

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY OF HISTORY

We'll read four plays about English history that trace the reigns of Richard II, the most lyrical and sometimes most fatuous of rulers; through the troubled times of Henry IV, a king dramatically overshadowed by his rambunctious but also calculating son Hal (and Hal's fat, witty, inventive, doomed companion, Falstaff); through the emergence of the heroic Henry V, in whom we can still see the shadow of the callow, even callous Hal.

In class we'll pay close attention to the language—or, better, the various languages—of the plays, sometimes by reading passages out loud, and closely, sympathetically analyzing them. It'll be a mixture of discussion and my own off-the-cuff mini-lectures, and I'll encourage the class to challenge me, or one another, or the characters. (Agreements are also welcome.)

Among topics to be considered are: media, fake news, and drama in the creation of competing royal narratives; the role of women in a world of battling men; ideas of rulership and the theatricality of royal rule; the shape of Tudor history and the design of Shakespeare's dramatic history. I'll try to provide some background (though Shakespeare himself tells us most of what we need to know) and I'll encourage the class to form and express their own ideas about these history plays that are also political plays as relevant and fresh as today's screaming headlines.

In a couple of sessions we'll watch video clips of these most cinematic of plays, by Welles, Olivier, Branagh, et al.

We'll read in order: *Richard II*, the *First Part of Henry IV*, the *Second Part of Henry IV* and *Henry V*. Please acquire the individual volumes in the Pelican Shakespeare series, so that we can be (literally) on the same page in class. (Easiest way to get them is on Amazon. For your convenience I list the ISBNs: (Richard II) 978-0143130215; (I Henry IV) 978-0143130208; (2 Henry IV) 978-0143131762; (Henry V) 978-0143130246.

Leader: Lawrence Danson is professor emeritus of English at Princeton University. He has written articles and books (including *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*) about Renaissance drama and about Victorian and Edwardian literature.

Mondays: 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 8 weeks: February 22 through April 12

Maximum: 20