

Shakespeare's England 2025: PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS  
Study Abroad Experience: Monday, June 2, to Tuesday, June 24, 2025

**ABRD:3028/ENGL:3287 Shakespeare's England**

Summer 2025

3 credit hours

Classroom times: 10.00-1.00 M-F

Instructor: Jonathan Wilcox, [jonathan-wilcox@uiowa.edu](mailto:jonathan-wilcox@uiowa.edu). Phone: 319-471-6837

In this class, we'll get out into the theatres, museums, and streets of London to see the way the city inspired and continues to inspire some of the greatest writing in English.

Around the time that Shakespeare moved to London from rural Warwickshire, an awed German visitor wrote that the city "is a wonder for learned men." There was simply nothing like this monster city, of 200,000 people, anywhere else -- the next largest town, Norwich, had about 12,000 souls. As we'll see, London is still unlike anything else: a teeming, diverse, international, metropolis, built on the bones of a Roman and medieval village. It is a center of a modern film industry, a capital of international finance and technology, and yet Shakespeare and Chaucer would still be able to recognize the shape of many of its winding streets.

How does the experience of moving from the English countryside to the teeming, cosmopolitan city imprint itself on Shakespeare's plays? What can we recognize in the landscape and cityscape of today's England that would have been familiar to him? How does the city inspire his writing, and our own? These are the questions we'll be asking, as we also talk with actors, directors, and scholars about the significance of performing the plays in Stratford or London, even if they are setting the plays in very different locations. On the one hand, theatre offers an escape from our particular circumstances -- on the other hand, it is all about the actors and audience assembled *right here*, and how does that differ when the *right here* is Stratford as opposed to say, Iowa City?

We will take full advantage of the theatrical performances available in London and in Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon, which we will visit on a day-long excursion. Within London, we will see two plays at the reconstructed Globe Theatre, once as a groundling (standing in the pit) and once seated in the stands. Throughout the course, we will discuss the different theatrical performance possibilities and compare the experience of page and stage, and the many ways of staging and adapting such classic texts

In addition to readings and writing that will fill the standard requirements for an undergraduate Shakespeare course, this course will emphasize the unique experience that comes from study abroad. We will make it our business to think about the significance of place, with classroom discussion and writing assignments devoted to understanding and thriving in a major English city in addition to discussion of Shakespeare's plays. Reading and writing assignments will be adapted to our compressed schedule. There will be daily short writing assignments of differing kinds (reading response, performance reviews, excursion notes, and reflection pieces), two reflective essays (at the beginning and middle of the time) and one analytical essay (due at the end).

**Eligibility requirements:**

See details on the Study Abroad website: <https://study-abroad.international.uiowa.edu/programs/details/index.php?crse=3028#application>

**Application Materials:**

- Application Form
- Statement of Purpose
- Copy of a Valid Passport
- UI Grade Report

Find the application on the Study Abroad website (under the How To Apply heading) here:

<https://study-abroad.international.uiowa.edu/programs/details/index.php?crse=3028#application>

**Course Requirements:**

Reading responses, performance reviews, and reflection pieces will form a backbone of regular short writing assignments, often of just one page. Engaged participation in class discussion and performances and excursions is central to the class. There will also be two reflective essays (multiple formats possible, including visual or audiovisual impressions) and one analytical paper. Assignments will be submitted into ICON, where full course details will be available.

**Required text:**

We have two options for texts. First, we will all have online access via the Folger Shakespeare Library: <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/all-works/>

If you would like inexpensive paper copies to bring on the trip, the Folger editions are a good option. Otherwise, I will encourage you to buy paperback copies while we are in England (good bookstores, near our classroom, are easy to find).

**Grades:**

Participation:	20%
Daily short writing x 12 (reading responses, performance reviews, excursion notes, reflection pieces)	40%
Two creative reflective essays	20%
One analytical paper	20%

**Grading Scale:**

A	>94
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	<60

## Schedule

NOTE: dates and excursions are approximate at this time, with excursion planning currently in progress. Also, the selection of plays in the second half may change if additional live performances are available.

### Week 1: London: now and then

June 1: Depart for London

M 2: arrive, orientation, stay up as long as you can!

T 3: introduction to Shakespeare, sonnets, walking tour of the city.

W 4: *Titus Andronicus*, acts 1-2

Th 5: *Titus Andronicus*, acts 3-4. Group tour of the Globe Theatre.

F 6: *Titus Andronicus*, act 5

Sat 7: full day excursion to Stratford upon Avon, including **matinee performance of *Titus Andronicus*** by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan Theatre .

### Week 2: love and identity

M 9: *Romeo and Juliet*, acts 1-2. Excursion to the British Museum

T 10: *Romeo and Juliet*, acts 3-4

W 11: *Romeo and Juliet*, act 5. **Globe Theatre matinee (as groundlings): *Romeo and Juliet*.**

Th 12: *Twelfth Night*, acts 1-2

F 13: *Twelfth Night*, acts 3-4. Excursion to the Tower of London

### Week 3:

M 16: *Twelfth Night*, act 5.

T 17: *Hamlet*, acts 1-2. Excursion to the National Portrait Gallery

W 18: *Hamlet*, acts 3-4

Th 19: *Hamlet*, act 5

F 20: *The Tempest*, acts 1-3. Visit to Greenwich, National Maritime Museum

### Week 4: endings

M 23: *The Tempest*, acts 4-5 + wrap up.

T 24: departure

### Faculty Director

Jonathan Wilcox is a Professor of English at the University of Iowa, where I teach and research pre-modern English literature. I am a dual citizen of the US and UK, long-time resident of Iowa City, but born and bred in London, to which I return with some frequency. My most recent book, *Humour in Old English Literature: Communities of Laughter in Early Medieval England* (University of Toronto Press, 2023), not only investigates the funny bits in early writings but also navigates the perilous differences between US and UK spelling! I look forward to introducing a group of Iowa students to the historical and cultural delights of London, to the performance of Shakespeare on the London and Stratford stage, to comparing Iowa City and London culture, and to the study of Shakespeare in his home country.

<https://english.uiowa.edu/people/jonathan-wilcox>

**Sample assignment: first reflective essay**

**Creative Response 1:** Creative nonfiction: your first impressions of the city.

I've always wondered what Shakespeare must have felt and observed when he first arrived in London from his small village. Whatever it was, it ultimately captured him so thoroughly that he spent most of his working life here, leaving wife and child behind for long stretches while he wrote, acted, and socialized in the city. But he clearly kept roots in Stratford too, retiring there in his final years, and dying relatively young, probably with what he thought was a long life in the country ahead of him. For this assignment, I simply want you to describe some of your own strongest impressions about London, and how they have, already, made you rethink some of what you know about home. What are you missing? What suddenly looks kind of boring or unexciting? What elements of the two places rhyme, or contrast, in interesting ways? Give me a page or two on this theme. Make sure to set the scene by including elements that activate all of the senses: smell, sound, sight, and touch.