

2022

**Seminar: Di. 19.04.-Fr. 22.04.2020, 16.00-21.00 Uhr**

**Oscar Wilde and the Fin de Siècle: Criticism and the Paradoxical Method**

Focussing on Oscar Wilde's fiction and critical prose including *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, the seminar will discuss his contributions to the theory and practice of criticism. Wilde conceived of the critic as an artist, a cosmopolitan, and, in ways that invite a comparison with Nietzsche, as a 'good European'. Far from being a transitional figure, he also loomed large in the literature of the more recent fin de siècle, which inspired imitations as diverse as Peter Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and Will Self's *Dorian*. The seminar will try to answer the question how far his 'paradoxical method' has stood the test of time.

Students ought to have read *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the dialogues *The Critic as Artist* or *The Decay of Lying* as well as the essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* preferably by the first meeting: *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Collins 1948ff. or any other edition).

They are also encouraged to read the following text: Peter Ackroyd, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (Penguin 1993).

2020/21

**Seminar: 23.10.2020-29.01.2021, 16.00-18.00 Uhr (online)**

**Shakespeare as a 'Good European' – *Henry V* and *The Merchant of Venice***

Shakespeare, we should be permitted to say, was a 'good European'. Our seminar will explore the meaning of this epithet while reading *Henry V* and *The Merchant of Venice*. In doing so, we will study Renaissance drama and, at the same time, engage in 'presentist criticism', as for instance Stephen Greenblatt has done in his recent *Tyrant, Shakespeare on Power*. However, we have learnt from the Romantic poet John Keats that Shakespeare was endowed with the ability to be "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". In modern critical parlance, he showed "a constitutional antipathy towards the conclusive and the disambiguated" (Quentin Skinner). We should try to find out as much as we can about the nature and the implications of this insight into Shakespeare's "negative capability" (Keats) and then answer the question why it affords a justification for calling him a 'good European' – if only metonymically.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V* (Arden/Oxford/Cambridge editions).

Recommended further reading: Stephen Greenblatt, *Tyrant, Shakespeare on Power*. Vintage: London, 2018. – Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*. Oxford: OUP, 2014. – Michael Szczekalla, "Shakespeare als guter Europäer," *Anglistik* 16,2 (2005) 25-34.

2018

**Seminar: 15.10.-18.10.2018, 16.00-21.00 Uhr**

**Shakespeare and the Idea of Kingship – *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III***

If one assumed that modern audiences would not be tempted by a discussion of kingship, Mike Bartlett's new play, first performed at the Almeida Theatre in 2014, could easily prove one wrong. Written in blank verse, its "dense Shakespearean references" (Michael Billington), including the structural device of a comic subplot, make it look like an 'original imitation'. Bartlett wanted to get as close to the Renaissance dramatist as possible.

Hence the seminar will begin with Renaissance drama and first look at what Shakespeare reveals to us about the notion of "the king's two bodies" (Ernst Kantorowicz), divine right, the magic of ceremony, lese-majesty, and usurpation, then turn to Bartlett and try to answer the question whether the Shakespearean references endow his exercise in 'virtual history' with depth and meaningfulness. – Participants ought to have read the four plays by the beginning of the first meeting.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *Henry V* (Arden/Oxford/Cambridge editions) and Mike Bartlett, *King Charles III* (Nick Hern Books).

Recommended further reading: Ian Ward, "Shakespeare and the Performance of Kingship in Bartlett's *Charles III*," *Anglistik* 28,2 (2017): 63-76.

**2017**

**Seminar: Di, 18.4.-21.4.2017, 16.00 - 21.00 Uhr**

**Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure***

*The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*, arguably Shakespeare's most intriguing problem plays, have attracted an astonishing amount of critical attention. In the seminar, we will ask what critics mean when they speak of the 'the endlessly perspectivizing Shakespeare' (Harold Bloom), and make use of the answers to enrich our own readings of these plays. In doing so, we will be guided by the regulative idea that Renaissance scepticism may be au courant with modernity, a claim that is rendered highly plausible by Howard Jacobson's recent novelistic reimagining of Shylock.

All participants ought to have read the two plays and ideally also Jacobson's novel by the first meeting.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure* (Arden/Oxford/ Cambridge); Howard Jacobson, *Shylock Is My Name* (Hogarth).

