

EN225: Slow Read Shakespeare: The Tempest
4 Credits * Fall 2025

Professor: Dyani Johns Taff

Class Time: MWF 10:00-10:50 am

Class Location: Miller 220

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Office Hours: M 1-3 & By Appt.



John William Waterhouse, *Miranda*, 1916, private collection. Sotheby's.

Course Description

Our goal for the semester will be to *slow down* with Shakespeare. We will engage in critical reading and re-reading practices and explore how historical research, creative response, adaptation, and place-based study can shape our understanding of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Along the way, we will find answers to some of these questions: What was Shakespeare reading and where—culturally and spatially—did he write from? Why read Shakespeare, here and now? What can reading slowly teach us about the study of literature and the practice of writing?

Through a variety of reading, writing, creative, discursive, and analytical assignments, this course will contribute to the following English department learning outcomes:

- Reading and making across genres, platforms, and media
- Understanding how representation shapes the world
- Finding pleasure and personal meaning in reading and writing together

Texts

Please buy the following books in hard copy (not ebook) as soon as possible. **If you have trouble locating or paying for these books or paying for printing, contact me and I can help.**

- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Peter Holland, The Pelican Shakespeare (Penguin), 2016. ISBN 9780143128632
 - **NOTE:** You may use or buy another edition of the play, **as long as it has good notes**. If you're not sure what to buy, or if your edition will work, get in touch.
- Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest*, Tr. Richard Miller, Theater Communications Group, 2002. ISBN 9781559362108
 - **NOTE:** this book is not listed on ecampus. Please buy a copy through your favorite local bookstore, through bookshop.org, or from another bookseller.

All other texts will be provided as PDFs on our Google Drive (accessible through Moodle). **You are responsible for printing these texts and bringing hard copies** to class. You have two main options for printing:

- Acquire a folder or binder and print our readings as you go on a personal printer or at the library.
- Print and bind all of our readings at the same time, using a printing company such as [SBS Carbon Copy](#) (in downtown Waterville) or [FedEx](#). FedEx will ship your print to you for a fee or you can pick up for free.

You must bring your course texts—books and hard copy PDFs—to class with you each day. If you do not have your course texts, you will be marked **absent** for the day.

Since we will write frequently in this course, I recommend buying a book about writing. My two favorites are Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say*, 5th edition (ISBN: 9780393538700) and Trimble's *Writing With Style*, 3rd edition (ISBN: 978-0205028 80). We may read excerpts of these books during the semester, which I will provide as pdfs; both are excellent, friendly guides to learning to write well. The [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) and the [Colby College Library "All About Citations" Guide](#) are excellent, free resources for citation, grammar, and writing help.

Grading System

I take a holistic approach to grading, aiming to reward process, collective support, and *learning* in as many forms as we can imagine it. I am inspired by the research of scholars including Alfie Kohn, Asao Inoue, Cathy Davidson, and Jesse Stommel; their work and my own observations of students during my seventeen years of teaching have led me to believe that numerical and letter grades are not especially useful tools for assessment and feedback. They can, in fact, cause harm and reflect systemic biases.

I have modeled our assignments and assessment structure on labor-based contract grading and ungrading systems. These systems seek to measure students' work differently, accounting for as many modes of learning as possible, and seeking to create equitable, socially just classrooms where students feel comfortable taking risks, exploring and being brave about new ways of speaking, reading, and writing, and even experiencing failure: these are key aspects of the process of learning.

We will work together—as a class community as well as in our one-on-one meetings—to reflect on and assess the work—the labor—that I ask you to complete this semester. I have designed all assignments for this course with care; everything I ask you to do is meant to support your work in **four core areas** that I take to be vital to learning at the college level:

1. Community

Proximity—simply being together in a room—does not equal community: making our class into a community takes the hard, rewarding work of being an engaged citizen. Assignments include: arriving on time to class sessions having completed reading and other assignments, **participating** fully during class **verbally or otherwise**, large and small group work, formal and informal **peer review** and class **discussion leadership** activities.

