

Shakespeare's Rebellious Women: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado about Nothing*

Start date 29 May 2020 **End date** 31 May 2020

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor Clare Smout **Course code** 1920NRR044

Director of ISP and LL Sarah Ormrod

For further information on this course, please contact the Lifelong Learning team Zara Kuckelhaus, Fleur Kerrecoe
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Tutor biography

Clare Smout has contributed courses to the Institute's weekend programme since 2007, teaching Shakespeare, Early Modern Drama and Irish Drama. She is currently a Visiting Lecturer at both the University of Birmingham and Staffordshire University and a major contributor to Crandall University's Study Programme at Oxford. Other regular teaching includes projects for i-Learner (Hong Kong). She also contributes theatre reviews for academic journals. She has recently co-edited *The Palgrave Handbook of the History of Women on Stage*, a volume stretching across the centuries and round the globe.

Clare spent two decades in professional theatre, specialising in directing and in developing new writing, and this has shaped her research and teaching interests. She still directs whenever possible: her most recent project was an adaptation of *King Lear* for primary school students in Hong Kong.

Course programme

Please see the Advance Preparation recommended under 'Additional Information' at the end of this document

Friday

14:30 Session 1: Introductions and *Shrew* 'Induction'

This session will introduce us to each other, to Zoom, and to the historical and theatrical context in which the plays were written and first performed. We will brainstorm the themes of the plays. We will then move on to *The Taming of the Shrew* and examine the contribution of the first two framing scenes, known as 'the Induction'.

16.30 Session 2: Gender Expectations / *Shrew* - Katherina (1)

This session will start with discussion of gender norms and expectations in Shakespeare's world and an overview of how the women of these two plays apparently fit the templates. We will then continue with *The Taming of the Shrew*, winding up discussion of the Induction and starting to explore Katherina and Petruchio's story.

19.30 Optional Extra: Streaming of the Globe 2012 *Taming of the Shrew*

We may be able to pre-record this, rather than stream it live, in which case you can be flexible about the timing of when you watch it. There is also the alternative option of watching the 1976 American Conservatory Theatre production via YouTube (link provided below).

Saturday

09:30 Session 3: Katherina (2)

This session will continue our analysis of Katherina and Petruchio's story. It will also include discussion of the recent 'gender-reversed' production by the RSC.

11:30 Session 4: Bianca and the Widow

This session will look at Bianca and the Widow and explore their strategies and significance.

Evening Optional Extra: Viewing of RSC 2014 *Love's Labours' Won* (*Much Ado*)

This is available on BBC i-player (or via a 14-day free trial of Marquee Theatre for those with no access to i-player). Alternatively, you could watch the 2011 West End production, directed by Josie Rourke, with David Tennant and Catherine Tate at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwy2a6ScZ-c>

Sunday

09:30 Session 5 *Much Ado About Nothing* – The Male World & Hero

This session will open with some back-ground information on the play; move on to explore male gender constraints, homo-social companionship and the implications of Elizabethan society's assumptions about female infidelity; and close with consideration of the role of Hero.

11:30 Session 6 *Much Ado About Nothing* – Beatrice and Benedick (1)

This session will focus on Beatrice and Benedick.

14.30 Session 7 *Much Ado* – Beatrice and Benedick (2), Course Conclusion

This session will focus further on Beatrice and Benedick and end by comparisons between the two plays.

Course syllabus

Aims:

- To enable students to gain deeper insights into the specific plays studied and the themes explored within them, with particular emphasis on the depiction and subversion of Early Modern gender norms and expectations
- To enable students to develop increased appreciation of the theatrical craftsmanship used in these plays and of how the interplay between character, structure, language and the dramatic conventions of the time creates meaning and shapes audience's response
- To enable students to develop transferable skills applicable to analysing Early Modern drama and theatrical craftsmanship, as well as increased confidence in discussion and argument in this field

Content:

This course explores two of Shakespeare's most enduringly popular comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, looking specifically at the way in which gender norms and expectations are presented and challenged in the plays as written and in performance.