Recommended further reading: Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 104ff.; A.D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2007), 255ff.; Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare, The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 171ff., 358ff.

**2016**

**Seminar: Roman Shakespeare II**

(Seminar: Lit.)

402082

2 SWS ab 4. Sem. 11.7.4.-14.7. 16-21 R 21

Michael Szczekalla

The death throes of the late republic and the rise of the empire from the ashes of a civil war have captivated the imagination of writers and readers through the centuries. By focussing on two Renaissance dramas as well as two twentieth-century epistolary novels, the seminar tries to achieve a balance between the contemporary and the perennial. Both novelists reveal a sure grasp of the historical situation, but so does Shakespeare, who, arguably, possessed a much greater affinity to the rhetorical culture that provided the matrix for almost everything Caesar said and did. Wilder and Williams are interested in the 'cosmic' dimension of human experience, but so again is Shakespeare, and it may be asked whether their existentialism has not aged worse than the scepticism of the Renaissance dramatist. Students ought to have read the two plays and at least one of the novels by the beginning of the first meeting.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* (Arden/Oxford/ Cambridge editions), Thornton Wilder, *The Ides of March* (Perennial), John Williams, *Augustus* (Vintage).

**2015**

**The Philosophy of Tragedy – Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *King Lear***

(Seminar: Lit.)

4002070

2 SWS ab 4. Sem. 7.4.-10.4. 16-21 R 24

Michael Szczekalla

Mainly, but not exclusively, on the basis close readings of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, the seminar will try to assess the contributions of philosophers to our understanding of tragedy. Though the choice of topics will also depend on the interests of participants, we will certainly discuss the Aristotelian concepts of catharsis and *hamartia*, Hegel's invidious comparison between ancient and modern tragedy, the latter's understanding of tragic conflict and the question whether it is irresolvable or not, freedom and necessity, as well as the contentious claim that tragedy, as a genre, is dead.

Students should have read the two dramas by the beginning of the first meeting. Some familiarity with Greek plays may also be helpful.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* (Arden/Oxford/Cambridge editions).

Recommended further reading: Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays* (Penguin, 1982); Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy, From Plato to Žižek* (Cambridge UP, 2013).

## 2014

### **The Radical Enlightenment in Contemporary Fiction: Malcolm Bradbury, *To the Hermitage* and Jennie Erdal, *The Missing Shade of Blue***

(Seminar: Lit.)

4002048

2 SWS ab 3. Sem. 14.4.-17.4. 16-21 R 24

Michael Szczekalla

British writers of historical fiction have frequently been drawn to the eighteenth century. In recent years, there have been at least two remarkable attempts at engaging with the legacy of the Enlightenment by turning its leading representatives into figures of contemporary relevance. Though the two novels could hardly be more different in general outlook, narrative scope, or tone, both Malcolm Bradbury's *To the Hermitage* and Jennie Erdal's *The Missing Shade of Blue* attest to the appeal eighteenth-century thinkers may still command. Whereas Bradbury tried to revive the reputation of Denis Diderot by imagining the aging *philosophe's* encounter with Catherine II of Russia, Erdal explores the interior landscape of the human psyche with the moral philosophy of David Hume as a source of inspiration.

Set texts: Malcolm Bradbury, *To the Hermitage* (2000), Jennie Erdal, *The Missing Shade of Blue* (2012).

Recommended further reading: Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*, translated by L. Tancock (1966); David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller (1985); Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind, Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origin of Modern Democracy* (2010).

## 2013

### ***King Lear, Leviathan, The Road* – From the State of Nature to Dystopia**

(Seminar: Lit.)

4002051

2 SWS ab 3. Sem. 2.-5.4. 16-21 R 24

Michael Szczekalla

From the early modern period onwards, there have been various ways of envisaging the 'state of nature'. (Dramatic) poets, essayists, novelists, and political philosophers have all made their contributions to this tradition of philosophical fiction. There have been Rousseauistic optimists and those who tend to agree with Hobbes that life in the state of nature is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. The seminar will focus on three texts which seem to corroborate the latter view. In doing so, it will try to answer the question to what extent poetic vision and philosophical analysis jointly contribute to our understanding of the human condition by imagining society reduced to a state of 'lawlessness'.

Participants ought to have read the three set texts by the first meeting.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (Arden/Oxford/Cambridge), Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Penguin), 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Parts, Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Picador).

maximum participants: 25