2. Textual Engagement

Our texts are essential materials for learning in this course; they function like lab equipment for a science course or paints and brushes for an art course. We'll learn about Shakespeare, 16th and 17th-century culture and theater practices, adaptations of *The Tempest*, ourselves, and each other by *reading* and engaging actively with our texts both before and during class. To promote active reading, and to extend our learning community beyond the classroom, you will keep a **journal** in which you will prepare for class, complete in class activities and assignments, and document your weekly rabbit hole research.

3. Writing

We often think of writing as a medium of communication, which it is. But writing can also serve as a means for thinking itself; I often use messy drafts and freewriting to work out what I *actually* think or feel about a topic, or to organize my understanding, or to work through or synthesize complex or overwhelming scholarly work. We will do many kinds of writing, informal and formal, in this class; your longer assignments will include a **Rabbit Hole Report (1000-2000 words)** and a final **Why Shakespeare / What Did You Learn Project (1000-2000 words)**; both of these assignments can take several forms and we will discuss options in class. We will engage in drafting, peer-review, and revision work throughout the semester, and you will **meet with me 1-1 at least once** to discuss your writing.

4. Reflection and Revision

As you complete your work for this course, I want you to think actively about *why* and *how* you are doing the work you are engaged in, and about how your work will influence your next steps within and beyond my course. Honest reflection is a powerful tool, and sustained learning cannot take place without it. To promote reflective thinking, you will track your time in a **labor log** for a month, and complete two detailed **self-assessments** (one at mid-semester and one at the end).

Detailed assignment directions are available on Moodle and in the assignment handbook. **You will assess your work in these core areas, and I will use your self-assessments to arrive at your course grade.** As a general baseline, completing all assignments in a timely, thoughtful manner will earn you a B; rushed, missing, or otherwise lack-luster work will earn you a lower grade; work that exceeds expectations, deepens your own or the community's learning, or otherwise goes **above and beyond** will earn you a higher grade.

Community Care Policies and Resources

We are subject to a welter of social, political, environmental, and other circumstances that can affect our mental and physical health. In response, **we need to prioritize an ethic of care: caring for yourself and caring for your community.** Here are policies designed to promote self and community care:

- **Attendance and missing class:** In order to create and sustain a compassionate community, we all need to commit to preparing for class, showing up, and attending to what members of our community (students and professor) say and ask of us. That said, our lives are complicated; if, for any reason at all, you are unable to attend one or more of our class sessions, you may complete an **alternative attendance** assignment that will count for participation in the missed session.
 - ***We'll need a critical mass of folks in class each week. Participating asynchronously (after class has happened) will mean that you will miss out on group work and real-time insights. **Please prioritize synchronous, in-person participation**, but use this option as a back-up whenever you need to.
 - **Masking in class is optional**, but I encourage you to wear a mask if you have a cold or other respiratory illness, if you have recently traveled by bus, train, or plane, if you think you might have been exposed to someone who is sick, or for any other reason that you might have to keep germs in or out. I will always have masks on hand; just ask if you need one.
- **Late work:** Completing course assignments on time is part of how you show your commitment to community, textual engagement, and writing work. Completing assignments on time will also save you from the stress of having assignments pile up. And yet, we all sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed or in need of more time for one reason or another. One or two late assignments is fine. Chronic lateness will affect your grade because it will affect your ability to complete the course work in a thoughtful, timely way.
- **Academic Support:** The Dean of Studies office offers comprehensive academic support in the form of academic success programs, learning consultants, tutors, and much more. [Consult the academic success page to learn more.](#)
- **Financial Security:** If you need support so that you can buy textbooks or food, pay rent, buy or borrow a laptop or interview clothes, or any other kind of financial relief, [contact your class Dean](#) (they are friendly and ready to help! If you want help reaching out, let me know!).
- **Counseling Services:** [Colby College provides cost-free mental health and counseling services](#) to help you manage challenges that threaten your personal or academic wellbeing. **Getting help when you need it is the smart, courageous thing to do.** I am not a mental health professional, but I can make you an appointment, walk with you to Counseling Services, discuss coursework-related stress (and make plans to alleviate it), or help you to see or know when you need to get help beyond my expertise. **Email me any time.**

