

Department of History
University of Wisconsin
Semester 2, 1987-88

History 367

Society and Ideas in Shakespeare's England

Instructor: Michael MacDonald

Course Description

This class will explore the cultural and social history of early modern England. Its main theme will be the role of religious change in shaping the relationship between magic and science. Beginning with a description of the main features of the mental world of late medieval and early modern people, the class will trace the way in which social changes and religious and political events influenced beliefs. The effects of the protestant reformation on the quasi-magical religion of the common people, the rise and fall of witchcraft prosecutions, the scientific status of astrology, the emergence of popular religious radicalism during the English Revolution and the rise of modern science will be among the topics covered in lectures and readings.

Required Readings

E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture
Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic
Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus
Ben Jonson, The Alchemist
Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down

Written Assignments

Students taking the course for three credits will take two mid-term exams and a final. Students taking the class for four credits will also write a brief paper, not to exceed six pages in length, discussing either Doctor Faustus or The Alchemist in light of the lectures and readings.

Grading

All students will be graded on an A-F scale. Students will be marked using the following formula as a guide: Three-unit students--mid-terms 20% each, final 50%, class participation 10%; four-unit students--mid-terms 15% each, final 30%, papers 15% each, class participation 10%.

Schedule of topics and readings:

Unit 1 (January 19-28) Society and Ideas

Introduction

The conditions of life in early modern England

The Elizabethan world picture

Popular culture: beliefs and practices

Readings:

Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, ch. 1.
E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture,
complete.

Unit 2 (February 2-23) Religion and Magic

New movements: humanism, heresy, protestantism

The break with Rome

Religious change and popular resistance

Catholics and protestants

Magic and religion

The impact of the reformation

Examination

Readings:

Christopher Haigh, "Introduction," in his The Reformation Revised (Kinko's)
D.M. Palliser, "Popular Reactions to the Reformation in the Years of Uncertainty, 1530-1570" (Kinko's)
Thomas, Religion and Magic, chs. 2-6

Unit 3 (February 25-April 12) Popular and Elite Magic

Magical healing

Cunning men and women

The occult philosophy

Doctor Faustus

Spring Break (March 15-17)

Magic and religion

Astrology and science

Astrological practice

Astrology and religion

Alchemy

The Alchemist

Examination

Readings: SEE NEXT PAGE

Readings:

Thomas, Religion and Magic, chs. 7-12
Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus
Ben Jonson, The Alchemist

Unit 4 (April 14-May 5) Witchcraft and the Decline of Magic

Witchcraft beliefs
Witchcraft prosecutions
Witches and other women
The decline of witchcraft trials
Politics and popular religion
Radicalism and revolution
The decline of magic

Readings:

Thomas, Religion and Magic, chs. 14-18, 631-668.
Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down