

## Shakespeare's Lovers and the Tragedy of Time

For Shakespeare, romantic love was mainly a comic matter, in dramatic worlds where time is elastic and forgiving, and where his matched (and mismatched) couples tumble their way to marriage. In his tragedies, it's different. We'll read five great plays about doomed lovers, paying special attention to the ways in which they become (as Sonnet 124 has it) "the fools of time," in tragic worlds where political and social forces, or the urgings of their own wills, make mortality, not marriage, the destined end. We'll consider the speedy but all-too-short time of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the long, deep time of *Antony and Cleopatra*; we'll find the pity in *Othello's* quick passions; and think about the warring, destructive time of *Troilus and Cressida*. And, although it can't be contained by the idea of romantic love, we'll read *Hamlet*, which is Shakespeare's most profound exploration of temporality, of brevity, duration, and passion.

Shakespeare's lovers do not live in a world of their own making. We'll talk about family structures, especially father-daughter relationships; about the politics of love and marriage; and about constructions of sex and gender, including the plays' homoerotic as well as their dominant heterosexual pairings. We'll pay attention to dramatic structure, including the way Shakespeare's scenic design slows or hastens time. And we'll always listen to the "infinite variety" of Shakespeare's language. To accomplish this we'll occasionally read aloud, and analyze with sympathetic closeness, the plays' sometimes knotty, sometimes luminous dialogue. (Folks who haven't read any Shakespeare in a while are especially welcome.) I'll do a bit of lecturing and ask participants to interrupt me if they can.

We'll use the paperback texts in the Pelican Shakespeare. They'll be available at Labyrinth. I urge you to use them so that we can be on the same page, literally. The syllabus goes like this: week one, *Romeo and Juliet*; weeks two and three, *Antony and Cleopatra*; week four, *Troilus and Cressida*; weeks five and six, *Othello*; weeks seven and eight, *Hamlet*.

**Leader:** Lawrence Danson is Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, where he taught and wrote about Shakespeare and Renaissance drama, among other things.

**Wednesdays:** 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, 8 weeks: September 27 through November 15.

**Location:** PSRC