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William Shakespeare: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies

Course Guidebook

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He received a B.A. from Yale University and a Ph.D. from Princeton. He is the author of *The Court Comedies of John Lyly* (1969) and *Shakespeare's English Kings* (1977), the latter a classic in its field. He edited Middleton's comedy *A Mad World, My Masters* for the Oxford *Complete Works of Thomas Middleton* (1996). He has published or delivered at conferences more than twenty papers on Shakespeare and other dramatists.

Professor Saccio has directed productions of *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*. He has devised and directed several programs of scenes from Shakespeare and from modern British drama, and he served as dramaturg for the productions of his Dartmouth colleagues. He has acted the Shakespearean roles of Casca, Angelo, Bassanio, and Henry IV as well as various parts in the ancient plays of Plautus and the modern plays of Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and Peter Shaffer. ■

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William Shakespeare: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies

Scope:

In thirty-six half-hour lectures, *William Shakespeare: Comedies, Histories, Tragedies* introduces the plays of Shakespeare and delineates the achievement that makes Shakespeare the leading playwright in Western civilization. The key to that achievement is his "abundance," not only the number of plays he wrote and the length of each one, but also the variety of human experiences they depict, the multitude of actions and characters they contain, the combination of public and private life they deal with, the richness of feelings they express and can provoke in an audience and in readers, and the fullness of language and suggestion.

The first two lectures are introductory. They consider how Shakespeare's plays have been found valuable by four centuries of readers, and how they have been interpreted and reinterpreted by the generations who have read and seen them. The lectures consider the kind of theater for which he wrote, the characteristic structures of his plays, and the way the plays easily mingle events from different realms: different social levels, different levels of realism, different metaphysical contexts.

The course then proceeds to consider the plays in terms of genre. Lectures 3 through 10 discuss four comedies. *Twelfth Night* offers an example of basic Shakespearean comic structure and subject matter: courtship by several young couples. Renaissance courtship practices are discussed, together with their implications about the place of romantic love in human life as a whole. Shakespeare also includes in his survey of lovers Malvolio the ambitious steward, for whom courtship is a means of social advancement. *The Taming of the Shrew* provides a more realistic look at bourgeois marriage customs and the place of a strong woman in a patriarchal society. It shows as well Shakespeare experimenting with an unusually sharp collision of romance and farce. *The Merchant of Venice* entails a particularly lofty form of romantic idealism in the courtship plot, but it confronts that idealism with the problematic, possibly tragic, character of Shylock, who has forced generations

of actors into reinterpretation of Shakespeare. *Measure for Measure* shows Shakespeare on the verge of breaking out of comic conventions altogether. The characters marry at the end, as is customary, but the route to their unions is a gritty path entailing near-rape and near-execution via the courtrooms and the sexual underground of a corrupt modern society.

Lectures 11 through 18 deal with five plays drawn from English history. The nature of the history play is explained. Richard III is followed through the arc of his villainous and entertaining career. *Richard II* raises constitutional problems that vex us still: what can be done with a ruler who is undoubtedly entitled to rule and is also damaging the realm? The two plays named after Henry IV show Shakespeare's widest scope in depicting the realm of England from throne room to tavern to countryside, and they introduce Shakespeare's most remarkable comic creation, Falstaff. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare kills Falstaff in a scene of extraordinary artistic skill and emotional effect, and then takes the king to a military victory that still arouses all our conflicted convictions about the morality of warfare.

Lectures 19 through 36 deal with Shakespeare's tragedies. They show him taking Romeo and Juliet, who should be the leading pair of lovers in a comedy, and plunging their private bliss in the public violence of a city torn by feud. Why ancient Rome was important to Shakespeare (and to the Renaissance as a whole) is explored in two lectures on *Julius Caesar*. Two lectures on *Troilus and Cressida* show Shakespeare re-writing Homer into a bitter satire on vainglorious men and unfaithful women. Finally, three lectures apiece are devoted to each of the four greatest tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, so that the richness and variety of each can be explored. Emphasis falls on the scope of the tragic effect: Shakespeare's acute development of the inner consciousness in his tragic soliloquies, placed within the far-ranging philosophical and theological implications of tragic events for the whole of human life.