Unlike many of Shakespeare's other comedies in which women become empowered by dressing as men, *Shrew* and *Much Ado* both feature independent-minded women who try to achieve agency without losing their female identity. However, in line with the dictates of comedy, both women end up 'submitting' to marriage. In each play, Shakespeare contrasts these non-conformist women with more conventional 'modest' female foils.

We examine the options open to women of this period and the strategies adopted by the women of the plays. Alongside this, we consider the contexts of the narratives Shakespeare has chosen and the constraints placed on men as well. Throughout, we explore the ambiguity of written playtexts and the significance of performance, with its potential for both conveying and subverting an author's (apparent) intentions - and for change in each new generation. Discussion is supported by analysis of performance clips in class and the option to watch full performance streaming in the evenings.

Presentation of the course:

This course will be delivered live online, via Zoom. Clare's teaching is usually a combination of formal and informal lecturing, full group discussion and small group work. This is supplemented by clips of the plays being studied and occasionally involves students in reading short extracts. Obviously in the current situation the element of lecturing will be far greater than usual. However, as far as the Zoom format allows, and as far as students feel comfortable with the technology, we will continue to include student participation throughout. The taught sessions will also be supplemented by optional viewings of the two plays on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Clare believes the strength of courses such as these comes from combining the tutor's specialist knowledge and enthusiasms with the opportunity for students to exchange ideas and debate interpretations.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- *Discuss these plays, their themes, language and structure with greater confidence, more textual and contextual knowledge and deeper insight*
 - *Demonstrate understanding of Early Modern gender norms and expectations and how these can be explored and challenged through drama, both in terms of the author's written text and the actor/director's performance choices*
 - *Apply the knowledge and transferable analytical skills developed during the course to other plays from this period or on similar themes*
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Reading and resources list

Essential Reading

Please read both the plays (and ideally an introduction to a good edition) before the course starts and have your copy accessible during the teaching sessions.

Normally I would recommend the editions of these plays published by Arden or the New Cambridge Shakespeare. This is because these have excellent introductions and helpful footnotes. I have listed them below. However, it is fine to read the plays in whatever editions you can easily access.

Alternatively, there are good online editions available for free download at the Folger Shakespeare Library website listed below. The only drawback with using an online edition for this course is that you will not find it easy to follow the text and the course on the same computer.

Play	Editor	Publisher and date
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Edited by Barbara Hodgdon	Arden 2010
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Edited by Ann Thompson	New Cambridge Shakespeare 2003, 2017
<i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>	Edited by Claire McEachern (Revised Edition)	Arden 2016
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>	Both available at https://shakespeare.folger.edu/download/	Folger Digital Texts

Additional Resources

Options for further exploration will be provided during the course. If you wish to do any extra advance reading, please contact the tutor via ICE with details of you area of interest and she will be happy to send suggestions.

Options for Viewing

Many students like to watch performances of Shakespeare's plays before coming on the course. This is no way obligatory, but here is a list of the productions most readily available on DVD or streaming platforms.

The Taming of the Shrew

- 1929. Directed by Sam Taylor, with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. Iconic early 'talkie'. Available at [youtube.com/watch?v=uTlsrhgVQRY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTlsrhgVQRY)
- 1967. Directed by Franco Zeffirelli, with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Classic Hollywood big budget star vehicle.
- 1976. American Conservatory Theatre. Commedia dell'Arte-inspired version. Available at [youtube.com/watch?v=2z52FqmnqMw&list=PLWYfJlrp9YpyszpD0DwhrBIHFOYanlC5N](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z52FqmnqMw&list=PLWYfJlrp9YpyszpD0DwhrBIHFOYanlC5N)
- 1980. Directed by Jonathan Miller, with John Cleese and Sarah Badel. BBC Complete Shakespeare Series. Made for small screen.

- 2013. Directed by Toby Frow for Shakespeare's Globe, with Samantha Spiro and Simon Paisley-Day. Recording of live stage production, making full use of the Globe's resources.
- 2019. Directed by Justin Audibert for the RSC, with Claire Price and Joseph Arkley. Gender-reversed production. Recording of live stage production.

