

# Elizabeth Williamson The Evergreen State College



## Shakespeare at the Box Office

### Course description

How can we account for the explosion of Shakespearean films that appeared in the late 1990s? Like the repertory theater of Elizabethan London, the film industry tends to repeat itself, but it is particularly intriguing that at such an optimistic moment in American history, popular filmmakers were returning to Shakespeare's 400 year-old scripts. In this course we will consider multiple film adaptations of three plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *1 Henry IV* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. This approach will allow us to focus on what is at stake--both politically and artistically--in each adaptation, rather than limiting ourselves to concerns about whether the film remains "true" to the text. We will also ask questions about how certain films get labeled art and others entertainment, remembering that Shakespeare's plays--which we now hold up as works of artistic genius--were in their own time considered a low art form. Because the syllabus necessarily leaves out several fascinating film adaptations of Shakespeare, students will give oral presentations on some of these works near the end of the semester.

### Course texts

Madden, *Shakespeare in Love*  
Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*  
Robbins and Wise, *West Side Story*  
Luhrmann, *Romeo + Juliet*  
Zeffirelli, *Romeo and Juliet*  
Shakespeare, *Henry IV, part 1*  
Van Sant, *My Own Private Idaho*  
Welles, *Chimes at Midnight*  
Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*  
Zeffirelli, *The Taming of the Shrew*  
Junger, *10 Things I Hate About You*