As with his students at Dartmouth, Professor Saccio expects his listeners and viewers to have some familiarity with the plays (he does not waste time on basic plot summary), but otherwise he provides the critical tools necessary for the appreciation of Shakespeare's world, his artistry, his significance, and his emotional power. ■

Shakespeare Then and Now

Lecture 1

This is a course in the plays of William Shakespeare. It will explore some of the most powerful works of art available to us in the Western tradition. They first filled theaters in London 400 years ago, and they continue to please, to move, and to enlighten many people today.

Shakespeare was an extremely prolific playwright, composing 38 surviving plays as well as 154 sonnets and several other poems. In about the year 1601, the scholar Gabriel Harvey said *Hamlet* pleased "the wiser sort." Several years earlier, the hack writer Thomas Nashe had described Shakespeare's effect on his audiences. Puritans said plays were pretense and provided bad examples of immoral behavior. Nashe countered that the plays honored history and provided good examples of valor and heroism.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-120971.

English actor Edmund Kean in *Richard III*.

Shakespeare's plays have enriched many generations of readers and listeners. They have encouraged patriotism. They have provided a livelihood for actors; e.g., following the Puritans' closure of England's theaters between 1642 and 1660. They have become important in school and university curricula. They have assumed centrality in the culture of the English-speaking world—indeed, in all European-based cultures. John Dryden and Samuel Johnson found Shakespeare to be the greatest modern writer. Matthew Arnold and Ralph Waldo Emerson found him to be semi-divine.

Different generations have interpreted him according to their own interests. The most influential scholarship of the 1940s and 1950s saw Shakespeare

as a conservative figure who upheld the "Elizabethan World Picture." More recent critics interpret Shakespeare as an advocate of liberal or even radical positions in favor of underprivileged classes and feminism. Shakespeare is a "culture hero": a mythical figure, a founder of the society, a lawgiver, a prophet. Each age must reinterpret such a figure according to its own needs.

The most extreme reinterpretation is anti-Stratfordianism, which argues that someone other than Shakespeare wrote the plays attributed to him.

The most extreme reinterpretation is anti-Stratfordianism, which argues that someone other than Shakespeare wrote the plays attributed to him. There is no factual basis for such arguments. Anti-Stratfordianism stems from false expectations. People expect great playwrights to be celebrities whose lives are recorded in detail. People expect plays about aristocrats to be written by an aristocrat. People expect plays with learned allusions to have been written by a university graduate.

Anti-Stratfordianism is an extreme version of a natural response to Shakespeare's abundance: the desire to reconceptualize him to meet the expectations, interests, or fancies of the present. ■

Essential Reading

Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*. If a briefer account is preferable, most one-volume complete Shakespeares include the basic facts in the introduction.

Supplementary Reading

Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, Part 6: "Deviations."

Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*.

Questions to Consider

1. Discuss the sorts of things that readers and audiences nowadays expect of a person who is labeled a "great writer."

2. Do stage performances run the risk of immorality? Explore the issues involved.

The Nature of Shakespeare's Plays

Lecture 2

Aristotle observed that it was a principle of Greek drama to have a single unified action, but Shakespeare regularly has multiple plots; three or four couples court one another in a comedy. ... Three or four parties are scheming against each other in a history or a tragedy. And the number of dead bodies at the end of a tragedy is ultimately controlled only by the absence of a front curtain; you have to have enough living people standing up to carry off the corpses.

Shakespeare was a professional man of the theater. His dramatic genius could flourish because he lived at a time when theater itself flourished. He was by no means a solitary genius. Shakespeare's plays are abundant in their contents. They have five acts and many scenes, lines, characters, and plots. The plots are derived from diverse sources. Originality lay less in one's invention of stories than in his treatment and development of existing stories. *Measure for Measure*, for instance, was based on a basic plot that had been often retold. Shakespeare gave the familiar story a new twist, and therein lay his genius.

