



**THE COMICAL, TRAGICAL, AND MAGICAL
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

COMEDY & TRAGEDY

In AST's performance, the actors discuss the definitions of comedy and tragedy and perform the following comic and tragic scenes:

- Beatrice, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act 2, Scene 1
- Gertrude, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Act 4, Scene 7
- Katharina and Petruchio, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Act 2, Scene 1
- Romeo and Juliet, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, Act 4, Scene 3 and Act 5, Scene 3
- Clown and Hamlet, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Act 5, Scene 1
- Pyramus (Bottom) and Thisbe (Flute), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5, Scene 1

Shakespeare, like many Renaissance playwrights, relies on the definitions of comedy and tragedy established by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in *Poetics*, his work that discusses dramatic theory. Aristotle defines comedy as a story that shows the rise of a common place character from misery to prosperity, and tragedy as a story that shows a character that is heroic and high-born falling from greatness to despair and often death.

Playwrights before Shakespeare's time tended to leave the drama of life, the comedy and the tragedy, centered on the characters of higher classes. What set Shakespeare's work apart was that he gave all his characters—from monarchs to maids—human emotions, desires, and flaws. He was one of the first to write of the humanity in us all.

Questions to discuss:

- 1) How would you define comedy? Tragedy?
- 2) There are many types of comedy: farce, parody, slapstick, irony. Discuss some of these and examples of such in the Shakespearean plays with which you are familiar.
- 3) Many of today's "tragic" stories end with some note of hope. Shakespeare's tragedies ended with no hope and often with several of the main characters dying. Why do you think we don't see contemporary tragedies like Shakespeare's?



Did you know?

Shakespeare never attended a university.

WHY STUDY SHAKESPEARE...?

BY AMANDA MABILLARD

Ben Jonson anticipated Shakespeare's dazzling future when he declared, "He was not of an age, but for all time!" in the preface to the First Folio. While most people know that Shakespeare is, in fact, the most popular dramatist and poet the Western world has ever produced, students new to his work often wonder why this is so. The following are the top four reasons why Shakespeare has stood the test of time.

Illumination of the Human Experience

Shakespeare's ability to summarize the range of human emotions in simple yet profoundly eloquent verse is perhaps the greatest reason for his enduring popularity. If you cannot find words to express how you feel about love or music or growing older, Shakespeare can speak for you. No author in the Western world has penned more beloved passages. Shakespeare's work is the reason John Bartlett compiled the first major book of familiar quotations.



Great Stories

Marchette Chute, in the *Introduction* to her famous retelling of Shakespeare's stories, summarizes one of the reasons for Shakespeare's immeasurable fame:

William Shakespeare was the most remarkable storyteller that the world has ever known... Shakespeare told every kind of story – comedy, tragedy, history, melodrama, adventure, love stories and fairy tales – and each of them so well that they have become immortal. In all the world of storytelling he has become the greatest name (*Stories from Shakespeare*, 11). Shakespeare's stories transcend time and culture. Modern storytellers continue to adapt Shakespeare's tales to suit our modern world, whether it be the tale of Lear on a farm in Iowa, Romeo and Juliet on the mean streets of New York City, or Macbeth in feudal Japan.

Compelling Characters

Shakespeare invented his share of stock characters, but his truly great characters – particularly his tragic heroes – are unequalled in literature, dwarfing even the sublime creations of the Greek tragedians. Shakespeare's great characters have remained popular because of their complexity; for example, we can see ourselves as gentle Hamlet, forced against his better nature to seek murderous revenge. For this reason Shakespeare is deeply admired by actors, and many consider playing a Shakespearean character to be the most difficult and most rewarding role possible.

Ability to Turn a Phrase

Many of the common expressions now thought to be clichés were Shakespeare's creations. Chances are you use Shakespeare's expressions all the time even though you may not know

it is the Bard you are quoting. You may think that fact is "neither here nor there", but that's "the short and the long of it." Bernard Levin said it best in the following quote about Shakespeare's impact on our language:

If you cannot understand my argument, and declare "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise - why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then - to give the devil his due - if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I were dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then - by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts - it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare. (*The Story of English*, 145)

References

Chute, Marchette. *Stories from Shakespeare*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1956.

