English 355
Tyranny, Service and Slavery in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries

Class Meeting: MWF 1.00-1.50pm

Professor: Rebecca Lemon, English Department, THH 429
Email: rlemon@usc.edu; phone: 213.740.3732 (email is the best way to reach me)
Office Hours: Wednesday, 9.00-11.00am, or by appointment

Course Description

This course investigates the legal and political concepts of “tyranny,” “service,” and “slavery” in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. From Richard III to Macbeth, and from Shylock and Othello to Caliban, Shakespeare exposes the workings of the tyrant and interrogates the bondage of service and slavery. His portraits pose questions of agency and law: when can political subjects rise against a tyrant? How do slaves and servants rise against tyrannical masters? Shakespeare’s answers resonate with vociferous debates on resistance and tyrannicide in the political writings by his contemporaries: we will read selections from the works of French jurist Jean Bodin, English monarch King James I, and Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli next to Shakespeare’s plays with an eye to investigating how early modern writers imagined the categories of tyrant, slave, and servant; and how their writings deepen our understanding of the long history of these categories in Western legal thought.

Required Book List

I have ordered the books into the USC bookstore. You might also find them on Amazon.

Shakespeare, Othello, Merchant of Venice, The Tempest, Richard III, Macbeth, The Comedy of Errors


Recommended Book List

I will offer handouts from these books, as we are only reading selections; but you might decide to purchase them for your library if you plan to work on these topics in the future.

Davis, David Brion. “Ancient Foundations of Modern Slavery,” Inhuman Bondage, [available through the library online]

Course Goals

- Reflect on the history of legal concepts through close study of some of the most influential works of literature in the western canon;
- Cultivate a critical appreciation for various forms of legal expression, including literature, philosophy, and political theory, as well as develop an understanding of the contexts from which these forms emerge;
- Engage with lasting ideas and values that have animated legal debates throughout the centuries for a more purposeful, more ethical, and intellectually richer life;
- Learn to read and interpret actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively;
- Learn to evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of critical importance.

Course Requirements

- **Essays:** Two 6-8 page essays, due on the dates shown below. NB: If you are interested in writing one long (15 page) paper, please approach me to discuss this option – I will create a series of shorter graded steps/deadlines for you (including an abstract of your paper, an annotated bibliography, and a rough draft). That way you can be assured of my mentorship and help through the process!

- **A short, written response (500 words)** to one EMSI or CLHC event. You are free to choose the what event 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. See [http://dornsife.usc.edu/emsi](http://dornsife.usc.edu/emsi) for details.

- **Keyword research project**
  - As a class, we will develop a Law-Literature Dictionary. You will each participate by selecting and researching three keywords (or, for your last entry, you could do a key image or key figure). These keywords should be ones that you find especially significant, challenging or difficult. You are welcome to select keywords that interest you; I am also happy to help with your selection. For this assignment, you will use the time of our Friday class, starting in week four, to conduct independent research on and writing of these keyword dictionary entries. You will research the word’s etymology (using *Black’s Legal Dictionary, the Oxford English Dictionary Online* online or other historical legal sources such as Coke or Bracton), and its usage (using *Early English Books Online*, or through electronic searches of your author/text online). Some of you may be interested in researching newspaper/popular cultural uses to help track the shift in the word’s meaning over time. Alternately you might be interested to research the appearance of your word in court rulings, including in dissenting briefs by Supreme Court justices (you can consult “The Bard at the Bar: Some Citations of Shakespeare by the United States Supreme Court,” by Jules Gleicher (2001) if you are interested). Then, for each word, you will post your write-up of etymology and usages on Blackboard on the due dates listed below.
  - Your outcome, in each case, will be a dictionary-style entry on your keyword and its history. This should run about 500 words.
• **Presentation/leading class discussion** on a legal concept or a critical article. Please select one topic (list of topics circulated on day 2) on which to lead discussion for the first portion of class (20 minutes or so).
  
  • If you are presenting on a legal concept, you should consult *Black’s Legal Dictionary*, *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* (available through USC electronic resources), and at least one other source. The source might be Justinian’s *Corpus Juris Civilis*, Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Coke’s *Institutes of the Laws of England* (https://archive.org/stream/cu31924021661693/cu31924021661693_djvu.txt), or any number of sources catalogued through the Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/default.asp).
  
  • If you are presenting on a critical article, you should open discussion by summarizing the argument and key evidence from the article, and then pose discussion questions about the article – you might offer your own critique, and ask us to respond; or you might pair a scene from Shakespeare’s play with the article to help guide our discussion.
  