The size of the stage in Shakespeare's time invited both epic and intimate effects. The stage features known as the heavens and the hell provided a potential supernatural context. The size of the stage invites setting personal lives in a wide social context. For instance, the large stages of Shakespeare's time allowed the depiction of eavesdropping. There is a case of double eavesdropping in *Troilus and Cressida*, in which a single event means five different things to three different sets of characters.

Shakespeare found brilliant ways to make the complex inner self speak.

Shakespeare keeps both the private and the public in interplay. He presents the title character of *Richard II* in both his private and public roles. Shakespeare found brilliant ways to make the complex inner self speak. For instance, he invented the modern soliloquy. *Romeo and Juliet* offers another example of this dichotomy between public and

private identities. Romeo's desire to be altogether private in his love for Juliet is thwarted by his public identity as a Capulet. Despite the centrality of the feelings, motivations, and desires of Shakespeare's characters, we are continually aware that their lives are intertwined with the condition of the societies in which they live.

Shakespeare keeps the down-to-earth and the imaginative in interplay. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice refers at once to the pain her mother suffered in giving birth to her and to the fantastic vision of a star dancing over the scene of her birth. Cleopatra's dream of Antony romanticizes her dead lover but also refers to qualities that Antony genuinely had.

Hemmings and Condell first collected Shakespeare's plays under the title *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*. Nevertheless, Shakespeare strains at the boundaries of generic definition. Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies are quite different from those of ancient Greece. There is no ancient Greek analogue to Shakespeare's history plays. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 5, scene 2.

———, *Richard II*, Act 3, scene 2.

———, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 3, scene 1.

———, *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 5, scene 2.

Supplementary Reading

Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe*.

Questions to Consider

1. Compare the characteristic form and structure of a Shakespeare play with a play of another period, ancient or modern. What is gained or lost by the "abundance" of the former as opposed to the more disciplined focus of the latter?

2. Do the multifarious contents of a Shakespearean play make it unreasonably difficult to grasp?

Twelfth Night—Shakespearean Comedy

Lecture 3

Comedy is concerned with desire and fulfillment. People are in a state of yearning, which of course entails a state of frustration, and eventually, they arrive at a condition of satisfaction.

Shakespearean comedy centers on the human desire for romantic love, which moves through courtship to marriage. This comedic pattern is as basic as the tragic pattern of decline and fall. Shakespeare has helped to establish modern Western ideas about courtship and marriage. The plots of comedies concern overcoming the barriers to the fulfillment of desire. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, these obstacles to desire-fulfillment are external to the characters; in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, they are internal to the characters. These obstacles generate the major plot patterns of the plays. The external barriers lead to an action of escape from the place where the barriers rule; internal barriers lead to an action of invasion into the deadlocked situation.

Shakespeare especially perceives that love is both foolish, prompting us into behavior that looks silly to the rest of the world, and wonderful, a profound and character-changing experience. Romantic comedies are thus both funny and moving. Foolish behavior arises particularly because societies invent highly artificial codes of conduct and speech for lovers. Courtship involves a highly stylized and ritualized set of behaviors. Early twentieth-century Americans courted with restraint, formal visits, and chaperones. Late twentieth-century American lovers converse in psychobabble. Late sixteenth-century English lovers courted in ballads, formal speeches of praise drawing classical mythology from Ovid, and sonnets drawing stylized descriptions from Petrarch.

Foolish behavior arises particularly because societies invent highly artificial codes of conduct and speech for lovers.

The main plot of *Twelfth Night* illustrates and contests these sixteenth-century conventions. Orsino in 1.1 praises Olivia and compares himself to the hunter Actaeon, the main character in a story from Ovid's Greek mythology. Orsino describes himself as a stag pursued by hounds representing his unsatisfied desires. Acting at Orsino's behest, Cesario (Viola in male disguise) approaches Olivia with a formal speech of praise, but Olivia rejects the praise and mocks the method. Speaking more directly, Cesario addresses Olivia with masculine appreciation *and* feminine insight.

