

Shakespeare's Plays and Richard Day's *The Book of Christian Prayers* (1578)

ENG 222: Introduction to Shakespeare

Dr. Tara Lyons, [tlyons@ilstu.edu](mailto:tlyons@ilstu.edu)

<https://taralyons.weebly.com>

For this assignment, students will analyze a book from early modern England, Richard Day's *The Book of Christian Prayers*, and write an essay (1500 words) that explores how ideas in the prayer book are represented, adapted, and/or refuted in one of Shakespeare's plays, either *Romeo and Juliet* or *Henry IV Part 1*. To complete this assignment, you will have access to an actual copy of *The Book of Christian Prayers* (1578) in Milner Special Collections Library (Call Number BV245 .D35). The volume was very generously donated to ISU's Library in summer of 2017 so that students like you could work hands-on with rare printed materials contemporary with Shakespeare's plays.

Day's *The Book of Christian Prayers* (1578), also known as Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book, is a heavily illustrated Protestant prayer book that contains a range of common prayers for English men and women. The book was popular enough to have multiple editions published in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Although we do not have evidence to prove that Shakespeare read this prayer book or used it to write his plays, he and his audiences would have been very familiar with the genre, most early readers having used prayer books like this for private or communal devotions. *The Book of Christian Prayers* (1578), however, is rather unique for its time, as each page's borders are filled with elaborate woodcut illustrations. These images feature skeletal figures leading men and women, of all ages and social classes, to their graves in a dance-like procession. The motif was called the "Dance of Death" or *Dans Macabre*, and it was part of the medieval artistic tradition, designed to remind Christians that life on earth is only temporary; no matter one's status, death conquers all. Shakespeare's plays readily engage with the Dance of Death motif and its related themes of social leveling, and his audiences would have likely recognized references to these concepts in his plays.

For this paper, you can choose to explore any connection between one of the listed Shakespeare plays and Day's prayer book. Your paper might consider, for instance, how prayers instructing children to be obedient to their parents are reinforced in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth Part 1* through the words of the King to his profligate son. Or, you could analyze what the prayer book says about the afterlife and contrast it with how Shakespeare approaches the concept in the final act of *Romeo and Juliet*. Your paper could also focus on the Dance of Death illustrations in the prayer book and explore how they represent Princes and Knights in a similar or different fashion than Shakespeare with Hal and Falstaff. Or, your essay could consider the prayer book's illustration of "Death and the Maide" and its correlation with moments in *Romeo and Juliet* when Death figuratively makes Juliet his "bride." You can choose any topic from the prayer book that interests you and connects in interesting ways with one of Shakespeare's plays. Just please remember: this paper should present your own original analysis, not a summary of sources' arguments or regurgitation of class discussions.

A key part of this assignment is conducting primary research on *The Book of Christian Prayers*, its text and illustrations. Reading the prayer book may be difficult because of the old Gothic typeface and/or because of damage to the book (missing pages, spots, tears). Do read at least 10 prayers in the book and study the visual designs on those pages. Please transcribe the prayers to the best of

your ability and bring them to class for activities. We will do some group transcriptions in class to help you make sense of the text. We will also spend time analyzing the woodcut illustrations and reading secondary sources on Day's prayer book and the Dance of Death motif. You should use these in-class discussions to sharpen your reading and research skills so that you can then conduct your own investigation with *The Book of Christian Prayers*.

For this paper, you will also need to do secondary research, integrating 5 peer-reviewed sources into the paper. This secondary reading will help you explore how a Shakespeare play can be read anew through your primary research. When you turn in the paper, please provide copies of pages from which you cite (both primary and secondary). This will allow me to provide detailed feedback on your use of sources when I grade your paper.

If you analyze an image in your paper, be sure to include a copy of the image. Label it Figure 1 and refer to it as Figure 1 in the text of the paper so that the reader knows which illustration you are discussing.

### **Grading—200 points, 20% of the Final Course Grade**

A paper that does not follow the assignment will receive a failing grade.

### **Format (10):**

- At least 1,500 words, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and 12 point Times New Roman font; a paper that is not at least 1500 words will earn a failing grade.
- Labeled images integrated into the paper or included at the end of the paper; cite appropriately.
- Headers with last name and page number in the upper right corner of the page.
- Academic Title—Do not title the paper “Play Analysis.” Instead, use a title that highlights the central argument of the paper.
- In-text Citations and Matching Works Cited page in MLA format
- Copies of pages from which you cite are attached
- Your name, my name, course number and section, the due date, and the assignment in the upper left hand corner of the first page—double spaced

**Thesis (20):** Your thesis should be a sophisticated and clear *argument* about a concept in Day's prayer book and its connection with Shakespeare's play. Your thesis should have evolved throughout the writing process. A thesis that can be proved just through summary is not sufficient for this assignment. Please position your thesis statement in the introduction of your essay.

**Analysis and Close Reading of the Play and Prayer Book (80):** Your paper must deeply consider the texts' meanings. Focus on specific details (such as word choice, syntax, repetition, rhyme, irony, etc.) and explore them. Go beyond summary. Go beyond the surface level. Make connections and add insights beyond the basic plot details. Make sure that your arguments have been shaped and developed from your close readings.

