

**English 407/507, Winter 2017: “The Other in Shakespeare and Levinas”
Tuesdays, 6-8:50, Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP)**

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The recent presidential election has highlighted the dangers of cultural and sexual stereotyping, and confirmed them, with the majority of white Americans and men having lined up with one major candidate and most of the so-called melting pot of non-white Americans and women with the other. We will read three plays by Shakespeare that are, as was our election, energized by fear of “the other”: by Shylock the Jewish money-lender of *The Merchant of Venice*; by Othello the passionate “Moor” of Venice (for Shakespeare, a Moor is someone of dark complexion and of Muslim origin from North Africa); and by Caliban, the native inhabitant – presented by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* as a rapist - of the island colonized by the European Prospero, the Duke of Milan (in Italy). We will ask: do these plays by Shakespeare exploit and encourage racial, ethnic, and sexual stereotyping, or do they rather call such stereotyping into question? Or both?

In trying to resolve this question, we will turn to Emmanuel Levinas. “It sometimes seems to me,” Levinas writes, “that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation on Shakespeare” (*Time and Other* 47). Alongside these three plays of Shakespeare (*The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*), we will read *Ethics and Infinity*, a series of interviews with Levinas, the thinker who has, par excellence, been preoccupied by “the other.” For Levinas, however, the other is not necessarily or even primarily the culturally or sexually different person. For Levinas the other is, rather, the stranger or the neighbor who calls me and my freedom into question and for whom I am infinitely responsible. To view the other primarily as culturally - or racially or sexually - different would, for Levinas, turn the face of the other into an object of knowledge that has been assimilated by my consciousness, and hence not as an occasion for the transcendence of the ego in the direction of what it is not, i.e. of what is truly other. Can Levinas help us with the question posed by this seminar?

Transportation up to Salem and back each week will be provided. We will leave campus Tuesdays at 3:50 p.m. and will return by 10:15 p.m. or shortly thereafter. Outside students will leave campus earlier on the day (TBA) that we take our tour of OSP.

This course on ethics and literature promises to be transformational for graduate students on many levels, including for how they think about their own approach to teaching literature. Graduate students may well find themselves drawn to being trained to teach Inside-Out classes of their own. To help graduate students think about the pedagogical implications of teaching Inside-Out classes, I’ve placed on reserve a copy of a collection of essays, titled *Turning Teaching Inside Out*, by teachers of a variety of Inside-Out courses.

Note: Undergraduates will enroll in ENG 407, graduate students in ENG 607.

Required Texts for Purchase

Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. R. Cohen (Duchesne UP, 1985)
 Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *The Tempest* (all in The Arden Shakespeare series)

Recommended Text (on Reserve)

Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell (eds.), *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

- I. **Monday, Jan. 9:** *Outside students meet separately from inside students in Friendly 206, 10-12:50; Tuesday, Jan. 10:* *Inside students meet separately from outside students in OSP, 6-8:50 p.m.* : Introduction. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 7 (“The Face”). Inside and outside students meet separately.
- II. **Jan. 17:** Ice-breaking exercises; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 8 (“Responsibility for the Other”); Mark Lilla, “The End of Identity Liberalism,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 2016 (handout); *Merchant of Venice*, Acts I and II; Shankman, “From Solitude to Maternity: Levinas and Shakespeare,” *Levinas Studies: An Annual Review*, Vol. 8 (2013), 67-79 (handout)
- III. **Jan. 24:** Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow” [handout]; *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 1 (“Bible and Philosophy”); *Merchant of Venice*, Acts III and IV
- IV. **Jan 31:** Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 2 (“Heidegger”); Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, Act V; Shankman, “The Saying, the Said, and the Betrayal of Mercy in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*,” *Other Others: Levinas, Literature, Transcultural Studies* (SUNY Press, 2010), 93-106 (handout)
- V. **Feb. 7:** *Outside students arrive early at OSCI for prison tour.* Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 3 (“The ‘There Is’”); *Othello*, Acts I and II
- VI. **Feb. 14:** Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 4 (“The Solitude of Being”); *Othello*, Acts III and IV
- VII. **Feb. 21:** Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 5 (“Love and Filiation”); *Othello*, Act V
- VIII. **Feb. 28:** *The Tempest*, Acts I and II; Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 6 (“Secrecy and Freedom”)

- IX. **March 7:** Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 9 (“The Glory of Testimony”); *The Tempest*, Acts III and IV
- X. **March 14:** Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, Chapter 10 (“The Hardness of Philosophy and the Consolations of Religion”); *The Tempest*, Act V; bring in outline of your seminar paper and first page for peer-review
- XI. **March 21:** Graduation ceremony and closing circle. Final paper (10-15 pp.) due

Written Assignments: Students will submit weekly response papers on the assigned reading. Each student will write a final seminar paper of 10-15 pp. The final paper is due **Tuesday, March 21 at 6 p.m.**, before the graduation ceremony.

There will be separate debriefings with Inside and Outside students (times TBA)

Group Project:

Students will compile and publish a selection of their weekly responses. They will also be invited to publish a selection of their own creative writing, or other creative expression, that reflects on their experience in the class.

Your grades will be based on the following criteria:

Class participation (including group project): 20%; seminar paper: 80%