- **Access and Disability Services:** In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations will be provided to qualified students with documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should start by contacting the [Office of Student Access & Disability Services](#).
- **The Farnham Writers' Center:** From the FWC's website: "The FWC is a place for you to get skilled feedback on your writing. Our peer writing tutors have experience working with Colby's diverse student populations, and they are eager to engage you in collaborative conversations about your writing." [To learn more and to make an appointment, visit their website](#). The Writers' Center also has a Multilingual Writing Specialist, Dr. Chaoran Wang, who meets individually with international and multilingual students and provides workshops to support multilingual writers. You can reach her at chaowang@colby.edu. Please feel free to contact her, either to discuss your writing concerns and issues in general or to discuss a specific course-related writing assignment.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please read [the Colby Affirmation](#) and review Colby's policies and resources regarding [academic integrity](#). It is the responsibility of every student and faculty member to be familiar with, and comply with, these expectations for honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility. If you have any questions at any time about whether or how to cite a source, about when it's ok to collaborate and when you must work alone, or other topics relating to your own or others' conduct, please ask me! I am happy to explain how to correctly give credit where credit is due or to discuss other concerns.
- **Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT** are tools that generate text probabilistically, outputting the most likely next word. They are trained on large amounts of text taken from the internet *without the writers' permission*. I do not yet know, fully, what I think about LLMs. I do know two things:
 - ChatGPT and other LLMs raise **serious labor and ethics concerns**: who's making money from these tools? Who's losing jobs? What happens when it is *so* easy to generate plausible but fake, misleading, harmful information?
 - **Writing is thinking** and thinking well is difficult and vital. Reading difficult texts with care and attention changes your brain. If you let the LLM do your reading, summarizing, or writing for you, you are not learning to *think*.

For this course, please do all of your own reading and writing at each stage, including summarizing, brainstorming, drafting, revising, and polishing. Reading and writing are hard and time consuming, but putting in that time will enable your intellectual growth, deepen your understanding of our texts, and hone your communication skills. If you would like to experiment with an LLM (and analyze and cite what it generates!), get in touch and we can discuss your plans.
- **Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement:** Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. [Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct](#) (including, but not limited to sexual assault and sexual harassment). If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490) or Kate Smanik, the Confidential Resource Advisor and Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life (207-859-4272).

- Please note that as your professor, I am designated a “responsible employee,” a legal category that requires me to report to the Title IX Coordinator, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4266), if you disclose an experience related to sexual misconduct. This is not as scary as it sounds: if I contact Emily, she and her office will email you. If you want to follow up, you can. If not, you don’t have to.
- **I will support you whatever you decide:** I can connect you to community resources for dealing with sexual misconduct without you needing to disclose specific information to me. If you wish to disclose a specific incident to me, I will help to connect you to Emily Schusterbauer. The college will take initial steps to address the incident(s), protect and support those directly affected, and enhance the safety of our community. Emily will work with you to determine the best way to proceed.
- **Bias Incident Prevention and Response Team (BIPR):** From the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion website: “BIPR is a non-disciplinary body charged with both responding to bias incident reports and implementing educational initiatives designed to decrease the frequency of bias incidents in our community. Community members who have experienced and/or witnessed a bias incident are encouraged to submit a BIPR report or contact BIPR chair Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).” [To submit a Bias Incident Report, click this link.](#)

Course Schedule

The following schedule will give you an overview of our readings, topics, and schedule of assignments for the semester.

*****This schedule is subject to change, as needed, throughout the semester.** Our Moodle site will be our home base: I will update checklists and assignments there regularly.

Reminder: for a 4-credit course, you should expect to spend approximately 8 hours per week on your work *outside of class*. Some weeks you will need more than 8 hours and some less; I have designed my assignments with that time frame in mind. Plan your time outside of class accordingly and get in touch if you have questions!