Levin, Bernard. Quoted in *The Story of English*. Robert McCrum, William Cran and Robert MacNeil. Viking: 1986).

Mabillard, Amanda. *Why Study Shakespeare?* [Shakespeare Online](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/whystudyshakespeare.html). 30 Aug. 2011. < <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/whystudyshakespeare.html> >.



Did you know?

Shakespeare's epigraph reads:

"GOOD FRENDE FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIGG THE DUST ENCLOSED HEARE:
BLESTE BE YE MAN THAT SPARES THES STONES,
AND CURST BE HE THAT MOVES MY BONES."

THEATRE IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY

Playhouses

To earn extra payment while still entertaining the public, actors and wandering minstrels temporarily adapted inns and animal-baiting rings or "game houses" for outdoor playhouses. A booth stage was set up against a wall on one side of the yard, while the audience gathered the stage on the other three sides. Out of these "natural" playhouses grew two major classes of permanent Elizabethan playhouse, "public" and "private."



Private playhouses featured actors performing in upper class locations such as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the homes of great lords and civil officials. Most private playhouses, such as The Second Blackfriars, only held about 700 spectators while public playhouses like The Swan held about 3,000 spectators. Because the audiences for private playhouses were much smaller, many of Shakespeare's plays were instead viewed outdoors where the lower class could also enjoy the theatrical entertainment.

Design

In 1576, James Burbage built the first permanent outdoor theatre in London called "The Theatre." The structure was based on the style of old Greek and Roman open-air amphitheatres. The Globe theatre was also constructed in this style. The outdoor theater consisted of the pit or yard, the stage, the heavens supported by posts rising from the yard, the discovery space where actors could be revealed, and three galleries for audience members.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and
women merely players;
They have their exits and
their entrances, And one
man in his time plays many
parts, His acts being seven
ages."

Jaques, *As You Like It*

Production

Unlike plays today with elaborate sets and props, theater of the Elizabethan Age lacked grandeur sets; however, the actors still wore magnificent costumes provided by the company. The Elizabethans used their imagination to portray the scenery and special effects of the play. For instance, spectators had to imagine scenes that were set at night even though the plays took place in mid-afternoon. The audience was not separated by the dropping of a curtain between acts and scenes, so playwrights of this time signaled a change in scene by having everyone onstage exit at the end of one scene and then bringing one or more different characters to enter the following scene.

Audiences

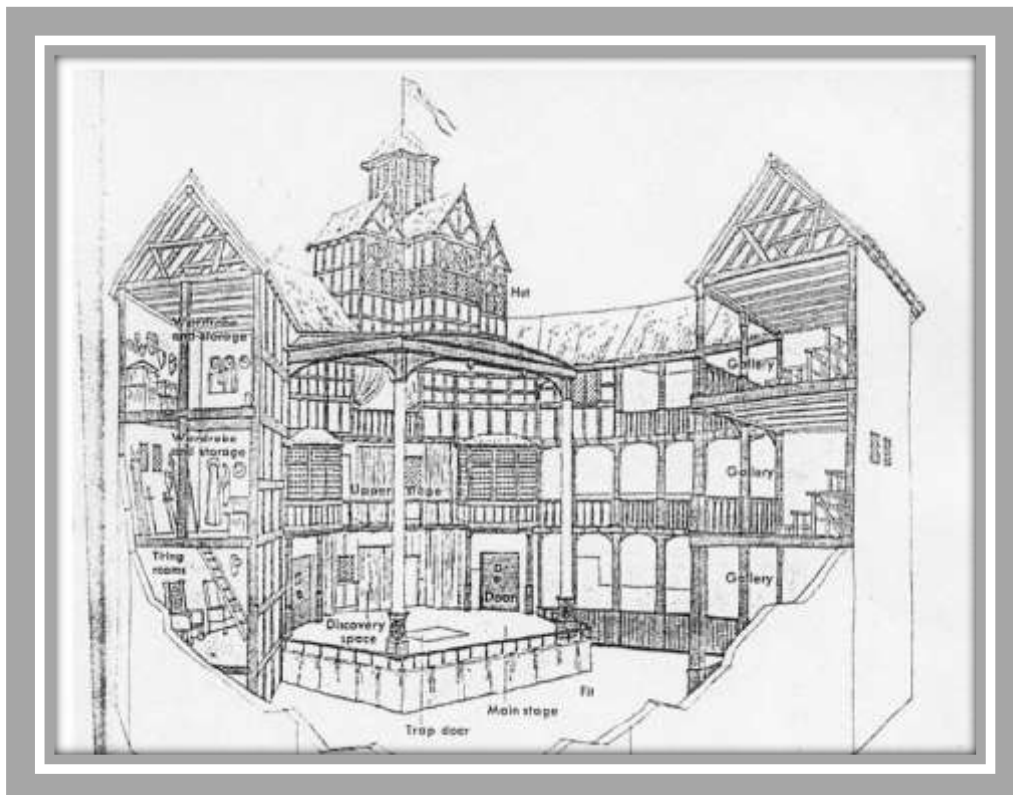
The majority of the spectators in the outdoor theaters stood in the dirt yard and were called “groundlings.” The groundlings stood in a circle about sixty feet in length from the front of the stage that stood five feet off the ground. Because these seats cost a penny, which was roughly one-sixth of a day’s wages, we can safely assume that the groundlings wanted their money’s worth and would often shout encouragement and applause for what they approved of, or boo and throw rotten fruit and vegetables at productions they did not care for.

