

2018

Seminar: 15.10.-18.10.2018, 16.00-21.00 Uhr

Szczekalla: 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 sub-plot, 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

Szczekalla: 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

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), 1st and 2nd Parts, Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Picador).

maximum participants: 25

2012

Shakespearean Politics (Seminar)

2 SWS ab 3. Sem. Di 10.04.- Fr 13.04., 16-21 R 21

4002051

Michael Szczekalla

Was Shakespeare a political dramatist? What does it mean when critics speak of “the politics” of *Julius Caesar* or any other play? How can such critical parlance be made compatible with John Keats’s famous insight into Shakespeare’s “negative capability”, the fact that dramatist disappears so completely behind his characters that he scarcely seems to have “an intellectual existence of his own”? The seminar will address these questions by focussing, among other things, on the issues of republicanism (*Julius Caesar*), the rise of the modern nation state (*Henry IV*), and colonialism (*The Tempest*). Participants ought to have read the three plays by the first meeting.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*; *Henry IV*, Part I; *The Tempest* (Arden/Oxford/Cambridge).

Recommended further reading: David Armitage et al. (ed.), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*. Cambridge: UP, 2009.

2011

Shakespeare and Modernity: The Criticism of G. Wilson Knight (Seminar)

2 SWS ab 5. Sem. 18.-21.04., 16-21 R 21

4002049

Michael Szczekalla

Knight wielded enormous influence as a Shakespeare critic until well into the 1970s. The seminar will address the question whether he owed his astonishing success, at least partially, to his ambivalent attitude towards modernity. The ‘imaginative criticism’ he practised from the 1920s onwards shows a close affinity to the literary movement of Modernism, which has rightly been described as “a by-product of incomplete modernization” (Frederic Jameson). Thus Knight taught readers and fellow critics to dispense with the ‘ethical criticism’ of the Victorians with its undue focus on characters, and read Shakespeare’s dramas as ‘extended metaphors’. In particular, he wanted his readers to focus on the tension between ‘cynicism’ and ‘affirmation’ he discovered in the problem plays, the tragedies – where it is suspended – and also in the late plays, which he chose to call ‘myths’, where, according to him, it is finally overcome.

PRIMARY TEXTS: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* (Arden).

A Selection of essays from *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) *The Imperial Theme* (1931) *The Crown of Life* (1947) will be made available to all participants.

2010

‘Under Western Eyes’: Eastern Europe and Russia in British Fiction (Seminar)

2 SWS ab 3. Sem. Blockseminar 6.-9.4.10, 16-21, R 21

4002055

The implosion of the Soviet Union and its aftermath has attracted a number of British writers of fiction. The approaching centenary of Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes* (1911) affords the occasion to show how much at least some of these contemporary authors are still indebted to the Polish émigré. “My eyes, in the Conradian sense, have stopped being Western and started being Eastern,” the unamiably octogenarian narrator of Martin Amis’s *House of Meetings* (2006) tells his readers. Like Julian Barnes’s *The Porcupine* (1991), Tibor Fischer’s

Under The Frog (1992), Carl Tighe's *Burning Worm* (2001), Nicholas Shakespeare's *Snowleg* (2004), or even Ian McEwan's somewhat earlier *The Innocent* (1990), it allows us to study what happens when cultural memory crosses national boundaries. These novels also exhibit particularly intriguing forms of genre crossing. Their generic affiliations range from tragedy (Amis and Barnes) via comedy (Fischer) and romance (Shakespeare) to spy fiction (McEwan) and fictional memoir (Amis, Tighe). The seminar will try to assess their contribution to the transformation of cultural memory by focussing on the dialectics of blindness and insight that results from a foreign perspective.

Texts: Students should have read *Under Western Eyes* (Penguin), *House of Meetings* (Vintage), and, if possible, also one of the other novels by the beginning of the first meeting.

