

Summer 2019

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

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 from Harvard University will also 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.

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*)
- D. Calabi, "The City of the Jews"
- T. Coryat, "Crudities" (selections)
- S. Copia Sullam, Selected works
- C. Sinclair, "Shylock Must Die"

- N. Alderman, "The Wolf in the Water" (selections)
- E. Shohat, "The Specter of the Blackamoor: Figuring African and the Orient"
- S. Bassi, "Moor and Medusa. In the Footsteps of Othello"
- R. Knolles, *The general history of the Turks*(selections)
- J. Leo, *A Geographical History of Africa*(selections)
- B. Okri, "Leaping Out of Shakespeare's Terror. Five Meditations on Othello"
- T. Morrison, *Desdemona*

Recommended Readings

- Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World. How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004).

Field Trips

Shakespeare's Venice 1: The Jewish Ghetto

Shakespeare's Venice 2: The Moors of Venice

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	20%	<i>4-6 pages, due Fri 7 July by 5pm. The paper prompt will be posted to the course website.</i>
Final paper/project	30%	<i>For the final assignment, students may choose between writing a critical paper or doing a creative, non-expository project that engages the readings and themes of the course. The first draft of final papers/projects is due in class on Thurs 27 July. The final draft is due Fri 4 Aug by 5pm.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical papers must be 5-7 pages long. Paper prompts will be posted to the course website; students may write on a topic of their own choosing provided they clear their topic with the instructor at least a week before the paper is due.</i> • <i>Creative projects must be accompanied by (1) a 1-2 page proposal, due Friday 14 Jul by 5pm; (2) a 1-2 page analytical preface to accompany the final submission; (3) a short in-class presentation on Thurs July 27. Further guidelines for creative projects will be posted to the course website.</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)	
Readings	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	
2	Reading Shakespeare, Reading <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (Stephen Greenblatt)	
Readings	Pecorone; Nirenberg	
3	Fieldtrip: visit to the Jewish Ghetto	
Readings	Calabi; Coryat; Copia Sullam	
4	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	
Readings	Greenblatt	
5	Shylock's Afterlife	
Readings	C. Sinclair; Naomi Alderman	
6	The representations of Blacks and Muslims	
Readings	Leo Africanus; Knolles; Shohat	
7	Fieldtrip: The Moors of Venice	
Readings	Bassi	
8	<i>Othello</i> (Stephen Greenblatt)	
Readings	Cinthio; <i>Othello</i>	
9	<i>Othello</i> (Stephen Greenblatt)	
Readings	<i>Othello</i>	
10	Othello's Afterlife	
Readings	Okri; Morrison	
11	Conclusions: Shylock and Othello compared and project presentation	
12	Final exam	
	Final paper/project due 5pm	