Cesario rebukes Olivia for cloistering herself from human relationships. According to the parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew, we do not own our possessions, merits, virtues, and other natural gifts and abilities. Instead, we hold them in trust from God and must put them to work in the world. The movement from self-absorption to generosity and reciprocal interaction with others is a basic measure of character in Shakespeare, especially for lovers. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*.

Supplementary Reading

See the film of *Twelfth Night*, directed by Trevor Nunn, or the BBC-TV videotape.

Hawkins, "The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy."

Warren and Wells, Introduction to *Twelfth Night* (Oxford edition).

Questions to Consider

1. During the play, we see Orsino, Cesario, and Malvolio court Olivia, and Olivia court Cesario and Sebastian. Compare and contrast modes of courtship within the play.

2. What varying tones do you find in the play? Is it purely comic? Are there moments of melancholy, anger, and other feelings that qualify the comedy? How does this affect our experience as we read or see the play?

Twelfth Night—Malvolio in Love

Lecture 4

Shakespeare is a comprehensive writer. Comprehensiveness is one of his great virtues. He closes this comedy with predominant happiness, but reminds us that there are always some people who decline to join the supposedly universal celebrations of common humanity.

In this discussion of *Twelfth Night*, we take a closer look at the characters of the play. This enables us to contrast the young lovers with the one character who is clearly outside their circle, yet would like to be in it. That character is Malvolio (whose very name gives us a hint of his true nature). Malvolio is also placed in contrast with a group of lesser characters who plot—and achieve—revenge as he plots for the hand of Olivia. We will see that this is a comedy with a bite, which does not necessarily resolve itself into the characteristic "happy" ending of Shakespearean romantic comedy in general.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LOT 8520.

Malvolio in the dark (Act 4, Scene 2).

In his soliloquy in Act 4 Scene 3, Sebastian acknowledges the bizarre quality of events in Illyria, and he argues for Olivia's sanity nonetheless. The real point of the speech lies, however, in his eager embrace of the good things of the world: the sun, the air, the Countess. This is a vital part of the view of life in Shakespearean comedy. The scene of Sebastian in the sun contrasts directly with that of Malvolio confined to the darkhouse, which represents his inability and unwillingness to see beyond himself.

In a great Elizabethan country house, the upper servants were significant

people, perhaps members of the lesser gentry themselves. Malvolio is a person of consequence, conscientious in his job as estate manager. His concern for the estate contrasts with Sir Toby's merry-making. This is one of the instances, recurring in Shakespeare, of opposition between festival and duty, Carnival and Lent, merry-making and Puritanism. Twelfth Night, or Epiphany (January 6), is the festive occasion that follows the solemnity of Christmas. Malvolio has the Puritan desire for power and the Puritan repressiveness but not the Puritan religious zeal or devotion. He is negatively virtuous; he wants to do away with all festivity.

Malvolio's concern with decorum and order is especially repressive because it coexists with the indecorum in his soul, his wish to rise above his place by marrying Olivia. Shakespeare does not consider it wrong to desire a desirable woman, but Malvolio wants her not for herself but for the worldly position he would achieve through her. Worldly position is not wrong either, except that Malvolio wants it only to exert trivial power over others. His fantasy of the marriage to Olivia in 2.5 consists entirely of tinpot tyranny.

The plot of Toby, Maria, Andrew, Feste, and Fabian to punish Malvolio for his repressiveness and threats is a precisely measured piece of comic revenge. Their revenge is exact and just. They tyrannize over him and make him appear to be mad. The darkhouse is a symbol of Malvolio's self-ignorance and egomania. At some point, however, we begin to feel sorry for Malvolio. The comic revenge turns slightly sour as we perceive his genuine suffering. His fate is exact and just, but few if any of us can endure such strict justice. At the end, Malvolio achieves some dignity in his blank-verse appeal to Olivia for some explanation of why he has been abused.

The darkhouse is a symbol of Malvolio's self-ignorance and egomania.