  • If you are interested to explore a topic further, I recommend you consult this reference list, on writings on slavery and colonialism by people of color: https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2017/07/25/a-reading-list-of-scholarship-by-people-of-colour-on-slavery-and-colonialism-c-1500-1750/

Grading: You will be graded on essays, your keyword entries, your event response and class participation (which includes a class presentation, thoughtful contributions to class discussion, as well as attendance). You are welcome to show me a draft of your paper for comments, up to one class period before the paper is due (i.e. if it is due on a Thursday, you have until Tuesday to show me a draft).

Class attendance: Attendance and class participation are an important part of the course. You are allowed only three absences. Any more than three absences will lower your final grade, and any more than seven absences will be reason for a failing grade in the course.

**Grading Breakdown**

All assignments are graded on a point scale from 0-100. Uncompleted assignments receive a zero. Late papers will be penalized by 3 points a day, starting immediately after the paper is due in lecture.

20% participation in class discussion and presentation  
20% for keyword entries  
10% for event response  
25% Essay 1  
25% Essay 2

**Seminar Schedule, Fall 2019**

Week 1: Slavery and Tyranny, a conceptual introduction
8/28: Introductory keywords and key concepts continued

**UNIT ONE: TYRANNY**

Week 2: Theories of tyranny
9/2:  Labor Day
9/4:  *Richard III*
     Legal concept: usurper
9/6:  *Richard III*

Week 3: Usurpation and divine right sovereignty
9/9:  *Richard III*
9/11:  Machiavelli, *The Prince*
9/13:  Keyword #1 etymology research: class meets to discuss Williams, *Keywords*, as a sample [handout]
     **Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass**

Week 4: Usurpation and divine right, continued
9/16:  Bodin, *On Sovereignty*; King James VI and I, *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*
     **Handout essay 1 assignment**
9/20:  Keyword #1 usage research

Week 5: Reason of State
9/23:  *Macbeth*
9/25:  *Macbeth*
9/27:  Keyword #1 draft

Week 6: Treason in Shakespeare
9/30:  *Macbeth*
     Legal concept: treason
10/2:  *Macbeth*
     Rebecca Lemon, “Scaffolds of Treason,” *Theatre Journal*
10/4:  **Keyword #1 entry due (on Blackboard)**

**UNIT TWO: SERVICE AND SLAVERY**

Week 7: Domestic service in Shakespeare
10/7:  *The Comedy of Errors*
10/9:  *The Comedy of Errors*
     Legal concept: servant
10/11:  Reading and response day
     **Essay 1 due**
     **Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript**
     **Last day to change a Pass/No Pass course to letter grade**

Week 8: Endings
10/14:  *The Comedy of Errors*
10/16: *The Comedy of Errors*
Legal concept: contract

10/18: Fall recess

Week 9: Religion, prejudice, and slavery in Shakespeare
10/21: *Merchant of Venice* [suggested film viewing: Al Pacino, *Merchant of Venice*]
10/23: *Merchant of Venice*
Legal concept: will

10/25: Keyword #2 etymology research

Week 10: *Merchant of Venice* in scholarship
10/28: *Merchant of Venice*
Legal concept: bond

10/30: *Merchant of Venice*

11/1: Keyword #2 usage research
**Handout essay 2 assignment**

Week 11: Racism and slavery in Shakespeare
11/4: *Othello*
Legal concept: counsel
[suggested film viewing: Laurence Fishburne, *Othello*]

11/6: *Othello*
Legal concept: coverture

11/8: **Keyword #2 entry due (on Blackboard)**

Week 12: *Othello* in scholarship
11/11: *Othello*

11/15: Keyword/key image #3 etymology research

Week 13: Slavery and colonialism in Shakespeare
11/18: *The Tempest*
Legal concept: colony
11/20: The Tempest
Legal concept/issue: AZ banning of The Tempest in schools

Essay 2 assignment due
11/22: Keyword/key image #3 usage research

Week 14: Slavery and colonialism in Shakespeare
11/25: The Tempest
11/27: The Tempest
11/29: Thanksgiving break

Week 15: Final Arguments
12/2: The Sonnets
12/4: The Sonnets
12/6: Class party
Keyword/key image #3 entry due (on Blackboard)

**Computer Policy**

In this class you are invited to take notes in your book and in a notebook. Please do not use an electronic device (computer, phone, iPad, etc.) to take notes, unless you have a documented disability that requires it (in which case, please provide me with this notification). If you need more information on why I have this policy, please feel free to ask me! I put this policy in place with your health, wellbeing, and education in mind. For more information, please see:
http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/
http://www.slake.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studying_divided_attention_and_technological_gadgets.html
http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/22/0956797614524581.abstract

**University Policies**

**Academic Accommodations**
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5:00pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**Academic Conduct:**
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards”
https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct,
http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.
Support Systems:
Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: http://sarc.usc.edu/

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. https://equity.usc.edu/

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/

Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/

Diversity at USC – https://diversity.usc.edu/
Tabs for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

Statement on Student Behavior
Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.