

**Mark Gatiss**  
**Doctor of Letters**  
**Durham Cathedral, 7 July 2025**

The Department of English Studies is delighted to present Mr Mark Gatiss for an honorary Doctor of Letters, in recognition of his significant contribution to UK culture via television writing, a prize-winning acting career on stage and screen, and a wider commitment to the importance of literature and literary scholarship as a source of entertainment for the most diverse possible public audiences.

Mr Gatiss was born in Sedgefield, County Durham, the son of a colliery engineer, and has achieved a remarkable cultural dominance in the world of television, writing for and starring in *The League of Gentlemen*, *Sherlock*, and *Doctor Who* amongst many others. He is also the author of three well-received historical novels and several works of non-fiction. Much of his writing draws on his interests in Victorian and Edwardian culture, and on an abiding interest in horror, the gothic, and the macabre. Mr Gatiss has also established an impressive stage career, including playing Menenius in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* at the Donmar Warehouse in 2013, and Dr Shpigelsky in Patrick Marber's *Three Days in the Country* at the National Theatre in 2015, for which he won the Laurence Olivier Award for 'Best Actor in a Supporting Role.'

In 2023, he starred as Sir John Gielgud in Jack Thorne's *The Motive and the Cue*, directed by Sam Mendes for the National. He won the 'Best Actor' Olivier for this complex and moving role, exploring Gielgud's relationship with wide renown, his lauded stage career, and his sexuality as a gay man. Reviewing the play for *The Guardian*, Arifa Akbar wrote that 'Gielgud's inner complications are [...] searingly explored,' while Quentin Letts for *The Times* called Mr Gatiss' performance 'eerily good.' Given that Sir John has been described as 'the greatest speaker of Shakespearean verse' of the twentieth century, it is no mean feat to resurrect him on the stage. Writing to an imagined 'young actor' in 1964, Sir John calls acting a 'flexible and contributory form of art' dependent upon 'the originality and selectiveness which are the hall-marks of the true artist.'

Building an original perspective from an interest in literature in place from childhood, Mr Gatiss has proved himself a 'true artist' across several forms. Not everyone, of course, has the good fortune to read English literature at university – indeed, Mr Gatiss did not, instead completing his studies in Theatre Arts at the innovative Bretton Hall College. But his acting and television work is marked by the intention to see literature as a common fund of stories, forms, and means of play amidst which we are all invited to explore.

Not everyone, alas, has the good fortune to be from County Durham, but we are so pleased to have Mr Gatiss to represent our region, and to be here among us today as an example of just how far a training in the arts might take you.

*Vice-Chancellor, I present Mr Mark Gatiss to receive the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.*