

# Shakespeare Seminar

*William Shakespeare*



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Shakespeare and the City:  
The Negotiation of Urban Spaces  
in Shakespeare's Plays

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# INTRODUCTION

BY

CHRISTINA WALD AND FELIX SPRANG

## **Shakespeare and the City: The Negotiation of Urban Spaces in Shakespeare's Plays**

Shakespeare's plays were conceived and first performed in a political, cultural and economic metropolis, London around 1600, which drew audiences from different social spheres and countries to its theatres. While England was foremost a rural country, London radiated a climate of social change that was negotiated in theatrical presentations of the city, often evoking a non-civilised, barbaric, or utopian other. Our seminar aims at tracing the negotiation of urban spaces on the early modern stage, in contemporary theatrical productions and film adaptations. Which influences did London around 1600 exert on Shakespeare's plays, and in how far can non-English settings of the plays tell us something about early modern notions of these cities and countries? In how far did the presentation of urban life in Shakespeare's plays contribute to the self-fashioning of Londoners (and other citizens) in his time and perhaps even today? Which topographies of the city (and its other – the countryside, the forest, the island) do Shakespeare's plays present and how do they relate to cultural, social and economic concerns? How do the plays enact the demarcation and intersection of public and private spaces? How are spaces gendered? Which allegorical conceptions of the city can we trace?

The contributions to this volume address these questions. Galena Hashhozheva investigates the juxtaposition of wilderness and civilization in *Timon of Athens* and points to fundamental dichotomies in Western philosophy. She illustrates that Shakespeare's play exposes the urban roots of Western philosophy shaped, consequently, by architectural mind-sets and civic mentalities. Yvonne Zips looks at similarities between ideas expressed by the *Situationist* movement and representations of the city in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* und *As You Like It* arguing that Shakespeare viewed the city as a theatre of action. Martin Moraw scrutinizes the function of the discovery space in *Hoffman* and *The Maid's Tragedy*. He argues that both plays make use of discovery to underpin a "theologico-political grammar of sovereign authority" allowing for the sovereign to appear unexpectedly to reinstall order. Sarah Dustagheer compares representations of the city in plays performed at the Globe and Blackfriars and argues that the respective repertoires construe different perspectives on London: it was viewed as a map (at the Blackfriars) or as a panorama (at the Globe).