Malvolio refuses to acknowledge his faults, and he rejects Fabian's peace-making overtures. Shakespeare's inclusion of one unreconciled person who still wants revenge in the otherwise happy and harmonious ending is a characteristic mark of his comprehensiveness. Malvolio's refusal to be reconciled dilutes our pleasure slightly at the end of the play. Shakespeare thereby anchors the play in real life. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*.

Supplementary Reading

Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, chapter 10.

Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, chapter 9.

Questions to Consider

1. Malvolio is a somewhat problematic character for a Shakespeare comedy. Is his punishment, stimulated by revenge, condign? Why do you think Shakespeare fails to redeem him at the end of the play?

2. After listening to the lectures on *The Merchant of Venice* (Lectures 7 and 8), compare and contrast Malvolio and Shylock in terms of their character, actions, and downfall. Is one more sympathetic than the other? More realistic? More justified in his actions?

The Taming of the Shrew—Getting Married in the 1590s

Lecture 5

Lots of people have disliked [*The Taming of the Shrew*], and the play has caused considerable amount of argument and hard scholarly research from feminist scholars in the last 25 years.

The Taming of the Shrew presents problems about both doctrine and action. The play is realistic in its survey of courtship practices of the 1590, though many of these practices appear odd or even offensive to the modern reader. Propertied parents often arranged marriages for their children. Dowries and dowers were expected as we now expect college degrees, for economic security. The source of wealth for young people of the upper classes lay in the family, not in working at a career. In individual cases, arranged marriages might succeed or fail.

Some preachers and moralists in late sixteenth-century England discouraged arranged marriage and argued for more consideration of personal affection. Romancers and poets could elevate personal affection among young couples to an absolute. In *Shrew*, the arranged marriage of Baptista's daughter Kate with Petruchio works better than the romantic one of his other daughter Bianca with Lucentio.

Some preachers and moralists in late sixteenth-century England discouraged arranged marriage and argued for more consideration of personal affection.

Kate closes the play with a 44-line speech in which she emphatically agrees with the doctrine of male supremacy in marriage. Actresses have played the speech for irony. This can be done either crudely or elegantly. Actresses can contradict the speech with gestures. Difficulties arise when the literal meaning of the speech is undercut or ignored. The doctrine of male supremacy requires careful statement. *Shrew* exemplifies the usefulness of old plays in reminding us that people have not always behaved or thought as we do today.

Kate's speech may be done sincerely but framed to acknowledge a variety of views. In Andrei Serban's production of *Shrew*, Kate recites the speech slowly and uncertainly, as if discovering something new. In the epilogue of the Serban production, the actors appear in their ordinary clothes and embrace each other in ways that suggest a multiplicity of relationships among them. Thus Serban supplements Shakespeare's portrayal of the "full stream of the world" by suggesting that heterosexual union with female submission, as depicted in the play, is not the only relationship possible. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Supplementary Reading

See Zeffirelli film with Burton-Taylor or ACT video directed by Ball.

Cook, *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and His Society*.

Kahn, "*The Taming of the Shrew*: Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage."

Saccio, "Shrewd and Kindly Farce."

Questions to Consider

1. How does Bianca either reflect or contrast with Kate?

2. Is Kate straightforward or ironic in her long final speech?

The Taming of the Shrew—Farce and Romance
Lecture 6

The verbal wit of the play is often farcical. Compared to the lyrical strain of speeches in later Shakespearean comedies like *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*, the wit of *The Taming of the Shrew* comes near wisecracking.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, an early comedy, Shakespeare adventurously combines farce with romance. The romantic thread lies in Kate's discovery of herself and of love for her husband. The bulk of the action, though, is farce. The play has many farcical elements and characters. Tranio displays the trickery and disguising inherited from ancient Roman farce. Grumio is a pantaloon out of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte. Petruchio and his servants engage in slapstick. The verbal wit consists of wisecracks and grotesque catalogues. The script invites farcical invention from directors and actors.

