

Shakespeare, Religion & Politics

Course Description

In the modern west, we tend to think of religion and politics as occupying separate spheres. This view has recently been challenged by critics of secularism on both the right and the left, who point to events like the Arab Spring to call for a reconsideration of religion as a positive force in the public sphere. After all, they claim, it wasn't always thus: before the "Great Separation" of religion and politics in the Enlightenment, religious concerns and ideas penetrated secular power and authority at every point. Indeed they argue that politics is *inherently* theological, in the sense that it borrows its concepts and passions from religion. In this course, we will explore the ways in which the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe and the writings of early modern political thinkers question or nuance this claim. In particular, we will consider how early modern writers conceived of religio-political authority precisely as an effect of dramatic performance, as something produced by and through the imagination. In this way, the drama and thought of the Renaissance will provide alternative resources for thinking the relationship between church and state today.

In exploring how the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe stage the relationship between religion and politics, we will ask how these works speak to the problems of contemporary political theology. Do their plays say anything about how supposedly secular states rely on theatrical enchantments? Or do they disenchant religion by unmasking its ideological uses? Are there ways of reading political religion in Shakespeare and Marlowe that are not wholly negative? Do they gesture toward alternative notions of belief and religious virtue? And if so, do they open up possibilities for reimagining the relation between church and state today?

Required Texts (available at bookstore)

- William Shakespeare, *Norton Anthology*.
- Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* (Oxford).
- Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago).
- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett).

Assignments

Participation: You will be asked to come prepared to class and participate enthusiastically whenever we act out bits of the plays or read them aloud. Participation is worth 20% of the final grade. After two absences, your final grade will be lowered a half letter grade for each additional absence. Missing more than four class meetings total will likely result in failure.

Papers: Four papers (4-6 pages each). You will be given prompts to guide your writing. The papers are each worth 20% of the final grade. I will give detailed instructions for every assignment as they come up in the semester.

DETAILED CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1—August 27th

- W: *Hebrew Bible*: Exodus 20:2-17, Exodus 31-34 (Golden Calf and Ten Commandments); 1 Samuel 8 (Kingship as Idolatry); 2 Kings 5 (Naaman the Syrian);
New Testament: John 1:1-5; 3:14-5 (the brazen serpent); 1 Corinthians 10

Week 2—September 1-3

- M: Plato's *Republic*, 508d-521a
Augustine, *The City of God*, 4.27; 6.1-8
Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11-2; 2.1-2
- W: Shakespeare, *Richard II*

Week 3—September 8-10

- M: Shakespeare, *Richard II*
- W: Shakespeare, *Richard II*

Week 4—September 15-17

- M: Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 1.Preface-1.2, 1.7, 1.9-1.16, 3.1, 3.3, 3.30, 3.49
- W: Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 1.Preface-1.2, 1.7, 1.9-1.16, 3.1, 3.3, 3.30, 3.49
 - o **Paper 1 Due**

Week 5—September 22-4

- M: Shakespeare, *Henry V*
- W: Shakespeare, *Henry V*

Week 6—September 29 to October 1

- M: Shakespeare, *Henry V*
- W: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Week 7—October 6-8

- M: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
- W: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Week 8—October 13-15

- M: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
- W: Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (selections)
 - o **Paper 2 Due**

FALL BREAK, October 18-26

Week 9—October 27-9

- M: Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*
- W: Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

Week 10—November 3-5

- Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*
- Marlowe, *Jew of Malta*

Week 11—November 10-12

- Marlowe, *Jew of Malta*
- Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

Week 12—November 17-19

- Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*
 - o **Paper 3 Due**
- Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

Week 13—November 24

- M: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chp. 1-5; 12-4; 16-8; 37, 45
- **November 26-9 Thanksgiving Break**

Week 14—December 1-3

- M: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chp. 1-5; 12-4; 16-8; 37, 45
- W: Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

Week 15—December 8-10

- M: Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*
- W: Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*
 - o **Final Paper Due**

Final note: syllabus is subject to revision.