Many of Shakespeare’s most powerful, intelligent, and subversive characters are female. How were such vividly complex roles constructed in a culture that legally defined women as property, on the grounds of their intellectual and moral inferiority? Given the early modern imperatives of feminine silence, chastity, and obedience, how is it that women impel Shakespeare’s plots, orchestrate conflicts, and—in many instances—impose “resolutions”? 

This five-week course considers representations of women in three of Shakespeare’s comedies and two of his tragedies. We will address the social and historical contexts of women’s roles and how the playwright both generates and subverts his culture’s assumptions about gender. 

While examining the extraordinary vitality of Shakespeare’s female characters, we will ask: what is their relation to the state, the family, the church, political economy, and desire? In short, what is their relation to order and disorder?

**Reading Schedule**

**September 30:** *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

**October 7:** *Romeo and Juliet*

**October 14:** *As You Like It*

**October 21:** *The Merchant of Venice*

**October 28:** *Othello*

Students may read any unabridged edition of the drama that they already own. For sale in the UA Bookstore will be the Pelican paperback editions of each play. Please bring the assigned work to each class meeting, including the first day.