

Shakespeare's Plays and Elizabethan England

This course provides an introduction to the plays of Shakespeare and the history surrounding their composition. Each week we shall focus on a play from a different genre, which will give students a well-rounded understanding of Renaissance dramatic traditions. In-depth study of these plays will be accompanied by discussion of themes which are central to sixteenth-century ideology.

Classes shall be taught in small seminar sessions, and one-on-one tutorials will also give students the opportunity to discuss and develop their ideas. The students shall also be given a list of recommended reading and marked work shall be set as appropriate.

Please note that teaching will take place over the course of four weeks. Students staying for two weeks will cover only two out of the four plays and accompanying themes.

1. Comedy; a general overview of Elizabethan history

This week will cover conventions of comedy in the sixteenth-century, alongside an in-depth study of *Twelfth Night*. Also of interest shall be Elizabethan history, with a particular focus on the Reformation and its impact on theatre.

2. Tragedy; the Shakespeare authorship question

King Lear shall be studied alongside the Renaissance conventions of tragedy. The theme which we shall cover this week is the Shakespeare authorship question, which has been of great interest to academics for a number of centuries.

3. History; Renaissance staging and scenery

This week we shall focus on Shakespeare's history plays, with an in-depth study of *Henry V*. The accompanying theme will be Renaissance staging and scenery, which will provide a good understanding of how theatres and plays would have looked four hundred years ago.

4. Problem plays; gender issues in Shakespearean theatre

This week shall comprise a study of the difficulties in grouping plays under a particular genre. *The Tempest* will be the play we read this week, which falls into the miscellaneous category. We shall also be discussing gender issues in Shakespearean theatre, such as cross-dressing.

Recommended pre-summer reading:

M. De Grazia, S. Wells (eds.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*