

Prospectus

Sex with Shakespeare

Dr. Abdulhamit Arvas
arvas@upenn.edu

This advanced seminar will explore the history of sexuality in the West with Shakespeare from a historical and transnational perspective. Our investigation of Shakespeare, sex, and sexuality will be guided by various contextual foci from the early modern period: revival of classical tropes, translations, global encounters, discoveries and colonial expansions, material history, religious conversions, cartographic knowledge, emergent nationalism, race, and empire. These contexts will not just provide a historical background but also highlight the constitutive interlink between representations of sexuality and socio-cultural dynamics. Within this historical context, weekly discussions will focus on such topics as sodomy, friendship, lesbianism, crossdressing, transgender, sexualization of the other, prostitution, masochism, bestiality, consent, and pornography. We will also survey major critical debates in the field of early modern sexuality studies, and the current state of (and future directions in) the history of sexuality and queer studies in general. The study of the past adds significantly to our understandings of sexualities and sexual discourses in the present. The seminar will therefore pay attention to continuities, ruptures, dissonances, crossings, and interrelations between discourses and practices in the past and the present.

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- demonstrate understanding of the representations of sexuality in Shakespeare and other early modern cultural productions;
- comprehend Shakespeare's legacy in relation to the larger historical and transcultural context in which he produced his plays;
- examine how sex, sexuality, and artistic productions historically relate to global dynamics, gender, race, religion, politics, subjectivity, and desire;
- be familiar with histories and theories of sexuality in the past and present;
- understand the interlink between sexuality and performance, and theatricality and sexual acts, identities, and desires;
- gain scholarly tools to explore complex theoretical and historical concepts by formulating responses to literary and critical readings.

Course Materials

Stephen Greenblatt et.al. eds. *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd Edition
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol 1. An Introduction*
All other readings will be posted on Canvas

Requirements, Assignments, And Policies

A premium will be placed on thoughtful preparation and active participation. Assignments will include weekly presentations, short writing tasks, and a final research paper.