	Readings and Assignments
Week 1:	<p><u>W Sept 3:</u> Course Introductions; The Ezra Klein Show, “This is Your Brain on Deep Reading.”</p> <p><u>F Sept 5:</u> Read Alfie Kohn, “The Case Against Grades” and Oliver Burkman, from <i>Four Thousand Weeks</i>.</p> <p>Begin your Labor Log, buy our course books, and make a printing plan!</p>
Week 2:	<p><u>Unit 1: Fast Read - Getting the Big Picture</u></p> <p><u>M Sept 8:</u> Read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act 1; Rachael Meager, “Thinking is difficult.”</p>

	<p><u>W Sept 10:</u> Read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act 2</p> <p><u>F Sept 12:</u> Read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act 3</p>
Week 3:	<p><u>M Sept 15:</u> Read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act 4</p> <p><u>W Sept 17:</u> Read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act 5</p> <p><u>F Sept 19:</u> Read Marcos Gonzalez, “Caliban Never Belonged to Shakespeare”; Early English Books Online (EEBO) and English Broadside Ballad Archive exploration (EBBA)</p>
Week 4:	<p><u>Unit 2: Slow Read – Shakespeare’s Culture</u></p> <p>Reading for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One EEBO or EBBA item • Barbara Fuchs, “Conquering Islands” <p><u>M Sept 22:</u> Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>W Sept 24:</u> Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Sept 26:</u> Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p>
Week 5:	<p>Reading for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Special Collections item • Andrew Gurr, from “<i>The Tempest’s</i> Tempest at Blackfriars” • Stephen Orgel, from “Prospero’s Wife” <p><u>M Sept 29:</u> Robinson Room: Special Collections Visit</p> <p><u>W Oct 1:</u> Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Oct 3:</u> Robinson Room: Special Collections Rabbit Hole Presentations</p> <p>Labor Log and Reflection DUE F Oct 3 by 11:55pm</p>
Week 6:	<p><u>Unit 3: Slow Read – Critical Perspectives</u></p> <p>Reading for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leah Marcus, “The Blue-Eyed Witch” • Ania Loomba, from <i>Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama</i> <p><u>M Oct 6:</u> Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p>

	<p><u>W Oct 8</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Oct 10</u>: Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p>
Week 7:	<p>Reading for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scott Manning Stevens, “Monstrous Indigeneity” <p>M Oct 13: NO CLASS: Indigenous People’s Day</p> <p><u>W Oct 15</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Oct 17</u>: Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p>
Week 8:	<p>Reading for the week (each student will be assigned two of the following):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steve Mentz, from <i>At The Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean</i> • Lowell Duckert, from <i>For All Waters</i> • Vin Nardizzi, from <i>Wooden Os</i> • Todd Borlik, from <i>Shakespeare Beyond the Green World</i> <p><u>M Oct 20</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>W Oct 22</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Oct 24</u>: Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p> <p>Mid-Semester Self-Assessment DUE F Oct 25 by 11:55pm</p>
Week 9:	<p>Unit 4: Slow Read – Shakespearean Adaptation</p> <p>Reading for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aimé Césaire, <i>Une Tempête / A Tempest</i> <p><u>M Oct 27</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>W Oct 29</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Oct 31</u>: Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p>
Week 10:	<p>Reading for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected Poems and Paintings <p><u>M Nov 3</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>W Nov 5</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p>

	<p><u>F Nov 7</u>: Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p> <p>Final Project Declaration of Intent DUE F Nov 7 by 11:55pm</p>
Week 11:	<p>Viewing for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jeremy Herrin's 2013 production of <i>The Tempest</i> at The Globe <p><u>M Nov 10</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>W Nov 12</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Nov 14</u>: Rabbit Hole Presentations and Discussion</p>
Week 12:	<p>Viewing for the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Julie Taymor's <i>The Tempest</i> (2010) Documentary about Lynne Bradley's 2019 production of <i>The Tempest</i> in Hong Kong (optional: watch the video of the whole show!). <p><u>M Nov 17</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>W Nov 19</u>: Prepare to slow-read <i>The Tempest</i>, Act/Scene TBA</p> <p><u>F Nov 21</u>: Why Shakespeare? Why Slow Read? What Did You Learn? Final Project Meetings</p>
Week 13:	<p><u>Nov 24-28</u>: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Recess</p>
Week 14:	<p><u>M Dec 1</u>: Peer Review Workshop – Final Project Drafts Due in class</p> <p><u>W Dec 3</u>: Revision Workshop – Peer Review Letters Due in class</p> <p><u>F Dec 5</u>: Project Presentations and closing thoughts</p> <p>Final Project Revision DUE F Dec 5 by 11:55pm</p>
	<p>Final Self-Assessment DUE F Dec 12</p>