

# Lockdown Dreams

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This seminar session formed part of a 13-week undergraduate seminar course *Shakespeare and Performance* at the University of Fribourg.

We had previously read and watched productions of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. It was the third week of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* having spent one week on the text and one week watching Shakespeare's Globe Theatre's 2013 *Dream* (dir. Dominic Dromgoole) and The Bridge Theatre's 2019 *Dream* (dir. Nicholas Hytner). We went on to read and watch film adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*.

**Watch:** CtrlAltRepeat

*A Midsummer Night's Stream*, (dir. Sid Phoenix)

<https://www.ctrlaltrepeat.com/midsummer>

**Fresh Life Theatre**

*Helena: Ugly as a Bear*, (dir. Charlie Day)

*Hermia: Heaven unto Hell*, and

*Mortal Fools*.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrImXACfKLBh66wOVsj6XLQ>

**The Show Must Go Online**

*A Midsummer Night Dream* (dir. Rob Myles)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfuPQzb1ftY>

### Content warning:

The Fresh Life Theatre Dream Trilogy is very dark and contains narratives concerning murder, rape, emotional and psychological abuse, and trauma. In *Mortal Fools* you will be asked to make a number of decisions to influence the action – some of your choices will lead to unexpected and possibly distressing outcomes.

Do let me know by email should you wish to be excused from any discussions on these topics or if you need any more details or accommodations.

### Focus Questions

1. Is Zoom a theatre or a setting in these productions - and how does that change meaning?
2. Consider the aesthetics of Zoom – how does the having characters in little boxes work to (1) enforce equality and (2) provide distance?
3. How does having actors necessarily distanced impact the darker undertones of the play - does this change any consent issues we have?

4. Think about the moments where two actors share a Zoom box – how does that ‘hit differently’ in time of lockdown?
5. How do the productions deal with the issue of socially distanced actors for the highly physical scenes (e.g. the lovers fight in Act 3 Scene 2)?
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7. How do you differentiate mortals and fairies in these productions? And how are the mortal and fairy realms created?
8. How do the productions engage with/work with the restrictions of Covid?
9. Are these productions ‘of pandemic’ or ‘in pandemic’ - that is are they overtly set in a pandemic or is pandemic a backdrop. If not, does the social distancing speak to this moment?

### Notes on Mortal Fools

1. Play the game!
2. Where do you end up? I will ask for a show of hands as there are a number of endings. If you are offered a redo do that - this will only happen once and it will be after one of your first choices.
3. What influenced your decisions -are you trying to replicate the play or go against it?
4. Does this game reframe *Helena* or *Hermia*?
5. What does this game say about gender politics?
6. Did you meet the fairies? Or Bottom? If so, did you need to?
7. Does this work as a game?
8. Do you need to know the underlying text?

### Teaching Notes

I taught a predominantly English as a second language seminar group of students that had little to no experience of Shakespeare. This led to fascinating debate as we read plays for the first time that were created the context of plague at a time when we too were ravished by plague.

We had a debate as to whether all lockdown theatre is inherently ‘pandemic’ as it is watched in a pandemic. There was a sense that we accept the distance and awkwardness of Zoom as it is our normal. The debate expanded to *Macbeth* as students revisited the text and found inexplicit allusions to plague. The next week we moved onto *Romeo and Juliet* our work on Lockdown Dream led the students to frame *Romeo and Juliet* as an explicit plague narrative. This played down Mercutio’s plague curse as a school yard: ‘YEAH, get Covid loser’ retort rather than anything more sinister. It also changed our reading of the undelivered letter, as John’s casual ‘oh well’ was the accepted equivalent of a delayed Amazon order.

Wider we debated who ‘owns’ Shakespeare and what can you do with Shakespeare. As we had watched ‘big theatre’ productions in earlier weeks from the RSC, The Globe and The Bridge Theatre moving on Lockdown Productions allowed us to talk about access and gatekeeping.