

**In the Beginning: Shakespeare to 1599**

**EN 4503/6503**

**TTh 3:30-4:45**

**Fall 2017**

**Anderson**

How do we talk about Shakespeare's early work—plays such as *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Richard II* or *Richard III*? Some of Shakespeare's most memorable characters come from his plays before 1600. Falstaff, Shylock, Mercutio, Beatrice, and Puck all come before what many critics consider his greatest achievements—Lady Macbeth, Prince Hamlet, Othello, or Lear. Is there an important critical distinction to be made between early and late Shakespeare? Between Falstaff and Iago? Between Prince Hal and Prince Hamlet?

In this course, we will consider Shakespeare's early work with this question in mind. Our goal in the course will be to examine plays from Shakespeare's early years in light of the most important critical questions that have shaped discussion of his late masterpieces. How do his early plays deal with questions of gender, sexuality, power, and politics. How can reading Shakespeare "forward"—that is, making sense of a play like *Hamlet* through the lens offered us in *Titus Andronicus*—help us better to understand Shakespeare's "maturity" as a playwright?

Students will write two papers, give a presentation with a partner, and have two exams; graduate students will take the final exam, write a 20-page scholarly essay, give a 10 minute presentation of research suitable for an academic conference, write an 800 word book review, and keep a reading journal.

Text: Greenblatt, *The Norton Shakespeare*.

