RENAISSANCE ENGLISH LITERATURES AND CULTURES:  
Conceptions of Tyranny

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain.
Shakespeare, Richard III

The sovereign, who freely consented to donning the executioner's clothes, is now finally manifesting his originary kinship with the criminal.
Giorgio Agamben, Means without End

Renaissance dramatists conceived of multiple forms of tyranny: usurpation, luxury, heresy, insanity. On one level, dramatists represent tyranny as a political or social act of conscious villainy: Shakespeare's Richard III, Macbeth and Claudius murder their way to the throne; Marlowe's Edward II and Jonson's Tiberius ignore good counsel. On another level, however, tyranny signifies often uncalculated, or uncontrollable, behavior and outcomes: tyrants experience forbidden desire (Edward II; Measure for Measure); rulers suspend the law to protect the state, inviting rebellion instead (Richard II; Coriolanus). Entangling issues of agency, law and cultural normativity, representations of tyranny on the Renaissance stage resonate with vociferous debates on resistance and tyrannicide (by writers including Bodin, James, Machiavelli, Mornay, and Ponet). Renaissance stagings also anticipate explorations of the state of emergency by modern theorists. Writers such as Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt grapple with states of exception, when rulers suspend laws in order to protect the state but in doing so veer towards tyranny. How do Agamben's notion of biopower and sovereignty and Schmitt's theory of the exception help us understand Renaissance emergencies? This course offers, then, an introduction both to English Renaissance literature, particularly drama by Shakespeare, and to contemporary theories of sovereignty and tyranny. We will begin the course through a philosophical engagement with modern notions of sovereignty and tyranny (including, most likely, selections from Agamben's State of Exception and Homo Sacer, as well as Schmitt's Political Theology); we will then pair early modern theories of tyranny (including Mornay's Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos, Bodin's The Six Booke of a Commonweale, James VI's Basilicon Doron, and Machiavelli's Il Principe) with Renaissance drama (including Shakespeare's Richard II, Richard III, Coriolanus, Hamlet, Measure for Measure, Macbeth; Marlowe's Edward II; Jonson’s Sejanus).

Requirements
• A short, written response (1 pg) to TWO EMSI events. You are free to choose the two lectures you would like to attend – the EMSI sponsors a number of seminar groups, including the Renaissance Literature seminar, the British History seminar, and the Distinguished
Lecture series. The event with Bill Sherman on Sept 10th might be a perfect first choice. See http://dornsife.usc.edu/emsi for details.

- Presentation/leading class discussion. Please select one week (any week, from 2-14, is fair game) when you would like to lead discussion for the first hour of class. Here, you might choose to offer discussion questions, circulated ahead of time; or you might like to draw out some of the themes in the text(s) to help provoke discussion – you can approach the presentation-class discussion however you like, but this is not meant to be a formal presentation, but instead a proper discussion which helps spark comments from everyone.

- An article-length final paper (20-25 pages), abstract and working bibliography due on Nov 4, final paper due on Dec. 2. OR two short papers (10-12 pages), due Nov. 4 and Dec. 2.

Tyranny and sovereignty, a conceptual introduction

Aug 26  
Course introduction; selected readings on tyranny:
“An Homily against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion”

Sept 2  
Agamben, State of Exception
Schmitt, Political Theology

Sept 9  
Shakespeare, Coriolanus
Agamben, Homo Sacer

I. Usurpation, part 1: divine right sovereignty

Sept 16  
Richard II
Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies

Sept 23  
Macbeth
King James VI and I, Trew Law of Free Monarchies
Bodin, The Six Bookes of a Commonweale
II. Usurpation, part 2: resistance theory

Sept 30

*Henry IV, part 1 and 2*

Ponet, John. *A Short Treatise of Politic Power*. 1556. Available at
http://www.constitution.org/cmt/ponet/polpower.htm

Meredith Evans, Rumor, the Breath of Kings, and the Body of Law in "2 Henry IV" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60. 1 (Spring 2009): 1-24. (usc electronic)

Oct 7

*Hamlet*

Anon, *Vindicae Contra Tyrannos*. Available at
http://www.constitution.org/vct/vindiciae.htm


III. Evil Counsel

Oct 14

*Richard III*

Machiavelli, *The Prince*


Oct 21

Ben Jonson, *Sejanus*

James VI and I, *Basilicon Doron*


IV. Domestic tyranny

Oct 28

*Taming of the Shrew*

“An Homily of the State of Matrimony” available at
http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/ret/homilies/bk2hom18.html

T.E. “The Law’s Resolution of Women’s Rights” (handout)

selections from Frances E. Dolan’s *Marriage and Violence* (handout)

Nov 4

*Winter's Tale*


Abstract and working bibliography of final paper due

V. Luxury

Nov 11

Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*

Nov 18 Measure for Measure
“Measure for Measure, Anti-Puritanism and ‘Order’ in Early Stuart England” in Peter Lake and Michael Questier, The Anti-Christ’s Lewd Hat (Yale UP, 2002). (handout)

Nov 25 UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY, THANKSGIVING RECESS

Dec 2 The Tempest; discuss papers, general merriment

FINAL PAPER DUE: Friday, Dec 2, 2011

Required book list


Kantorowicz, Ernst. The King’s Two Bodies (Princeton UP, 1997). ISBN: 978-0691017044. If you can get this at the library or online, great.


Shakespeare, William. The Norton Shakespeare. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York: Norton, 2008. ISBN 978-0393929911. I’m also happy with other editions of individual plays, including the Signet, Pelican, Penguin, Folger, etc. If you want the most scholarly editions, Norton (collected) and Arden and Bedford (individual plays) are the best bets, but with Shakespeare even the cheapest editions are quite good (with the exception of the Dover Thrift editions, which I’d prefer you don’t use).
Further reference list


---. *A Declaration of the Sentence and Deposition of Elizabeth, the Usurper and Pretended Queen of England*. 1588.


Goodman, Christopher. *How a Superior Power Ought to be Obeyed*. 1558.


----. “Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies,*” in *Representations* 106 (Spring 2009): 77-101.


Parsons, Robert [R. Doleman]. “A conference about the next succession to the crown of Ingland.” Imprinted at N. [Antwerp], 1594.


