

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM

Three Tragedies by William Shakespeare:
Romeo and Juliet; Othello;
and *Hamlet*

Spring 2025

Wednesdays 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Dorothy Rubel Room, The Poetry Center
and On-line

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SEMINAR DESCRIPTION:

Welcome to *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, an HSP seminar to be offered Spring term 2026. We shall study *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*. As tragedies, these plays trace the decline and fall of their heroes. Our approach will be twofold. We shall examine the voices of the tragic heroes and analyze their characters. This approach will lead to the heroes' psychologies and some of the enduring questions everyone must face: What is the world? How can one meet the problems of life? Is there an order to history, and if so can it be controlled? What is death? Ultimately our study of the plays will deepen our sense of the mystery of human life, what Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* describes as 'All that can be won and lost.'

REQUIRED READING AND TEXTS:

The plays to be studied may be read in any well-annotated text. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd ed. (Houghton Mifflin, 1997), is the standard complete works of Shakespeare and the one that I use. But any annotated edition—or individual editions of single plays—will do. The Signet Classics, The Pelican Shakespeare, and the Penguin Classics are reliable, inexpensive, and readily available on Amazon, e-Bay, and other on-line outlets. What's important is to have a text with explanatory notes at the bottom or on the side of the pages.

COURSE PROCEDURE:

We shall read the plays together—that is, go through principal portions of the texts and discuss their significance. Since we shall focus on the texts and examine specific passages, lines, and even words, seminarians should have their texts at hand during class; otherwise, discussion will be difficult to follow. We shall supplement textual analysis with video clips of various productions of the plays under consideration. We shall proceed on the assumption that everyone has read (or reread) the plays before class. In most cases, reading each play should require three to four hours.

Do not hesitate to raise questions about particular or technical matters during discussion—for example, 'What is meant by *anaphora*' or 'What exactly was 'The King's Men'?' More general questions are also welcome—for example, 'Isn't Hamlet just a neurotic who can't make up his mind' or 'Isn't Cleopatra simply a selfish, spoiled, rich girl'. I especially encourage having such questions written out before (or after) class.

COURSE CALENDAR:

Meeting 1: January 28: Shakespeare's verse and prose; *Romeo and Juliet* Act 1

Meeting 2: February 4: *Romeo and Juliet* Acts 2-3

Meeting 3: February 11: *Romeo and Juliet* Acts 4-5

Meeting 4: February 18: *Othello* Acts 1-2

Meeting 5: February 25: *Othello* Acts 3-4

Meeting 6: March 4: *Othello* Act 5

March 9 to March 13: Spring Break

Meeting 7: March 18: *Hamlet* Act 1-2

Meeting 8: March 25: *Hamlet* Acts 3

Meeting 9: April 1: *Hamlet* Acts 4

Meeting 10: April 8 : *Hamlet* Act 5