

William Flesch, Ph.D., is an associate professor of English at Brandeis, where he teaches courses on Shakespeare. Among his many publications are *Generosity and the Limits of Authority: Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton* (Cornell University Press, 1992), "Keats Reading Shakespeare," "Quoting Poetry," "Vicarious experience in Shakespeare's sonnet" and "Helen Vendler's *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*," as well as articles for the *Boston Globe* Ideas section. He was chair of the English Department from 1998-2001. He is the recipient of three teaching awards at Brandeis and Cornell and a National Endowment of the Humanities Fellowship.

REGISTRATION

(Space is limited. Register early.)

Name _____

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Make check payable for \$155 to Brandeis University

Send registration and check to:

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King Lear: The Personal and the Political

Faculty

William Flesch, Ph.D.
Associate Professor - English & Literature
Brandeis University



**Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
@ Brandeis University**



Monday through Friday
January 9th to January 13th 2006
9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The Lurias in Hassenfeld
Brandeis University

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The leader doesn't know whom to trust. Surely his father didn't have these problems. He wants only good news from his advisors, primarily so he can devote his own time to outdoor recreations. Whenever anyone tries to tell him the truth about the mistakes he might be making, he flies into a towering rage and banishes the truth-teller. Consequently, he is surrounded by flatterers, to the point where, after a horrendous storm, he finally has to acknowledge that he has taken too little care of the people of his country. The flatterers have included his daughters, whom he trusted far more than their behavior warranted. In the meantime, his country is radically divided and the strange and unexpected weather make people think that disaster cannot be avoided. Furthermore, the borders of his country are porous and there are spies everywhere. Some leak disinformation to further their own aims, and try to spin the legal inquiries under way. But enough about the Bush Administration...

We will spend a week on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, often considered Shakespeare's greatest tragedy. Shakespeare's tragic heroes, no matter what their stories, all have one experience in common: they try and fail to control their relation to time. Time is both personal and political – it measures the life of individuals and of nations. When a person finds neither can be controlled, that personal and political needs and desires thwart each other or conspire against him, we are in the realm of tragedy. No one understood better than Shakespeare that *tragedy is a real life experience and emerges from real life issues.*

We will read and study *King Lear* act by act (one act a day) to look at how tragic experience expands to take over the whole of life. We'll look at the lessons Shakespeare offered for our own lives, both in the public and the private sphere.

The reason Shakespeare made historical figures the heroes of his greatest plays is that he understood that history repeats itself--over and over again. The story of any historical figure would therefore be relevant to the reigns of Elizabeth I (who said to her advisors after a production of Shakespeare's play about him, "I am Richard II, know ye not that?") and James I.

These stories are also relevant to contemporary politics. The quest for power is perennial, and human nature being what it is, the machinations of those who seek power are also perennial. The best way to understand Shakespeare's sense of humans as political animals is to compare what happens in a Shakespearean play to what is happening in contemporary politics. **In this seminar, we'll see how each will illuminate the other.**

Reading Required Prior to Program

***King Lear*
William Shakespeare**