughly every other week. This paper is a two-page critical response to the materials assigned since the previous response paper was due. These are typed, thoughtful engagements that address a specific issue, question, or section of a work that you would like to explore. They may also engage with issues raised in class discussion. For some classes, I will assign a specific topic or approach. For others the choice will be yours. Due dates by which the responses must be turned in are listed on the syllabus. Response papers are due on the day that the work you are writing about will be discussed. In most cases, you can choose the work and thus the day during the (usually) two-week period when you will be writing. Response papers are due at the **beginning** of the class period. Please number and date your response papers.

**Discussion questions:** In addition to the response papers you will also be asked to bring a thoughtful discussion question to class at least twice during the semester. Each class period, two students will present their questions based on the assigned works for that day. This assignment will help us to bring your questions and concerns to the center of class. You are expected to bring your questions and concerns to every class, but these questions should be particularly designed to stimulate discussion about the issues in which you are interested. I will post your assigned days before the second week of class begins. Please make sure to bring your question to class in writing and to email it to me by the end of the day. I will keep a running list of questions on blackboard for all of us to refer back to as the semester progresses.

**Papers:**
In addition to the above, you will be writing two analytical papers for the class. The first paper will be 5-6 pages, and the last will be a research paper of eight to ten pages. Topics for your papers will develop from issues we have discussed in class. The research paper is designed to give you the opportunity to delve more deeply into a topic we have studied that is of great interest to you and inspires you. I encourage you to develop research topics that allow you to connect what we have been studying to your concentration or major if it will be productive for you to do so. You might choose a topic by thinking about how the ideas we’ve studied in this course add a new dimension to, or way of thinking about, issues that are central to your concentration—or vice-versa. A prospectus for this paper will be due early in April, and we will have individual conferences to discuss your topics and ways to research them. There are many ways to conduct research for this paper. These might include: reading additional plays, reading other primary texts from the period, reading works by historians, or literary critics, etc. Many of you will find that a combination of the above will be most useful.

Please keep in mind that all written work must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides.
Grades are based on the quality of all written work (response papers and papers) as well as class participation (which includes your discussion questions and your participation in the performance). The following is a rough breakdown of how much each category is worth. If your work gets stronger as the course progresses, I will weigh your later work more heavily. (Attendance and Participation: 30%; Response Papers: 25%; Papers: 45%).

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon.

Plagiarism: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Do not plagiarize. If you take an idea or more than two or three words directly from any source (including the Internet), you must cite the source in a footnote. If you are not sure if you are plagiarizing, please ask me. Similarly, if you are unsure how to complete an assignment, come talk to me.

Required Texts:
All texts should be available at the NYU bookstore. In addition to the texts listed below, I will be distributing additional materials. Films will be on reserve at the Avery Fisher Center at Bobst Library.

1) Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice: Texts and Contexts (You must purchase this edition as we will be reading materials in it in addition to the play itself.
3) Massinger, The Renegado (Arden early modern paperback edition)
   (You must purchase this edition as we will be reading additional materials in it.)
5) Southerne, Oroonoko
   (This is a completely different text than the one listed above. This play is based on Behn's prose narrative, but with some very significant changes.)
Course Schedule: (Schedule May Be Subject to Changes)

Week 1: Introduction and Foundations
Jan. 24:
--Syllabus and Introduction
Jan. 26:
--Excerpt from “Introduction” to The Norton Shakespeare
--William H. Sherman, “Travel and Trade”
--Turn in sheet on your interests in relation to the course.
Come to class prepared to discuss what major issues Sherman and Loomba raise in relation to cross-cultural encounters. What information or ideas in these essays came as a surprise to you, or particularly sparked your interest?

Week 2: On the Margins of Europe: Jews, Turks, and Christendom
Jan. 31:
--Merchant of Venice Texts and Contexts, 242-49, 297-300
--Jew of Malta, Act 1
Feb. 2:
--Jew of Malta, Acts 2 and 3
First Response Paper Due

Week 3: Shakespeare Encounters Marlowe: Jews, Christians, and Economic Transformations
Feb. 7:
--Finish Jew of Malta
Feb. 9:
--Merchant of Venice, 187-94, 207-11
--Merchant of Venice Acts 1-3

Week 4: Shakespeare Encounters Marlowe: Jews, Christians, and Economic Transformations
Feb. 14:
--Finish Merchant of Venice
Feb. 16:
--Merchant of Venice
Second Response Paper Due

Week 5: Performing Merchants / Ottoman Temptations
Feb. 21:
--Merchant of Venice Performance Workshop with Fiasco Theatre (Meeting in 430 and 432)
Feb. 23:
--Readings on Piracy and Captivity
Week 6: Ottoman Temptations  
Feb. 28:  
-- *The Renegado*  
Mar. 1:  
-- *The Renegado*  

**Third Response Paper Due**

March 2nd: First Paper Due by noon

Week 7: Resisting Temptations/Spice and Romance in the East Indies  

Evening March 5th: Attend reading of *Merchant of Venice*  

Mar. 6:  
-- *The Renegado*  
Mar. 8  
-- *The Island Princess*  
-- Excerpts from Marx, *Capital* and Thomas Mun, *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade*  

Spring Break: March 12-17

Week 8: Spice and Romance (continued)  
Mar. 20:  
-- *The Island Princess*  
-- Excerpts from Argensola, *The Discovery and Conquest of the Maluco and Philippine Islands*  
-- Elizabeth I's letter to the Kings of the East Indies that accompanied the English East India Company's first voyage.  
Mar. 22:  
-- *The Island Princess*  

**Fourth Response Paper Due**

Week 9: New World? Imagining Others/Imagining Self  
Mar. 27:  
-- Visual Representations of the New World and their Classical Foundations  
Mar. 29:  
-- *The Tempest*  
-- Excerpts from *The Tempest*'s Narrative Encounters  

Week 10:  
Apr. 3: *The Tempest*  

**Fifth Response Paper due**  
Apr. 5: Research Day (no in class meeting)
Week 11: New Worlds/ Ethnographic and Romantic Narratives of New Institutions: Sugar and Slavery
Apr. 10:
--*The Tempest*
Apr. 12:
-- Excerpts from Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*
--Reading Rebellions

Week 12: Slavery Continued
Apr. 17:
--Behn, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave*
Apr. 19:
Behn, *Oroonoko*
**Epigraph (Final) Response Paper Due**

Week 13: Slavery Continued; Dramatic Transformations
Apr. 24:
--Southerne, *Oroonoko*
Apr. 26:
--Southerne, *Oroonoko*

*Friday April 27: Final Research Papers Due by Noon*

Week 14:
May 1: *Omkara* discussion
May 3: Epigraph Discussions