

**HERTOG POLITICAL STUDIES PROGRAM
2014 SUMMER FELLOWSHIP
WEEK 6—SHAKESPEARE’S ROME
Washington, DC**

Section 1 – Paul Cantor, professor, University of Virginia

We will study Shakespeare as a serious political thinker who displays familiarity with Plato and Aristotle, and detailed knowledge of Machiavelli’s *Discourses*. Shakespeare’s Roman plays are a sustained effort to understand what he and his contemporaries regarded as the most successful political community in antiquity and perhaps in all of human history. The Renaissance was an attempt to revive classical antiquity; Shakespeare’s Roman plays are one of the supreme achievements of the Renaissance in the way that they bring alive the ancient city on the stage.

We will study the plays, not in the order in which they were written, but in historical order. *Coriolanus* portrays the early days of the Roman Republic, indeed the founding of the Republic, if one recognizes the tribunate as the distinctively republican institution in Rome. *Julius Caesar* portrays the last days of the Roman Republic, specifically the moment when Caesar tries to create a form of one-man rule in the city, while the conspirators try to restore the republican order. The issue of Republic vs. Empire stands at the heart of *Julius Caesar*. *Antony and Cleopatra* portrays the early days of the Roman Empire, the emergence of Octavius as the sole ruler of Rome (he went on to become Augustus Caesar, the first official Roman Emperor).

The way Shakespeare arranged his three Roman plays suggests that he was centrally concerned with the contrast between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. The Roman plays thus offer an opportunity to study the phenomenon Plato and Aristotle referred to as the regime (*politeia*)—the way a particular form of government shapes a particular way of life. From classical antiquity down to the eighteenth century and such thinkers as Montesquieu and the American Founding Fathers, Rome has been one of the perennial themes of political theory. Shakespeare’s Roman plays are his contribution to the longstanding debate about Rome, and also occupy a very important place in his comprehensive understanding of the human condition. The plays are evidence of the crucial importance of politics in Shakespeare’s view of human nature, as well as of his sense of the limits of politics.

Monday, July 28, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. *Coriolanus*

- *Coriolanus*, Acts I–V

Questions:

1. How does Shakespeare characterize the two parties in Republican Rome, the patricians and the plebeians? The two parties are opposed in their interests, but how do they manage to communicate and to some extent work together?
2. What in Coriolanus's character causes him to fail in his bid to become consul?
3. What is the understanding of immortality in republican Rome, and how does it affect the character of the Romans?
4. How are the women in *Coriolanus* portrayed? In particular, what is Volumnia's role in the play? What is the relation of the family to the city of Rome?
5. How would you compare the Volsces with the Romans? Why is Coriolanus able to achieve rule among them, when he was not able to do so among the Romans? How would you compare Aufidius with Coriolanus?
6. Why does Coriolanus eventually abandon his effort to conquer Rome?
7. What do the Romans learn from the story of Coriolanus? What do the patricians in particular learn? What do the plebeians in particular learn? How will these lessons affect the future of Rome as a republic?

12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Semiweekly Group Lunch

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Speaker
Peter Thiel, president, Thiel Capital

Tuesday, July 29, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. ***Coriolanus***

- *Coriolanus* (continued)

Questions:

See questions for previous assignment

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ***Julius Caesar***

- *Julius Caesar*, Acts I–V

Questions:

1. Compare the opening scene of *Julius Caesar* with that of *Coriolanus*. What does this comparison tell us about the changes that have occurred in the republican regime? How do the plebeians of *Julius Caesar* differ from those of *Coriolanus*? How has the role of the tribunes changed?
2. In Shakespeare's portrayal, what are the strengths and weaknesses of Julius Caesar? How has he gotten to the point where he is on the verge of achieving one-man rule in Rome?

3. Why does the conspiracy form against Julius Caesar? Who are its leaders, and what does each contribute to the enterprise?
4. Why does the conspiracy fail? What are some of the conspirators' specific mistakes, and why do they make them? Could the Republic have been saved?
5. What is Antony's role in the play? Can you compare him to any character in *Coriolanus*? Why does he succeed in defeating the conspirators? What implications does his reaction to Caesar's death have for his future in *Antony and Cleopatra*?
6. How would you compare Brutus's funeral oration with Antony's?
7. How has the status of women changed since the days of *Coriolanus*?
8. How has religion in Rome changed since the days of *Coriolanus*? What does the presence of soothsayers in the play suggest?
9. Cassius is a professed Epicurean; Brutus is a professed Stoic; Cicero is the only "name" philosopher to appear in any of Shakespeare's plays. What does the presence of philosophy in the Rome of *Julius Caesar* suggest?
10. What is the attitude toward suicide in the closing scenes of the play? Has the Roman attitude toward military victory changed?

Wednesday, July 30, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ***Julius Caesar***

- *Julius Caesar* (continued)

Questions:

See questions for previous assignment

Thursday, July 31, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ***Antony and Cleopatra***

- *Antony and Cleopatra*, Acts I–V

Questions:

1. How have the political circumstances changed now that the Roman Empire is coming into being? How do these changes affect the lives of the characters in the play?
2. What do you make of Pompey's rhetoric and actions in Act II, scenes 6 and 7? How and why have the terms of politics altered for him?
3. In Act III, scene 1, we see Ventidius, a Roman commander on the frontier of the empire. What does this scene reveal about how politics has changed in Imperial Rome? What are the implications of this scene for the future of Rome?
4. How has the status of women changed in the Empire?
5. How has religion changed in the Empire?

6. How has Rome become Egyptianized in *Antony and Cleopatra*? What does this development tell us about Imperial Rome?
7. Antony expresses a wish to live “a private man in Athens” (Act III, scene 12). If all that matters to him and Cleopatra is their private love affair, why don't they simply abdicate and disappear into the teeming masses of the empire?
8. What is Enobarbus's dilemma, and how is it representative of the changed conditions of the Empire?
9. How has the notion of nobility changed in the world of *Antony and Cleopatra*?
10. For the first time in the Roman plays, we hear talk of an afterlife in *Antony and Cleopatra*. What is the significance of this development?

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Speaker Rep. Tom Cotton , member, U.S. House of Representatives
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3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Tour – U.S. Capitol
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Friday, August 1, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. ***Antony and Cleopatra***

- *Antony and Cleopatra* (continued)

Questions:

See questions for previous assignment

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Open Forum on the Plays**

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.	Closing Reception and Dinner
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