

**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

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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*

Bodin, Jean. *On Sovereignty: Four chapters from The Six Books of the Commonwealth*. Ed. and trans. Julian H. Franklin. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992 or CreateSpace, 2009. ISBN 978-1438288703.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Penguin edition or other reasonably priced edition, such as David Wootton’s from Hackett Pub: ISBN 978-0872203167

Sommerville, Johann P. (ed). *King James VI and I: Political Writings*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994. ISBN 978-0521447294.

**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]

Nyquist, Mary. *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

### 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> 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](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

8/26: Introduction to the course: Definitions of slavery/slave and tyranny/tyrant, via *Black's Legal Dictionary*, *The Legal Dictionary*, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (handout)

8/28: Introductory keywords and key concepts continued

## **UNIT ONE: TYRANNY**

8/30: *Richard III* [suggested film viewing: Ian McKellan, *Richard III*]

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*

9/18: Anon, *Vindicae Contra Tyrannos*. Available at <http://www.constitution.org/vct/vindiciae.htm>

John Ponet, *A Short Treatise of Politic Power*. 1556. Available at

<http://www.constitution.org/cmt/ponet/polpower.htm>

**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*

Recommended: Todd Butler, "Bedeviling Spectacle: Law, Literature, and Early Modern Witchcraft," *Yale Journal of Law & Humanities* 20.2 (2008): 101-119.

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*

Akhimie, Patricia. "'Bruised with Adversity': Reading Race in *The Comedy of Errors*," *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, Race*. Ed. Valerie Traub. Oxford UP, 2016, 186-96

10/16: *The Comedy of Errors*  
 Recommended: Bradin Cormack, "Locating The Comedy of Errors: Revels Jurisdiction at the Inns of Court," *The intellectual and cultural world of the early modern Inns of Court*, pp. 264–85; Paul Raffield (2009) "The Comedy of Errors and the Meaning of Contract," *Law and Humanities* 3.2: 207-229.

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

Rebecca Lemon, "Shakespeare and Law," *Oxford Guide to Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Kinney (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 548-64.

10/30: *Merchant of Venice*

Janet Adelman, "Her Father's Blood: Race, Conversion, and Nation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Representations* 81 (Winter 2003): 4-30; Recommended: Amanda Bailey, "Shylock and the Slaves: Owing and Owning in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Volume 62, Number 1, Spring 2011, pp. 1-24; Esp. 11-13.

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*

Kim F. Hall, "Othello and the Problem of Blackness," *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume I: The Tragedies*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (2005); [for reference: Michael Neill, "'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors': Othello and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 49, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 361-374.]

[also for reference, Rebecca Lemon, "Addiction and Possession in *Othello*," *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England* (2018).]

11/13: Ian Smith, "We are all Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.1 (2016): 104-124.

Ayanna Thompson, "Original(ity): *Othello* and Blackface," chapter five in *Passing Strange*.

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.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254>

[http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2013/05/multitasking\\_while\\_studyi ng\\_divided\\_attention\\_and\\_technological\\_gadgets.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studyi ng_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/>

Tab 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](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.