Farce has a poor reputation with critics, and it is often described negatively. Robert Heilman has averred that farces typically depict limited personalities that operate in mechanical fashion. Those having this sort of personality cannot feel or think deeply, and they are not moved by scruple. According to Heilman, farce represents a selective anesthetizing of the person. Such a mode of critical description could be applied to tragedy or any other genre with equally devastating effect. Characters in many of Shakespeare's tragedies show personality traits that Heilman attributes to characters in comedic farces: they rush to extremes, they fail to pause or reflect on their actions (or do so faultily), they lack a sense of humor about their problems.

In *The Shrew*, farce celebrates the virtues of energy, ingenuity, and resilience.

Farce deserves a positive description. In *The Shrew*, farce celebrates the virtues of energy, ingenuity, and resilience. These virtues are especially demonstrated by the male characters arriving in Padua: Petruchio, Lucentio, and Tranio. Petrochio's speeches exemplify energy. Ingenuity is exemplified by the

suitors' use of unconventional means to attain their ends. Both Petruchio and Tranio illustrate resilience in their stubbornness and adaptability, and in their ability to endure repeated setbacks. Kate also has verbal and physical energy and determination, but at the start she suffers from compulsiveness and destructiveness. Over time she grows in farcical range. Petruchio teaches her to play, thus releasing her energies more fully.

Play—game or pastime—is the dominating activity and metaphor of *The Shrew*. At first Kate's understandable anger prevented her from playing games, and she has not met any men worth her respect. She is "curst," and thus she cannot play and is not fully human. There are faint suggestions in the second and third acts of her interest in Petruchio.

The development of her mind is more carefully traced in the fourth and fifth acts. She becomes sympathetic with the victims of Petruchio's temper-tantrums, such as Grumio and the other servants. She is perplexed by Petruchio's claim that he acts out of love. She resorts to anger and insists on obvious facts. In 4.5, the scene of the sun and the moon, she realizes that Petruchio is playing games. She starts playing with him, and she quickly learns to keep up with his rule-changing, to exaggerate, and to mock. Games have a cathartic effect. They release Kate from her compulsiveness and her insistence on literal fact.

Since the story of the shrew is a play enacted by the anonymous lord's players for the tinker Christopher Sly, it is all a game. Theater is Shakespeare's great game, in which he persuades audiences that the sun is the moon and that a thirteen-year-old boy is a nubile virgin named Kate or Bianca. Such games may be therapeutic. Once Kate loses her anger, she becomes a very effective *farceuse*. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew.*

Questions to Consider

1. In view of the (often) negative view of farce expressed by critics, how can we explain its enduring appeal across time, language and even culture?

2. The basic premise of this play has been adapted, with greater or lesser effect, into Broadway musicals (*Kiss Me Kate*), westerns, television sit-coms and even updated versions of the Bard's play set in contemporary times. You are a producer/director for a new movie version. Which contemporary actress-comedienne would cast for Kate? How would you direct her to bring out the farcical elements discussed in this lecture?

The Merchant of Venice—Courting the Heiress

Lecture 7

Over 50 years ago, a great actor, director, and Shakespearean critic, Harley Granville-Barker, said there was no more reality in Shylock's bond and the Lord of Belmont's will than there is in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and he spoke wisely.

The Merchant of Venice is a fairy tale. Winning the hand of a princess by a lottery is unrealistic. Borrowing money on collateral of a pound of flesh is unrealistic. Shakespeare frequently used unlikely plots. The purpose of art is not realism. Characters and events may be true to life without being realistic on the surface. Portia's father's will displays a genuine concern of fathers.

The casket plot contrasts the three suitors. The prince of Morocco is a man of heroic exploit and reputation. His rhetoric imitates that of Marlowe's Tamburlaine. His love is merely the desire to have what every other man desires. The prince of Arragon is a snob. He assumes that he deserves Portia. Shakespeare is suspicious of desert, especially in matters of the heart. Like Morocco, Arragon essentially chooses himself rather than Portia.

The leading protagonists of high comedy tend to be women.