2009

Shakespeare's First Henriad (Seminar)

4002059

2 SWS ab 3. Sem. 14.–17.04., 16-21 R 21

Michael Szczekalla

Whereas *Richard III* has always been popular on stage as well as on film, and even in the classroom, the three *Henry VI* plays have been treated with comparative neglect. Focussing on *I Henry VI*, the seminar intends to show that, for students of literature, there is very little justification for such a negative preference. Probably written as a kind of 'prequel' to parts 2 and 3, this play grants us a view of Joan of Arc as a historical figure distorted by patriotic bias, with the equally bogus Sir John Talbot as her chief antagonist. Though Shakespeare's dramatised history of the final stages of the Hundred Years War and the internecine dynastic struggles that followed it appears highly tendentious, *1-3 Henry VI* can also be read as 'analytic plays', driven by a sophisticated model of historical causation, which allows us to study, among other things, the rise of modern statecraft, i.e. of a moderate form of Machiavellism, which is shown to supplant the Christian virtues exhibited by a weak king dreaming of a pastoral utopia.

Texts: Students are encouraged to read all three parts of *Henry VI* plus *Richard III*. Failing that, *I Henry VI* and *Richard III* should be studied with some care. Annotated editions (preferably Arden 3rd Series) are indispensable.

2008

Shakespeare's Problem Plays (Seminar)

4002071

2 SWS ab 5. Sem. 30.06.–03.07.08, 16-21 R 22

Michael Szczekalla

Troilus and Cressida, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure*, but sometimes also *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Winter's Tale* are designated as 'problem plays': a conventional epithet that was coined in the late 19th century, critics by no means agree on its usefulness. The seminar will deal with three of these plays, which represent an intermediate genre between comedy and tragedy.

Whereas *The Merchant of Venice* may be dubbed an 'equivocal comedy', *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure* strike even modern audiences as "nihilistic and bitter" (Harold Bloom). In the former, Shakespeare appears to take a dim view of both love and war, the latter can be read as a critique of autocratic rule. However, the 'problematic nature' of these plays can be explored in a variety of ways, some of them appealing even to young

readers or theatre-goers. Hence the seminar will also discuss their suitability for the EFL classroom.

Set texts:

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice, Troilus and Cressida, Measure for Measure*, (Arden/Cambridge/Oxford/Penguin editions).

Recommended further reading:

Tillyard, E.M.W. *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. London, 1950

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare, The Invention of the Human*. London, 1999

2007/2008

Seminar

Szczekalla – The First World War in English Literature

From the authentic experiences of the first generation of war poets to their skilful remediation in contemporary works, English literature is replete with memories of the First World War.

This seminar will study the different modes of recreating the past in at least three different genres. In doing so, it will examine the claim made by many critics that literature has outmanoeuvred historiography both in the manner in which it recaptures war-time experiences and records the cataclysmic changes effected by the 'Great War'. As the War shattered a commitment to civilised values and hence entailed a loss of 'innocence' (Philip Larkin), it gave birth to irony as 'a form of cognition' (Paul Fussell). Special attention will be given to the poetry of Sassoon, Owen, and Rosenberg, to Ford Madox Ford's modernist study of the demise of Edwardian England, to Pat Barker's much more recent fictionalisation of the events at the Craiglockhart army hospital in 1917, but also to a Commonwealth perspective on the First World War.

Students ought to have read Siegfried Sassoon's war poems, at least one work of fiction, Robert Graves' autobiographical 'comedy of evil', and, if possible, Paul Fussell's seminal study by the beginning of the first meeting.

Poetry: Siegfried Sassoon, *The War Poems* (Faber); Wilfried Owen, *Poems*, edited by Jon Stallworthy (Chatto and Windus), *The Selected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg* (Cecil Woolf).
Fiction: Ford Madox Ford, *Some Do Not...* in: *Parade's End* (Penguin); Jennifer Johnston, *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (Penguin), Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (Vintage), Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (Penguin).
Autobiography: Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (Penguin).
Criticism: Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (OUP).

