

Summer 2018

Instructor: Shaul Bassi, Ca' Foscari University (with Stephen Greenblatt, Harvard University)

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Shakespeare's Venice: Jews, Blacks, Muslims, and Christians at the Origin of the Modern World

ENGL S-122 - Tuesday/Thursday 9:45-12:15

Course description

A great early modern metropolis and a richly symbolic landscape, Venice is the setting of two seminal plays by Shakespeare, a comedy and a tragedy. *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* have made the Jewish moneylender Shylock and the Moor Othello the emblematic ethnic and cultural outsiders, figures who both foreshadow and challenge the modern notion of a multicultural community. This course will analyze the Shakespearean texts, read their principal sources, and chart their controversial critical and theatrical histories. We will examine the rich cultural and literary material that informs the plays, including the representations of African, Jews and Muslims, and their multiple resonances in different times and places, including modern adaptations in fiction and film. Our presence in Venice will be crucial to our understanding: we will explore why the setting for these plays had to be here and not elsewhere, and we will visit Venetian sites that illuminate the Biblical, classical, and ethnographic contexts that forged Shakespeare's notions of cultural and religious difference.

Classes will be structured as lectures and group discussions. The instructors will make extensive use of multimedia presentation formats (powerpoint, films, etc.). Lectures do not simply explain the readings, but also complement them by providing further data and information. Taking notes during classes is highly recommended. If a student misses a class it will be his/her responsibility to catch up with what he/she missed. Assignments and exams will cover both the readings and the class lectures.

Stephen Greenblatt(Harvard University) will be teaching some of the classes during the course.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course. A basic knowledge of Shakespeare is highly advisable. We encourage you to read both plays once for basic comprehension before the start of the class, then a second time during the course as we dig deeper into Shakespeare's themes and language.

Required readings

- W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*(any critical edition)
- W. Shakespeare, *Othello*(any critical edition)

Course Pack with selected readings:

- G. Fiorentino, *Il Pecorone*
- G. Cinthio, "Il Moro di Venezia"
- S. Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* (selections)
- D. Nirenberg, "Shylock" (from *Anti-Judaism*)
- T. Coryat, "Crudities" (selections)
- S. Coppia Sulam, Selected works
- C. Sinclair, "Shylock Must Die"

- N. Alderman, "The Wolf in the Water" (selections)
- J. Leo, *A Geographical History of Africa*(selections)
- E. Shohat, "The Specter of the Blackamoor: Figuring Africa and the Orient"
- M. Floyd-Wilson, "Othello's Jealousy"
- S. Bassi, "The Merchant in Venice: Re-creating Shakespeare in the Ghetto"
- B. Okri, "Leaping Out of Shakespeare's Terror. Five Meditations on Othello"
- T. Morrison, *Desdemona*

Recommended Readings

- S. Greenblatt, *Will in the World. How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (Norton, 2004).
- D. Calabi, "The City of the Jews"

Field Trip

Shakespeare's Venice: The Jewish Ghetto

Grading

Participation	25%	<i>Students who receive a high participation grade will have demonstrated the following: consistent and thorough preparation for each class (having carefully done all of the readings, and, ideally, having written down a few thoughts or questions about the readings before class); consistently excellent contributions to in-class discussions (including listening carefully to your fellow students and engaging thoughtfully with their ideas); and perfect attendance to lecture and section. Students are expected to behave properly in class: eating and drinking are not allowed. Cell phones are not allowed. Laptops may be used only for the purpose of viewing course readings during class.</i>
Midterm paper	25%	<i>4-6 pages, due in class on Tue 10 July. The paper prompt will be posted to the course website.</i>
Dramaturgical assignment	25%	<i>4-5 page essay along with annotated passage, completed worksheet, and list of works cited, due in class on Thurs 26 July.</i>
Final Exam	25%	<i>The final exam will be a written, in-class exam. The exam will consist of passage identification questions and short response questions, and will cover all of the readings from the course.</i>

NB: Master's students (studenti a livello magistrale) and all other students at graduate level will be given extra work for grading purposes.

Policies and procedures

Attendance is required and considered as part of the grading. *Any absence must be registered by the CFHSS office (email cafoscari-harvard@unive.it). All work submitted for this course must be the student's own and must follow proper citation procedures. All students are required to read in advance the policies on "Plagiarism and Collaboration" in the Handbook for Students at <http://hord.me/iXiaLD>. Please familiarize yourself with the **Guidelines for Using Sources:** <http://bit.ly/cQK9A3>*

Other guides to reading, writing, and research are available on the course website: <http://hord.me/yYGeJy>

Seminars

Lesson	Title and Description	Date
1	Shylock, the Jews, The Christians(Stephen Greenblatt)	Tue 26 June
Readings	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	
2	Reading Shakespeare, Reading <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (Stephen Greenblatt)	Thu 28 June
Readings	Pecorone; Nirenberg	
3	Fieldtrip: visit to the Jewish Ghetto	Tue 3 July
Readings	Coryat; Copia Sullam	
4	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	Thu 5 July
Readings	Greenblatt	
5	Shylock's Afterlife	Tue 10 July
Readings	C. Sinclair; Naomi Alderman Midterm paper due in class	
6	Staging Shakespeare- meeting with professional actors	Thu 12 July (time tbd)
Readings	Bassi	
7	The Representation of Blacks and Muslims	Tue 17 July
Readings	Leo; Shohat	
8	<i>Othello</i> (Stephen Greenblatt)	Thu 19 July
Readings	Cinthio; <i>Othello</i>	
9	<i>Othello</i> (Stephen Greenblatt)	Tue 24 July
Readings	Floyd-Wilson; <i>Othello</i>	
10	<i>Othello's</i> Afterlife	Thu 26 July
Readings	Okri; Morrison Dramaturgy assignment due in class	
11	Conclusions: Shylock and Othello compared	Tue 31 July
12	Final exam	Thu 2 August