**Support and Development (30):** You must use strong evidence and specific examples to support your 1) thesis and 2) claims within paragraphs. Not only must you provide the evidence, but also you must explain to the reader how your examples support your claims. Develop for the reader how the claims in your body paragraphs support the larger argument, your thesis.

**Organization (20):** Your paper should be well structured, moving logically from point to point. Each body paragraph should begin with a claim that you then prove in the paragraph. Each topic sentence in your body paragraphs should support your larger argument, your thesis. In general, body paragraphs are between 8 and 12 sentences. Your conclusion should examine the significance of this argument to the wider themes in the Shakespearean text or the prayer book. or the early modern period. You may also pose questions that your analysis has raised.

• **Sources (30):** You must cite at least five peer-reviewed secondary sources. These sources should help you develop your argument. In other words, use quotes or paraphrase passages that relate to your thesis or smaller claims. Your sources should be smoothly integrated into your writing using MLA format. Three things to do with sources: Agree, Disagree, Use as a Jumping Off Point. *The Booke of Christian Prayer*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *1 Henry IV* are PRIMARY sources. The essays on the syllabus by Chew, Knowles, and MacKenzie are SECONDARY peer-reviewed sources.

• **Grammar and Style (10):** A superior paper will be free of all spelling and grammar errors, have strong sentence structure, and use an appropriate academic tone. You must have complete sentences, correct punctuation, and correct word choice. Proofread carefully. Watch for fragments, run-ons, parallelism problems, subject verb agreement, pronoun antecedent agreement, and quotation format. Also, watch for comma errors, semicolon errors, and dangling modifiers. Aspects of style include conciseness, variety of sentence structure, consistent verb tense (use present tense throughout), avoidance of the passive voice, and attention to the connotative meanings of words. This is a formal paper, so do not use slang or clichés. Do not use contractions (can't, haven't) or second person "you."

### **Academic Integrity**

All work in this course is expected to be your own, with all words and/or ideas from other sources fairly attributed. To use phrases or ideas from any other source as if they were your own constitutes plagiarism. Any student who plagiarizes or in any other way cheats in this class will fail the course. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is, please see me at any time. All students should familiar themselves with the university policy on academic integrity: see Student Handbook, Policy IIIB.

### **Getting Help on this Assignment**

Julia N. Visor Academic Center: The Visor Center offers one-on-one writing assistance for students at any stage of the writing process. I strongly suggest you make an appointment and meet with a writing tutor before turning in this paper. You can visit the center to brainstorm ideas, review your final draft, or get help at any stage in between. Make an appointment by calling 309-438-7100 or visit the center's website: <http://universitycollege.illinoisstate.edu/tutoring/writing/>

If you receive help on the paper from a tutor or other person, please reveal this information at the end of your paper.

**See Me:** You should also feel free to discuss the assignment. I will not pre-grade your entire paper, but I am happy to help you brainstorm ideas and provide feedback on a thesis statement or body paragraph.

**Please let me know if you have questions. Happy writing!**

**Shakespeare—Rubric –200 points**

Student's Name:

Category	Above Standards	Meets Standards	Approaching Standards	Below Standards	Far Below Standards
<b>Format (10 points)</b>					
<p>1500 words; font, spacing, and margins are correct</p> <p>Images integrated, labelled, cited</p> <p>Headers, with last name and page number in the upper right corner of the page</p> <p>Academic Title that highlights the central argument of the paper</p> <p>Works Cited page in MLA format; in-text citations match Works Cited</p> <p>Copies from sources attached</p>					
<b>Thesis (20 points)</b>					
<p>Thesis is appropriately located in paper (intro)</p> <p>Thesis is sophisticated and clear <i>argument</i> about the meaning of the Shakespeare text in relation to the prayer book</p> <p>Thesis is complicated enough that it cannot be proven with summary</p>					
<b>Analysis and Close Reading (80 points)</b>					
<p>Deeply consider the play's meanings</p> <p>Deeply consider the prayer book's meanings</p> <p>Focuses on specific details and explores them</p> <p>Goes beyond summary &amp; surface level ideas</p> <p>Makes connections and add insights</p> <p>Arguments have been shaped and developed from close readings</p>					
<b>Support/Development (30 points)</b>					

<p>Strong, specific evidence and examples support thesis</p> <p>Strong, specific evidence and examples support claims within paragraphs</p> <p>Develops how examples support arguments</p>					
<b>Organization (20)</b>					
<p>Well-structured moving logically from point to point</p> <p>Each body paragraph begins with a claim that is then proven in the paragraph</p> <p>Each topic sentence in body paragraphs supports larger argument</p> <p>In general, body paragraphs are between 8 and 12 sentences</p> <p>Conclusion examines the significance of argument</p>					
<b>Sources (30 points)</b>					
<p>Cites at least three scholarly peer-review secondary sources</p> <p>Sources develop the argument</p> <p>Uses quotes or paraphrases passages</p> <p>Sources smoothly integrated into writing using MLA format</p> <p>Sources are used to Agree, Disagree, or as a Jumping Off Point</p> <p>All sources in paper are cited</p>					
<b>Grammar and Style (10 points)</b>					
<p>Spelling and grammar errors</p> <p>Strong sentence structure</p> <p>Correct punctuation</p> <p>Conciseness, variety of sentence structure, consistent verb tense avoids passive voice</p> <p>Appropriate Word Choice</p> <p>Academic tone</p>					

**Total Score:**

**Additional Comments:**