Actors

Most actors were quite poor, but a few dozen were able to establish a name for themselves and even become shareholders in their respective companies. Being an actor was no easy task, especially since a company played six days a week and rehearsals seemed to never end. An actor would learn a new role every week, with thirty to forty roles to memorize, and to make matters more complicated, an actor would only get his lines and cues in a rolled up parchment, not the whole script. Over a period of three years, a tragedian actor such as Edward Alleyn, would learn not only fifty new parts but also retain twenty or more old roles under his belt

No Girls Allowed!

During the Elizabethan era in England, women were prohibited by law from acting on the stage. Companies instead hired young boys to play the roles of female characters. Because their voices had not yet changed and their muscles had not fully developed, they spoke with a relatively high pitch, were slender, and were able to pass off as women when in full costume. Just imagine strong female roles like Juliet, Rosalind, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, Titania, or Cleopatra being portrayed by a young boy! Some Shakespeare productions today utilize a same-gender cast (either all male or all female)—why might a director want to do this? What differences do you think an all-male or all-female cast would make and why?



THEE, THOU, AND YOU

BY DAVID CRYSTAL

"By the time of Shakespeare, the word *you* had developed a role as an alternative to *thou / thee*. It was used by people of lower rank or status to those above them (such as ordinary people to nobles, children to parents, servants to masters, nobles to the monarch), and was also the standard way for the upper classes to talk to each other. By contrast, *thou / thee* were used by people of higher rank to those beneath them, and by the lower classes to each other; also, in elevated poetic style, in addressing God, and in talking to witches, ghosts, and other supernatural beings. There were also some special cases: for example, a husband might address his wife as *thou*, and she reply with *you*.

Of particular interest are those cases where an extra emotional element entered the situation, and the use of *thou* or *you* broke the expected conventions. *Thou* commonly expressed special intimacy or affection; *you*, formality, politeness, and distance. *Thou* could also be used, even by an inferior to a superior, to express such feelings as anger and contempt. The use of *thou* to a person of equal rank could thus easily count as an insult, as Sir Toby Belch well knows when he advises Sir Andrew Aguecheek on how to write a challenge to 'the Count's youth' (Viola): 'if thou thou'st him some thrice, it shall not be amiss' (*Twelfth Night*, III.ii.42), himself using a demeaning *thou* in a speech situation where the norm is *you*. Likewise, the use of *you* when *thou* was expected (such as from master to servant) would also require special explanation.

David Crystal, ed., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71.

so-lil-o-quy:

[suh-lil-uh-kwee]

The Latin base words in soliloquy are *Solus* ("to be alone") and *Loqui* ("to speak"). In the theatre, a soliloquy is a speech during which a character who is on stage alone (or thinks he or she is alone) reveals his or her thoughts to the audience. In general, the audience can believe that what a character says in soliloquy is true, particularly since the character speaking is not addressing any other characters on stage. Pay particular attention to these instances—they may expose secrets that the character is hiding or even hint at the next big event in a twisting and exciting plot.



Did you know?

Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway. Together, they had three children: Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet.

SHAKESPEARE'S FOOLS

In Shakespeare's day, the fool (or clown) was traditionally given license to speak out where others had to remain silent. When in *As You Like It*, Jacques says, "motley's the only wear," he is alluding to the freedom of speech traditionally granted the court jester, whose costume—multicoloured and patched ("motley")—proclaimed his eccentricity (2.7.34).



Famous Renaissance clown, Will Kemp, 1600

The fool was a familiar sight in the courts of Renaissance princes and nobles, and some achieved considerable fame. On the Renaissance stage, fool characters (and the talented actors who played them) became quite popular as well.

Through his insightful, witty, and comic characters like **Touchstone** of "*As You Like It*," **Feste** in "*Twelfth Night*," the **Porter** in *Macbeth*, and the **Gravediggers** in *Hamlet*, the Bard elevated the fool, often using him not only as a "comic relief" to ease the tension in his tragedies, but also as the voice of reason and rationale. This blending of comedy and tragedy played well to both the seated audience and those who could afford only to stand on the ground at the foot of the stage.

Best, Michael. "Jesters and Fools." Internet Shakespeare Editions, University of Victoria: Victoria, BC, 2001-2010. 1 September 2011. <<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/help/introcite.html>>.



Did you know?

Shakespeare's complete works consist of 884,647 words and 118,406 lines.

COSTUMES IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY

In the theatre of Shakespeare's day, costumes were invested with meaning much differently than they are in our film and stage productions today. Records show that playing companies spent a substantial portion of their money on costumes, which were elaborate, expensive, and of the latest fashion. Scholar Russ McDonald cites one instance in which the value of a costume outweighed the value of the play: "For a production of Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in 1603, the Lord Worcester's Men paid the author six pounds for the play, but spent six pounds, thirteen shillings, for the gown worn by the heroine" (112). Costumes were among a playing company's most valuable assets.



Attitudes toward clothing, class, and gender complicated the importance of costumes to the Renaissance theatre. Religious moralists denounced cross-dressing, and given the status of strictly male actors, cross-dressing was unavoidable when aiming for suspension of disbelief. Not only was cross-gender dressing an issue, cross-dressing socially also raised the eyebrows of nobles and wealthy audience members. A poor, unrespectable actor donning the robes of a king or the garments of a noble would have been highly frowned upon. Authorities even passed legal codes on clothing—known as "sumptuary laws"—to try to regulate dress, which remained a controversial subject, both on stage and off.

Russ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001).



THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Live theatre is very different from film. When you go to a movie theatre, you don't have to worry about distracting the actors you're watching, for example. Also, while a movie is the same each time you watch it, a play changes with every performance because every show has a new audience and new possibilities. The performance you will see is unique –it will never happen exactly the same way again. Please enjoy this experience to the fullest by following a few simple guidelines.

- Arrive a few minutes early so that you can enjoy the entire experience.
- Please turn off your cell phone and do not text during the show.
- Please do not talk during the performance. Intermission is a great time to talk to your friends about the show, so try to save your comments until then.
- Please do not eat or drink during the performance.
- Please keep your feet on the floor (not on the chairs).
- Please stay seated until intermission or the end of the play.
- Please come back with a friend! Seeing a play is even more fun when you have someone to share it with!

ABOUT AST

Founded in 2006, The Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre produces a repertory of family-friendly professional productions each summer in Conway. With our missions of artistic excellence, educational opportunities, and community outreach, the Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre adds something unique in our region and provides thousands of families with a one-of-a-kind experience in a world-class facility.



After 5 seasons of outstanding theatre, education, and outreach opportunities, over 10,000 tickets sold to date, over 1000 tickets given away to local students and charities, over 75 intern scholarships created, and over 150 theatre artists hired from all over the country, 2010 is proving to be a great year for this one-of-a-kind festival, and we hope to see you again (and again and again!). For this theatre to most effectively serve our community, we need to represent our community! Become a part of this exciting experiment as a board member, volunteer, season ticket holder, member, or patron. Thank you for supporting your local theatre.

FOR MORE DETAILS AND INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARKANSAS SHAKESPEARE THEATRE, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

[HTTP://WWW.ARKSHAKES.COM/](http://www.arkshakes.com/)