

Shakespeare-Seminar 2021
Shakespeare's Politics – Politicising Shakespeare

PROGRAMME – Saturday, 13/11/2021, 14:00 to 15:30 (Marie-Seebach-Stiftung, Weimar)

Introduction Kirsten Sandrock and Lukas Lammers

PANEL 1 (two papers followed by discussion)

Sophie Emma Battell (Zürich)

“Economies of the Death Penalty in *The Comedy of Errors*”

Anas Tabraiz (Delhi)

“Angling Cleopatra and ‘Drawn’ Antony”

PANEL 2 (two papers followed by discussion)

Katrin Bauer (München)

“Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, Brexit, and British National Identity”

Mohammadreza Hassanzadeh Javanian (Berlin)

“*Richard III* in Iran: Richard Faces Legitimation Crisis”

PANEL 3 (two papers followed by discussion)

Raghav Verma (Tübingen)

“Shakespeare and the State of Sovereignty”

Fernando Martinez-Periset (Cambridge)

“Shakespeare's Augustinian Machiavellianism: The Politics of *Henry V* and *Macbeth*”

ABSTRACTS (in order of programme)

PANEL 1

Sophie Emma Battell: “Economies of the Death Penalty in *The Comedy of Errors*”

Discussing how there is an ‘economic model of emotions’ at work in political discourse, Sara Ahmed notes that ‘hate does not reside in a given subject or object. Hate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement’.¹ In *The Philosophy of Money*, meanwhile, Georg Simmel argues that money has always been the ‘domain of the stranger’.² Taking these two quotations as my starting point, in this paper I examine the monetisation of stranger relations in *The Comedy of Errors*. Focusing on the opening scene, I look at how financial considerations dictate the welcome of Egeon: a

¹ Ahmed, ‘Affective Economies’, p. 119.

² Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p. 227.

Syracusan refugee newly arrived in Ephesus. First, I explore the intersections of credibility and credit. Without friends or relatives nearby to vouch for them, the stranger's personal history—the story that they tell about themselves—must speak for them and inspire trust and credibility with the authorities. Equally important, though, is the outsider's *creditworthiness*, both in terms of the money that they carry on them, and their financial solvency. The hardening of social attitudes towards outsiders and immigrants is likewise often accompanied by an economic vocabulary and apprehensions about impoverishment, unemployment, and resource scarcity. My second example looks at the machinery of the death penalty, suggesting some of the ways that state-sanctioned execution operates similarly to a credit-based economy. Throughout the paper, I will adopt a political approach to Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, showing how economic calculations undermine the principles of hospitality and international asylum.

Anas Tabraiz: "Angling Cleopatra and 'Drawn' Antony"

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is one of his late plays and he seems to be making a statement here that is different from many of his earlier plays. Elizabethan plays have usually depicted a society with predictable power centers that send out waves of desire and, in concentric circles pull the margin towards themselves. Although there have been discussions about the Rome- Egypt binary, not many people have talked about Shakespeare depicting a movement of protagonist away from the power center rather than towards it. In my paper, I would like to talk about how most of the action of the play takes place in Egypt, where Cleopatra seems to make constant attempts and succeed in pulling Antony away from the power centre. Whereas the general drift of most of the contemporary plots is that of the 'feminine' margins being incorporated into a very 'masculine' center, *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to be showing a contrary movement. It is a play in which a heretofore 'iconically' masculine Antony is 'transformed' by the erotic skill of Cleopatra. In my paper I propose to study and discover this rather intriguing dynamics where the 'feminine' margins use an erotic attraction to wring a phallic 'morsel' from the 'symbolic' centre to perform masculinity, to salvage some semblance of power and voice for itself. Antony, although a Roman icon of masculinity, in the play, becomes a mere mojo in the hands of Cleopatra, a 'strap-on' phallus, like Caesar ad Pompey, to retain her power. The discussion would, inevitably, include Shakespeare's development of Cleopatra as a Circe/Medusa-like monstrous figure who uses her female charms to strip Antony of his male power.

PANEL 2

Katrin Bauer: "Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, Brexit, and British National Identity"

This paper aims to explore the central intercultural encounters between Romans and Britons in Shakespeare's late romance *Cymbeline*. First written and performed at the end of the first decade of James I's reign as king of both England and Scotland, *Cymbeline* has experienced a renewed interest in the wake of the Brexit referendum in 2016 – a year which saw three major productions of this otherwise seldomly performed play by three major theatres in London alone. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the play raises questions that are equally topical today as they had been in Jacobean England: questions about national identity and the role the nation should play in an increasingly globalised world. The play does so, I argue, by offering an interesting twist on the relationship between the Self and the Other in traditional intercultural encounters. By moving the locus of the encounters from the centre of power to its periphery into the realm of the Other and setting it in the Roman colony of Britain during a conflict between the colonisers and the colonised, the play evokes a rich tableau of associations and

connections that would have influenced how an early modern audience would have perceived these intercultural encounters. This reflects, so the main argument of this paper, the peculiar predicament of Shakespeare's early modern audiences, who on the one hand found themselves figured as the Other in newly rediscovered texts such as Caesar's *Bello Gallico* and Tacitus' *Agricola* and whose political discourse of empire on the other hand was calling the emerging nation to emulate the Roman Empire. It also provides an eerily prophetic mirror for the debates surrounding the Brexit referendum and its aftermath.

