

- Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines
- www.unine.ch/lettres

Sém. Ang. I : Machiavelli and Early Modern Drama (2AN2113)

Filières concernées	Nombre d'heures	Validation	Crédits ECTS
Pilier principal M A - littératures	Séminaire: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M A - littératures	Séminaire: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5

ph=période hebdomadaire, pg=période globale, j=jour, dj=demi-jour, h=heure, min=minute

Période d'enseignement:

- Semestre Automne

Equipe enseignante

Dr Kilian Schindler

Contenu

In this seminar, students will be introduced to the political thought of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and its representation in three early modern English plays, which range from sixteenth-century religious conflict in the Mediterranean over medieval English history to classical antiquity: Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1589-91), William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* (1605). Machiavelli gained notoriety in early modern Europe as the principal proponent of reason of state, an approach to politics which is divorced from conventional morality and in which any means are justified if they lead to political success. Machiavelli thus entirely disregarded a number of central Christian values in his political writings, as in his claims that a prince merely has to pretend to be pious and good instead of actually being so, or that one is allowed to break one's promises if it is politically advantageous to do so. In the sixteenth century, "Machiavellian" therefore became a by-word for evil, cruelty, and deceit and gave rise to a specific character type in early modern drama, the so-called stage Machiavel. Prominently embodied by Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, or Jonson's *Sejanus*, the stage Machiavel is at once a polemical distortion as well as a creative adaptation of Machiavelli's political writings to a different medium. In this seminar, we will focus on these processes of adaptation and discuss the ethical and political questions with which early modern playwrights grappled in their reaction to Machiavelli. In particular, we will discuss how early modern playwrights responded to the inherently theatrical dimension of Machiavellian power politics, as exemplified by the great store which Machiavelli set by dissimulation. All three playwrights thus reflect on politics as theatre and the role of the theatre itself in a political culture that was perceived to be based on outward appearance alone rather than a sincere attachment to the values professed by its representatives.

Forme de l'évaluation

Students will have to submit an essay after the end of term (100%). A number of essay topics will be provided during term. Students may also formulate their own topics, but they must be related to the texts and themes of the seminar and they must be approved beforehand.

Documentation

Excerpts from Machiavelli's writings (in English translation) and secondary literature will be made available on Moodle, but students are expected to acquire copies of the following titles at the start of term:

Marlowe, Christopher. *The Jew of Malta*. Ed. James R. Siemon. New Mermaids. London: Methuen Drama-Bloomsbury, 2009.

Shakespeare, William. *King Richard III*. Ed. James R. Siemon. *The Arden Shakespeare*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Jonson, Ben. *Sejanus His Fall*. Ed. Philip J. Ayres. *Revels Plays*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999.

Pré-requis

Requirements

- Students will be required to give short presentations (c. 10 min) alone or in pairs (which will not contribute to the mark)
- Regular attendance
- Active participation in class
- Reading assignments

Forme de l'enseignement

Seminar

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Objectifs d'apprentissage

Au terme de la formation l'étudiant-e doit être capable de :

- Develop close reading and essay writing skills
- Compare literary texts and characters
- Employ concepts of early modern political thought in the analysis of literary texts
- Analyse early modern plays from a political perspective
- Examine the relationship between literary texts and their sources
- Discuss questions of political ethics
- Identify processes of adaptation

Compétences transférables

- Apply knowledge to new situations
- Develop intellectual rigour and curiosity
- Generate new ideas (creativity)
- Communicate in a second language
- Work in team
- Discuss complex issues