Syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Shakespeare and Political Philosophy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Dr Sam Gilchrist Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Cross-Listing</td>
<td>History, Political Science, Advanced Certificate in Political Thought, Early Modern Philosophy (MA in Philosophy)</td>
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**Description**

We all talk Shakespeare
— Jane Austen

While Shakespeare’s plays have been cited by virtually every political theorist from Hobbes to Arendt, no explicit theories of government are offered by his dramas. Indeed, part of their enduring power as explorations of the state, sovereignty, nationalism, tyranny, revolution and justice lies in the manner in which they necessary present the responses of particular individuals to particular stimuli in the context of specific conditions, without moralization or generalization. Whether it be his vicious debunking of religious hypocrisy in *Measure for Measure* or his discrediting of sovereignty in *Henry V*, Shakespeare’s attitude to his society, its institutions, authorities and narratives appears to be ambivalent at best. Yet, this neither prevented his works being used in the British colonial enterprise, nor as a call to arms in the Revolutions that swept Europe in 1848.

The course examines three key questions:

- What sort of political philosophy do Shakespeare’s plays offer?
- What is the appropriate methodology to consider politics in literature?
- How and why have Shakespeare’s plays been used in various nationalistic and imperial agendas?

**Goals**

The primary purpose of this course is to better understand Shakespeare’s political philosophy through the analysis of selected comedies, histories and tragedies, while also fathoming the way in which Shakespeare has been used in divergent political agendas and movements, from Marxism to the so-called “Anglo-Saxon” cult of Shakespeare. His works, it was believed, would serve a “civilizing” function in the empire where the sun never set. Since it places political questions center stage, a contemporary re-write of *King Lear*, set amidst the
corruption and gross inequality of modern India, Preti Taneja’s *We Who are Young* (2018), is also considered as a key text.

**Learning Outcomes**

This course approaches what is perhaps the major question in literary studies: how does literature think? Or, in other words, what kind of knowledge is offered by a work of fiction that distinguishes it from one of philosophy, science or history? Aside from this, the course introduces students to certain key works of early modern and classical political philosophy (Plato; Hobbes; Machiavelli), deepens their knowledge of certain canonical plays and their political afterlife, including their perverse refunctioning in the ethno-nationalism of twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The methodological focus is on developing skills that are vital in the study of literature: close-reading, rhetorical analysis, and source/adaptation studies.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

Watching or reading all of the plays is essential (a list of film versions will be uploaded), as is accessing and reading the extracts before class. Students are, of course, expected to familiarize themselves with the eras in question and read around the topic. It is vital to read the following two texts in preparation for the course:


Attendance is mandatory and students auditing the class may miss a maximum of 3 classes.

1. Contribution as an individual or group to the end of term mini-conference on *Shakespeare’s Political Philosophy* (25%);
2. Completion of a 2000-word essay (65%);
3. Class contribution (10%).

Full bibliographic details of the required reading, along with some suggested readings, are found in the bibliography.

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<tr>
<th>Lesson No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td><strong>Scope and Expectations</strong></td>
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<td><em>Politics and Poetry? A Discussion</em></td>
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<td><strong>Definition of Terms</strong></td>
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<td>Strauss. “What is political philosophy?”</td>
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<td>La Boétie. <em>Discourse on Voluntary Servitude</em></td>
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| **2.** | **Shakespeare’s Republic**  
*The Merchant of Venice*  
Plato. *Republic* (Chapter 5)  
Hall. “Opening the Silenus”  
| **3.** | **Shakespeare’s Machiavelli**  
*Richard III*  
*The Prince*  
— *The Discourses* [Extract]  
Grady. *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne* [Extract] | Shakespeare’s Machiavelli  
*Richard III*  
*The Prince*  
— *The Discourses* [Extract]  
Grady. *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne* [Extract] |
| **4.** | **Shakespeare and Absolutism**  
*Hamlet*  
*Leviathan* (Extract: Parts 1-4)  
Wilson. *Free Will* [extract] |  |
| **5.** | **Shakespeare the Revolutionary**  
*Here’s Fine Revolution* [Extract]  
Taureck* [Extract] |  |
| **6.** | **Populism and Shakespearean Drama**  
*Henry V*  
*In Mendacio Veritas*  
Canetti. *Crowds and Power* [Extract] |  |
| **7.** | **East-West Relations**  
*Antony and Cleopatra*  
Plutarch. *Antony* (*Narrative and Dramatic Sources*)  
Brenk. "Antony-Osiris, Cleopatra-Isis: the End of Plutarch’s Antony”  
Crane. "Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*." |  |
| **8.** | **Shakespeare’s Political Theology**  
*King Lear* |  |
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<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong> Mini-Conference: Shakespeare as a Political Philosopher</td>
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<td><strong>12.</strong> Course Feedback Essay Feedback</td>
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* This text is only available in German

**Primary Texts**


**Secondary Reading**


——. “In Mendacio Veritas: Telling the Truth through Lies in 1&2 Henry IV and Henry V.” *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 91, no.1, 1-14