Much Ado about Nothing

- 1972. Directed by Joseph Papp, with Kathleen Widdoes and Sam Waterston, for New York Shakespeare Festival, Broadway. Award-winning 'rollicking fun' set in the early 20th century.
- 1984. Directed by Stuart Burge with Robert Lindsay and Cheri Lunghi. BBC Complete Shakespeare Series. Traditional, educational, made for small screen; good main characters but a bit dated / dull elsewhere.
- 1993. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, with Branagh and Emma Thompson. Hollywood movie with sexy, Italian setting, 'timeless' costumes.
- 2011. Directed by Josie Rourke, with David Tennant and Catherine Tate. Modernised West-End stage production, set in 1980s Gibraltar. Available free at [youtube.com/watch?v=Cwy2a6ScZ-c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwy2a6ScZ-c)
- 2012. Directed by Joss Whedon, with Amy Acker. Modernised (21st century), black & white 'art' film (£2.49 to stream on YouTube)
- 2012. Directed by Jeremy Herrin, with Eve Best and Charles Edwards. Shakespeare's Globe. Recording of live stage production, traditional dress, making full use of the Globe's resources.
- 2014. Directed by Christopher Luscombe, with Edward Bennett and Michelle Terry, for the RSC, under the title 'Love's Labour's Won'. Recording of live stage production, set 1918.

Additional information

Here is a list of things to think about as you read the plays. This will give you an idea of the material we will cover and the approach we will be taking. Maybe check out the 16th century meanings of 'shrew' and 'nothing' before starting.

The Taming of the Shrew

- What themes or issues is the play exploring? (**Make a list** as you read)
- What is the point of the Induction? What does it add? Why not go straight to the main story? Do you mind that the Sly story fades away? How similar are the themes in the induction to the themes in the main narrative? What is the effect of setting the induction in England (near Stratford) and the main narrative in Italy?
- What is the impact of having two parallel plots in the main play?
- How are ideas of identity and disguise used or explored in the play?
- What are the options and expected roles for women in this society? And for men? What techniques do women and men use to achieve their ends in this play?
- What other strategies do you think men used to control independent-minded women in this period? How acceptable (and how typical) is Petruchio's behaviour for his time?
- How important is money in this society? Love? Looks? Status? Birth?
- How often are characters being observed unseen by other characters? **Make a note** as you read of every time characters step aside to watch others 'performing'? What is the significance / impact of this? How often are the characters consciously performing?
- This is still one of Shakespeare's best-selling comedies. Do you find it offensive or enjoyable? Is it still ok to present this 'shrew taming' as a comic romp in the 21st century? What other approaches might one take? How satisfying do you think they might be dramatically?
- How would you stage this play in general? In particular, would you include the Induction? Why / why not? How would you stage the ending?

Much Ado about Nothing

- What themes or issues is the play exploring? (Make a list as you read) How far are they different or the same as *Shrew*?
- How are ideas of disguise and identity used or explored in the play?
- What are the options and expected roles for women in this society? And for men? What techniques do women and men use to achieve their ends in this play?
- How similar/different are Beatrice and Hero to Kate and Bianca?
- How similar/different are Beatrice and Benedick to Kate and Petruchio?
- How important is money in this society? Love? Looks? Status? Birth? Wit? Soldiership?
- In *Shrew* everyone seemed to be watching everyone else. In *Much Ado* everyone seems to be repeatedly listening to everyone else, eavesdropping. Make a list as you read of all the times someone overhears someone else (deliberately or accidentally).
- Which are the funny bits? What sort of humour is it?
- Is Claudio a villain or a victim? What other evidence could he have demanded before taking action? (Note: He is very young!) What was the main characteristic he loved her for?
- Why does Hero agree to marry Claudio after he has rejected her?
- The waiting woman Margaret - she seems to want to model herself on both Hero and Beatrice - look out for evidence
- How similar are the brothers Don Pedro and Don John?

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 04 May 2020