

Shakespeare Seminar

William Shakespeare



Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft

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Shakespeare and Popular Cultures

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EDITORS

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PUBLICATIONS FREQUENCY

Shakespeare Seminar is a free annual online journal. It documents papers presented at the Shakespeare Seminar panel of the spring conferences of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. It is intended as a publication platform especially for the younger generation of scholars. For the current Call for Papers, please see our website: www.shakespeare-gesellschaft.de

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CALL FOR STATEMENTS – SHAKESPEARE SEMINAR 2026

“Truth is truth to the end of reck’ning”?: Shakespeare and Truth

At the end of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* – a play full of cunning disguises, performed righteousness, and hidden corruption – Isabella speaks her truth. While she was silenced before by Angelo’s “Who will believe thee, Isabel?” (1.4.168), she now appeals to the Duke and the public to listen to her “true complaint” and give her “justice! Justice Justice! Justice!” (5.1.26–27) Panicking, the accused attempts to discredit Isabella: “she will speak most bitterly and strange” (5.1.41), Angelo proclaims, but in a move that anticipates Gisèle Pelicot’s “shame must change sides”, Isabella flips the narrative: She picks up on Angelo’s word “strange”, only to emphasise that the man’s *behaviour*, and not her *speaking*, is what is strange: “Most strange: but yet most truly will I speak.” (5.1.42) After listing Angelo’s wrongdoings, Isabella reiterates how “this is all as true as it is strange”, but then adds: “Nay, it is ten times true, for truth is truth / To th’e end of reck’nin”. (5.1.50–52)

While this scene from *Measure for Measure*, with its almost eerily contemporary relevance, highlights the irreversible nature of certain facts, Shakespeare’s plays also, again and again, dramatise the relativity and contingency of the concept of “truth”. Truth is subject to individual perception (“‘Seems,’ madam? Nay, it is. I know not ‘seems.’” [*Hamlet* 1.2.79]), performance (“I am not what I am” [*Othello* 1.1.71]) and sometimes even denial and connivance (“When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her, though I know she lies” [Sonnet 138.1–2]). In light of the many resonances between Shakespeare’s works and contemporary discourses on truth in our post-truth moment, this seminar seeks to explore the contested field of truth *in* and *through* Shakespeare’s works. Therein, we follow John Drakakis’s assertion that “to understand the poisonous implications of the world of ‘post-truth’ and ‘post-fact’ that now confronts us, we do not need more scientists, or more disseminators of information (a.k.a. spin doctors). What we need is a greater public exposure to the literature and drama that prefigure and comment critically upon the crises that they have historically generated. In short, we need to go back to Shakespeare.” We therefore invite papers that engage with, but are in no way restricted to, the following topics:

- Judicial / racial / philosophical/ social / political / queer / ecological / theatrical / religious truth(s) in Shakespeare
- Truth-telling in Shakespeare
- Shifting concepts of truth: Shakespeare’s time vs. the present day
- Shakespeare and fake news – now and then
- Shakespeare’s relevance for contemporary post-truth discourses
- Political (mis)appropriations of Shakespeare for the sake of ‘truth’
- Biographical (un)truths about Shakespeare
- Shakespeare and conspiracy theories

- Negotiating socio-political truths in the 21st century via Shakespearean performance and adaptation
- *Werktreue* / Negotiating fidelity as ‘truth’ in adaptation studies
- Whose Shakespeare – Whose truth?
- Dismantling canonical truths

Our seminar will address these issues with a panel of six papers during the annual conference of the German Shakespeare Association, *Shakespeare-Tage*, which will take place from **24–26 April 2026 in Bochum**, Germany. As critical input for the discussion, we invite papers of no more than 15 minutes that present concrete case studies, concise examples and strong views on the topic. Please send your proposals (abstracts of 300 words) and short bio notes by **15 December 2025** to the seminar convenors:

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The Seminar provides a forum for established as well as young scholars to discuss texts and contexts. Participants of the seminar will subsequently be invited to submit extended versions of their papers for publication in *Shakespeare Seminar Online (SSO)*. While we cannot offer travel bursaries, the association will arrange for the accommodation of all participants in a hotel close to the main venues. For more information, please contact Marlene Dirschauer and Jonas Kellermann. For more information about the events and publications also see: <https://shakespeare-gesellschaft.de/>.