2007

Seminar

Szczekalla – Iris Murdoch

In the 1970s Iris Murdoch wrote three Shakespeare novels, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), *The Black Prince* (1973), and *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), which draw their parallels

from *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest* respectively. The aim of the seminar is two-fold: to study Murdoch's fiction by focussing on two meticulously planned and highly structured novels of ideas, and to appreciate the significance of Shakespeare's art in the works of a major 20th-century novelist. In this way, we will cover a wide range of topics from the rhetoric of consciousness, love, and the philosophy of art, especially the need for a unified aesthetic whole and the tension between form and contingency, to plot construction and unreliable narration.

Students ought to have read the following novels by the beginning of the first meeting: *The Black Prince* (Vintage), *The Sea, The Sea* (Penguin). They should also be familiar with the plays which inspired the two novels: *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* (Arden, Oxford, Cambridge, Penguin).

Recommended further reading: *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (Vintage), *Othello*.

2006/2007

Seminar

Szczekalla – The Enlightenment in English Literature

This seminar will join current debates on the Enlightenment. Its four set texts belong to three different genres covering the relatively short period from the 1730s to the 1750s. With the inclusion of Hume's *Dialogues* – a must for all students seriously interested in eighteenth-century literature – due emphasis will be given to the Caledonian contribution to the (English) Enlightenment. All four writers may be said to inhabit the same 'literary world'. If we succeed in pointing out their common concerns, we shall see what is wrong with the fashionable dismissal of the Enlightenment as 'a conspiracy of dead white men in periwigs to provide the intellectual foundation for Western imperialism'.

Students ought to have read the following texts by the beginning of the first meeting: Alexander Pope, "Essay on Man" (Dover Thrift), Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (The World's Classics), Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas* (Penguin), David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (Penguin).

Recommended further reading: Roy Porter, *Enlightenment, Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Allen Lane, 2000).

2006

Seminar

Szczekalla – Fins de Siècle

Focussing on Oscar Wilde's fiction and critical prose, 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 looms large in the literature of the recent fin de siècle, which inspired imitations as diverse as Peter Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* and Will Self's *Dorian*. Vacillating between homage and parody, such works lend themselves

to a reappraisal of Wilde's critique of aestheticism and thereby help us to answer the question how well it has stood the test of time.

Students ought to have read *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the critical dialogues, and *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* by the beginning of the first meeting: *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Collins 2003).

They are also encouraged to read at least one of the following texts: Peter Ackroyd, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (Penguin 1993), Will Self, *Dorian* (Penguin 2003).

2005/2006

Seminar

Szczekalla – New Historicism

Since the late 1980s New Historicism has become an important research paradigm in literary and cultural studies. The term was coined by Stephen Greenblatt, whose recent *Hamlet in Purgatory* offers itself as a good introduction to this critical movement. By taking seriously the Protestant denunciation of purgatory as a "poet's fable" (Tyndale), the monograph attempts to shed new light on *Hamlet*.

It goes without saying that students ought to have read both set texts by the first meeting if they wish to discuss Greenblatt's 'poetics of culture', in particular, its emphasis on contingency and the 'constructedness' of all interpretations, its denial of the 'ontological difference' between text and context, and its polemics against 'master narratives'.

Copies of a selection of further writings by Greenblatt and other critics will be found in the seminar file.

Set texts: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Arden/Cambridge/Oxford editions). Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 2001).

2005

Seminar

Szczekalla – New Criticism

New criticism was a movement that shaped both academic criticism and class-room practice on an unprecedented scale. It developed in the forties in the U.S.A. though it had influential precursors in Britain. With its emphasis on the "self-contained" literary work it promoted critical concepts and tools that have revealed themselves to be of lasting importance. Today's students tend to be familiar with it from the polemics directed against it in more recent critical writings that favour different approaches to literature. This alone may be a sufficient reason for returning to one of the classics we owe to the new critics: *The Well Wrought Urn*. The seminar will discuss Brooks' readings of major English poets from the 17th to the 20th century. Participants are invited to find out whether seemingly dogmatic assertions like "the truth which a poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox" may still be of help when it comes to thinking about and revising one's own habits of reading and analysing poetry.

