

LP<sup>2</sup> STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

**SHAKESPEARE IN TEXT AND FILM:  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, KING LEAR, THE WINTER'S TALE**

**COORDINATORS:** Jonathan Gaines and Richard Herrmann

We read *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*. We focus our close reading on important speeches, meet some of Shakespeare's most famous characters, see movie clips of key scenes, and explore timeless themes of (to name a few) obsession, greed, power, filial conflict, and what it takes to gain self-knowledge.

**Jonathan Gaines** and **Richard Herrmann** are both lawyers. This will be their fourth study group centered on a close reading of Shakespeare's plays.

**Type of Study Group:** Mostly discussion

**Readings and other Materials/Online Services:**

*The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare;  
*King Lear* by William Shakespeare;  
*The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare.

We will be referring to the Folger Shakespeare Library Updated Edition of each play; if you are using another edition, please note that line numbers may differ significantly. We will also distribute optional additional readings for each play.

**\* \* \* \* \* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS \* \* \* \* \***

We read through the plays, with pauses for discussion and film clips, taking approximately four sessions for each play. We begin with *The Merchant of Venice*, for which the syllabus provides examples of discussion questions.

**WEEK 1:**

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**READING:** *The Merchant of Venice*, Introduction and Act 1

### **QUESTIONS:**

The play begins with Antonio (the Merchant); based on the opening lines, what will this play be about? How will Antonio benefit by increasing his loans to Bassanio? Bassanio wants 3,000 Venetian gold Ducats; how much is that in today's money? The second scene begins with Portia; what will the play be about from her perspective? The third scene begins with Shylock; what will the play be about from his point of view? Why does Shylock hate Antonio? Why suggest a commercial contract with a very odd non-payment penalty?

### **WEEK 2**

**READING:** *The Merchant of Venice*, Acts 2 and 3

### **QUESTIONS:**

How does Portia deal with her deceased father? Why is this relationship important to the play? Why does Portia cheat in running the "casket game" with her suitors? Are there parallels in the "casket plot" and the "Shylock plot"? How do Jessica and her father deal with each other; describe Shylock's reaction when he learns of Jessica's disloyalty? Later we will compare Shylock's reactions to the reactions of Lear and Leontes to their family events. Was Portia right to disregard her father's will by favoring Bassanio?

### **WEEK 3**

**READING:** *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 4: *The trial*

### **QUESTIONS:**

Why is it important to Venice for the contract to be enforced? Do you agree with Portia's ruling? What alternative rulings could she have made? Was Shylock entrapped?

### **WEEK 4**

**READING:** *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 5 and wrap-up

### **QUESTIONS:**

Was Portia a paragon of feminism? As the play ends, do you foresee Bassanio and Antonio enjoying a happy life?

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**WEEKS 5-8:** *King Lear*

**WEEKS 9-12:** *The Winter's Tale*