Mohammadreza Hassanzadeh Javanian: "Richard III in Iran: Richard Faces Legitimation Crisis"

The popularity of William Shakespeare's plays among Iranian theatre directors has surged in the last decade. Many of these directors find in the plays of Shakespeare a unique opportunity to address mechanisms of social structures and political power in contemporary Iran. Shakespeare's plays, in other words, continue to offer Iranian directors a fruitful ground for the exploration of multiple socio-political topics. *Richrad* (2018), adapted and directed by Hamirdreza Naeimi, is a recent example of such productions in Iran. Based on Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the play dramatizes Richard's unquenchable thirst for domination of others in a recognizable Iranian context. The 125-minute adaptation, performed for 60 consecutive nights at Talar-e Vahdat [Vahdat Hall] in Tehran, received positive reviews in the Iranian press. Naeimi's directing and Hamed Komeili's performance as Richard, in particular, were highly acclaimed by the spectators and theatre critics alike. Although Naeimi retained much of Shakespeare's original plot, his references to the contemporary political climate in Iran were hard to ignore. The present study seeks to investigate the political resonances of the play within a theoretical framework informed by the idea of legitimation crisis developed in the work of Jürgen Habermas. The research aims to demonstrate how politicians in Naeimi's version of Shakespeare's play continuously manipulate power in order to gain legitimacy for the established political system and suppress public frustration over the unequal distribution of privileges within the society. The study explores many forms that the legitimation crisis takes in Naeimi's play.

PANEL 3

Raghav Verma: "Shakespeare and the State of Sovereignty"

In the sixteenth century, the French jurist and philosopher Jean Bodin laid out the concept of Sovereignty as a supreme power over citizens and subjects, unrestrained by law and much in the favour of absolute monarchies and the divine right of the king. Two decades later, at the turn of the century in 1599, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was performed at the Globe Theatre. However, the Sovereignty that Jean Bodin conceived in his works, derived largely from the ancient Roman law and the Roman Sovereign that Shakespeare portrayed had a world of difference. This paper aims to contest and investigate how the theory of Sovereignty given by Jean Bodin, which served as the basis of much of the modern politics including the theory of nation-states, did not abode well in Shakespeare with the portrayal of *Julius Caesar*. Thus, I explore Shakespeare's treatment of the political tragedy in the form of unceasing dislocation of the state of Sovereignty.

Fernando Martinez-Periset: "Shakespeare's Augustinian Machiavellianism: The Politics of *Henry V* and *Macbeth*"

Machiavelli has acquired a reputation for infamy, impiety and deceit. The translation of Gentillet's treatise *Contre-Machiavel*, which circulated in Elizabethan England, popularised

this view, and gave rise to the *topos* of the 'stage Machiavel'. However, many of Machiavelli's arguments have frequently been distorted and, throughout *The Prince*, he distances himself from the figure of the Machiavel. Although much ink has been spilled in trying to determine Shakespeare's familiarity with Machiavellianism, the results have been mostly inconclusive. Nevertheless, this should not deter critics from examining both authors together. In fact, it may open up new perspectives that are not necessarily available when using source-study tactics. If discourses can circulate fluidly in societies, different authors may share a cluster of preoccupations that can bring them in conversation with each other.

This interdisciplinary paper will study Shakespeare as a political writer who shares synchronic affinities with Machiavelli. Research in this direction, such as John Roe's *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, Hugh Grady's *Shakespeare, Machiavelli and Montaigne*, or the essay collection *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, has not usually adopted a Christian standpoint. Initially, the links can be hard to trace, especially given Machiavelli's criticism of Christianity in the *Discourses on Livy*. Following the 'turn to religion in Early Modern studies' (Jackson and Marotti, 2004), this paper will argue that there are branches of Christian (particularly Augustinian) thought that provide a pertinent interpretative angle when it comes to solving this difficulty, and which inform some aspects of Shakespeare's plays. The paper will compare and contrast *Henry V* and *Macbeth*. Drawing on literature, Augustinian theology, and political philosophy, the central thesis of this paper is that Shakespeare and Machiavelli share an interest in the problem of civil war and wonder how it is possible to create political stability in a world that tends to degenerate into social chaos.