You should try to get hold of a copy of *The Well Wrought Urn*. Though first published in 1942, it is still available as an affordable paperback. Failing that, you should at least be

familiar with the poems discussed by Brooks. Master copies of the poems (!) may be found in the seminar file, which also contains a selection of essays for further reading.

Set text: Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn, Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace, 1975).

2004/ 2005

Seminar

Szczekalla – Roman Shakespeare – *Titus Andronicus, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra*

The seminar will focus on three of Shakespeare's five Roman plays: *Titus Andronicus*, a Senecan revenge tragedy once held in low esteem, but of late revived to great success and also turned into a film, *Julius Caesar*, a historical play about a famous regime change brought about with the help of a pious Roman senator who thereby compromises his virtue, *Antony and Cleopatra*, the story of a tragic love affair built on the moral and political antithesis of Rome and Egypt. For the Elizabethans the actual and mythical city of Rome possessed contemporary relevance. Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* was a source of inspiration to them. Thus these plays engage in debates about such issues as politically motivated violence, the legitimacy of tyrannicide, rhetoric as the art of persuasion, and even, though anachronistically, religious martyrdom.

Participants ought to have read the three plays by the first meeting.

Set texts: *Titus Andronicus, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra* (Arden, Oxford, or Cambridge).

Recommended secondary reading: Robert S. Miola, "Shakespeare's Ancient Rome: Difference and Identity," Michael Hattaway (ed.), *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) 193-213.

2004

Seminar

Szczekalla – Shakespearean Politics – *Henry IV* Parts I and II, *Henry V*

There is little consensus of opinion on the 'politics' of Shakespeare's Henriad. Has monarchy been turned into a lie by the deposition of Richard II? Does the victory of Agincourt sanction Bolingbroke's usurpation as the sacramental language of Richard II has given way to the pragmatic rhetoric of both Henry IV and Henry V? Then Falstaff must be a "lord of misrule". Yet Harold Bloom has recently dubbed him the "philosopher of Eastcheap". Do at least the *Henry IV* plays endorse Sir John's "cognitive contempt" (Bloom) for the heroic enterprise of war? From Hazlitt to Greenblatt, important critics have also challenged patriotic readings of *Henry V*. This seminar will have to face the astonishing complexity of the Henriad. It is no wonder that, from Lawrence Olivier's famous 1944 film version of *Henry V* to Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of the play at the Olivier Theatre, Shakespeare's study in dubious legitimacy has not ceased to fascinate or baffle modern audiences.

Participants ought to have read the plays by the first meeting.

Set texts: *Henry IV*, Pt. I, *Henry IV*, Pt. II, *Henry V* (Arden/Oxford/Cambridge).

Recommended reading: Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare, The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999): 249-324.

2003/2004

Seminar

Szczekalla – James Joyce, *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

We want to delve into the world of Joyce's earlier fiction and perhaps also throw a glance at *Ulysses*. Considerable time, however, will be spent on the examination of spiritual poverty and paralysis performed in *Dubliners* as well as on *A Portrait*'s vacillation between analysis and visionary intensity as it tries to unfold the predicament of the modern artist. In this context the representation of Dublin and of Irish culture appears to be of crucial importance. Joyce scholarship can be intimidating. Hence some guidance will be offered on how it can be put to use for the enhancement of our insight and pleasure in reading Joyce.

Participants ought to have read both texts by the beginning of the first meeting.

Set texts: *Dubliners*, introduction and notes by T. Brown (Penguin), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, edited with an introduction and notes by S. Deane (Penguin). Alternatively: *The Portable James Joyce* (Viking/Penguin) – the best choice though it may be difficult to obtain a copy!

Recommended reading: D. Attridge (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce* (CUP 2002).