

Module Title: Shakespeare in London

Module Code: ENG020N250H

Module Rationale

What can productions of Shakespeare's plays tell us about today's London theatreland? We'll see productions of Shakespeare and/or his contemporaries and use that experience to explore the plays themselves, the links between the Renaissance and the present day, and Shakespeare's place in the London theatre industry.

Together we will sample the state-of-play of Shakespeare in London, exploring very different kinds of productions of three plays to investigate the London theatre's energetic and often irreverent response to Shakespeare and Renaissance dramatists. This will involve thinking about questions of access and representation for marginalised communities' engagement with Shakespeare, and we'll think about questions of casting among others.

This module is for you if you're enthusiastic about drama and the theatre industry, want to expand your knowledge of Shakespeare and performance, or if you're thinking about working in any part of the cultural or heritage industries.

Students who successfully complete this module will have:

- an enriched understanding of Shakespearean language
- an enriched understanding of the social and theatrical contexts for the Shakespearean stage, including questions of access and representation
- increased comprehension of the changing dynamics of a play through its performance history
- increased skills of analysing a theatre production in relation to its text and both its early modern and present-day social context
- enhanced presentation skills
- enhanced skills of argument and evidencing
- enhanced research skills
- enhanced their insight into the present-day London Shakespearean theatre industry, supporting them for careers in the cultural and heritage sectors.

Syllabus

We will engage with the texts and productions of 3 Shakespeare plays, to consider the state of play of London's Shakespearean theatre industry. Productions will be chosen to give students as broad a range of experience as possible, ranging from state-funded productions (e.g. the RSC or National Theatre), to commercial theatre productions (e.g. at Shakespeare's Globe), to experimental and fringe productions (e.g. at the White Bear, the Kiln, or outdoor productions). Together we will think about the role that Shakespearean theatre plays in London's theatreland, ways in which that role is changing through a direct engagement with questions of access and representation for marginalised communities, and the detail of how a Shakespearean play comes to a stage today.

Teaching and Learning Methods

This module combines classroom seminars and field trips to see Shakespearean productions. We will discuss the play text ahead of the trip in our seminars and you'll be given the background and context to engage with our chosen plays as text and as production. When you see the production, you'll be given guided question sheets to help you record your experience, responses, and questions and to structure our class discussion.

In class, you'll be supported to explore the texts through a combination of lectures for contextual information, group discussions, close textual readings, and analysis of live performance and its digital and material records. We'll combine this with training in the skills of working a) with Shakespeare texts and b) Shakespeare in performance. You'll be supported to develop presentation and research skills, including library skills for group presentations, time devoted to development of group presentations for formal assessment, and peer review sessions to support you in assessment.

Assessment

1) Group presentation (100%).

You will develop skills of project management and team working to develop a topic as a group with your tutor and then present it to the seminar.

Shakespeare in London: Reading List.

Please note: this is an *indicative* list only, as our curriculum will be designed around productions onstage in summer 2024.

Primary Texts

William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E.A.G. Honnigman with introduction by Ayanna Thompson (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2016).

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2017)

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Neil Taylor and Ann Thompson (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2016)

Secondary Texts

Aebischer, Pascale, *Shakespeare, Spectatorship and the Technologies of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber, 2009)

Davies, Callan, *What Is A Playhouse? England at Play, 1520-1620* (London: Routledge, 2023)

Engendering the Stage: a Roehampton-based project investigating performance in Shakespeare's time by women, children and gender nonconforming people:

<https://engenderingthestage.humanities.mcmaster.ca/>

Stephen Purcell *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Mark Rylance at the Globe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017)

--- *Shakespeare and Audience In Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Thompson, Ayanna (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021)

--- *Color-Blind Casting: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2006)