

Shakespeare's Politics  
Government 90ca  
mpnichols11@hotmail.com

Professor Mary Nichols  
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The class will explore the extent to which Shakespeare's plays, including tragedies, comedies, and histories, present a comprehensive understanding of political life. How did Shakespeare view the potential and limits of different political orders, and of politics more generally? What do his plays show us about the grounds of authority, justifications for rule, the relation between law and discretion, the goals and manner of statesmanship, the relation between the sexes, authority within families, monarchy, and freedom? In particular, to what extent do Shakespeare's plays explore the advantages and limits of more liberal political orders, based on self-government, consent, and individual choice? Are such orders more or less conducive to tragedy? What are the causes of tragedy, and how do different political orders direct the tragic conflicts of human life? What is the relation between civil society and the natural world? What can dramas teach us that treatises cannot? In general, why should political scientists study literature?

We will begin with Shakespeare's Rome (*Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*), the meaning of Julius Caesar for Roman politics, the goals of the conspirators, the eclipse of nobility under imperial rule, and the attractions of love and private life. We shall then examine the effect of Christianity on politics: what moves Hamlet, is he capable of political action, and what form does tragedy take in Christian times? We shall then study Shakespeare's greatest English monarch, Henry V (*Henry IV, Part I* and *Henry V*), the effect of tavern life on his education, the kind of ruler he becomes, and the extent to which his Christianity contributes or conflicts with his successful rule. To what extent does Hal become a "democratic" king? Even more "modern" regimes than Henry V's rule are represented in Shakespeare's Italian settings, where Shakespeare set so many of his comedies, such as the commercial republic of Venice (*The Merchant of Venice*) and the declining patriarchy in Messina (*Much Ado About Nothing*). But the assertion of free choice, and of independence from patriarchal rule, also brings tragedy, as in *Romeo and Juliet*. How do these plays treat "modern" marriages, and the question of both tragedy and statesmanship in these more liberal political settings? Finally, we shall conclude with the two plays closest to Shakespeare's own England, *Henry VIII*, which involves conflict between religious and political authority, and the threat of religious persecution to England's freedom and prosperity, and *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare's only comedy set in England, which explores the possibility of a political order based on middle class virtue rather classical nobility.

Books to be purchased: (I have ordered the Pelican Shakespeare at the Harvard Coop; I also recommend the Arden editions)

1. *Julius Caesar*
2. *Antony and Cleopatra*
3. *Hamlet*
4. *Henry IV, Part I*
5. *Henry V*
6. *Merchant of Venice*
7. *Romeo and Juliet*
8. *Much Ado About Nothing*
9. *Henry VIII*
10. *Merry Wives of Windsor*

Requirements for the course:

1. (50%) one paper (10-12 pages) on one of the plays on our reading list, a draft to be turned in at the class the week after we begin discussion of the play. Comments will be returned,

and the final version of your paper will be due on the first day of exams.

2. (40%) Eight response papers (no more than 2 pages) on each of the plays (after *Julius Caesar*) with the exception of the play on which you are writing your longer paper. Papers should respond either to some point that arises in class discussions, or to some aspect of the play not yet covered in class. These will be due the week after we begin discussion of each play.

3. (10%) Class discussion

Assignments:

I. Shakespeare: Political Settings and Ways of Life

1. January 30-Introduction, and *Julius Caesar*

II. Rome: Its Nobility and Dangers

2. February 6-*Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

III. The Limits of Rome and the Rise of Christianity

3. February 13-*Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet*

4. February 20-*Hamlet* (papers on *Hamlet* due)

IV. English Monarchy, the Foundations of Rule, and Hal as King

5. February 27-*Henry IV, Part I*

6. March 6-*Henry IV, Part I* and *Henry V*

7. March 13-*Henry V*

V. Commercial Republics and the Decline of Patriarchy

8. March 20-*Merchant of Venice*

9. March 27 (Spring Recess)

10. April 3-*Romeo and Juliet*

11. April 10-*Much Ado About Nothing*

VI. England, Again, and Modern Politics

12. April 17-*Henry VIII*

13. April 24-*Henry VIII* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*

14. May 1-*Merry Wives of Windsor*