Bassanio is a problematic hero since the plot does not allow him to do anything heroic. This is a difficulty that recurs in high comedy, which tends to stress not the manly and heroic values of courage and strength, but the more womanly values of wit, grace, and civilized behavior. Thus, the leading protagonists of high comedy tend to be women. Bassanio has been described as a fortune-hunter out to gain Portia's money in order to repay his debts. Shakespeare describes Bassanio as a knight on a romantic quest. He displays generosity in small matters.

Bassanio's heroism emerges in his choice. The song that precedes his choice distinguishes between desire ("fancy") and love. Bassanio is aware of

this distinction. The casket labels reveal the risk in love. Bassanio's great generosity is to leave the choice to Portia. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV videotape of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, chapter 7.

Coghill, "The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy."

Danson, *The Harmonies of "The Merchant of Venice."*

Questions to Consider

1. How much do we know about Portia? How does she handle her difficult situation?

2. Compare the suitors with lovers elsewhere in Shakespearean comedy—Orsino, Orlando, Benedick.

The Merchant of Venice—Shylock

Lecture 8

Shakespeare's England was almost monolithically Christian, so that to be a Jew was defined negatively. It was to be not a Christian, to be one who had rejected the dispensation of love, mercy and salvation that Christianity says is available through Jesus Christ. [Shylock] is an alien, not part of the Christian community of love.

Shylock may be merely a villain, a character contrasting with the generosity of Antonio, Portia, and Bassanio. The character of Shylock is founded on a three-part stereotype. He is a miser. He is a usurer; money lending at interest was officially condemned but tolerated as a necessary evil. He is a Jew at a time when Jews were thought of simply as "other," as non-Christian, as scapegoats.

In England this stereotype had a special purity. Only in England did Jews dominate finance, albeit temporarily. They were a major source of Crown revenue. The belief that the Jews killed Christian children—the "blood libel"—originated in England. Jews were banished from England between 1290 and the 1660s. No real people could be damaged by English anti-Semitism, since very few Jews lived in England during Shakespeare's time. The stereotype of the Jewish usurer and murderer could flourish in the absence of experience.

Shakespeare develops the character beyond stereotype.

Actors have reinterpreted the role of Shylock over time. We do not know how Richard Burbage played Shylock in 1596. In the late seventeenth century, Shylock was a comic villain. In the eighteenth century, Charles Macklin made Shylock a serious villain. In the Romantic period, Edmund Kean made him an honest villain, marked by directness and honesty. In the Victorian period, Henry Irving made him a heroic patriarch, marked by dignity and heroic pride. In 1970, Laurence Olivier made him a banker-aristocrat of the industrial age.

Shakespeare develops the character beyond stereotype. “Hath not a Jew eyes?” is both a cruel piece of exaggerated and vengeful illogic and an overwhelming outpouring of painful feeling. Revenge is not an automatic, physiological reaction, as bleeding is when pricked or laughing is when tickled. Shylock points out that Jews resemble Christians both in their humanity and—at times—their inhumanity. Shylock contains the faults of us all. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV videotape of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Gross, *Shylock: Four Hundred Years in the Life of a Legend*.

Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*.

Questions to Consider

1. Compare Shylock’s mode of speech with that of Bassanio or Antonio.

2. Shylock does villainous things and yet we feel enormously sympathetic to him at times. Is Shylock a coherent characterization? Consider especially the passage with Tubal at the end of 3.1.

Measure for Measure—Sex in Society

Lecture 9

In this case, the plot is intricate, and unusual, and Shakespeare made some key changes in the sources from which he inherited it.

Like other Shakespearean comedies, *Measure for Measure* ends with four couples on the point of marriage, but the means by which they arrive at this point are unusual. The play derives from an old folktale ("the unjust judge") in which a woman tries to save a man (her husband or brother or father) from execution by begging the judge for a pardon. There are various endings to this scenario.

In this case, the judge, Angelo, acting for the absent duke of Vienna, offers to pardon the young fornicator, Claudio, only if his religious sister, Isabella, will sleep with him (Angelo). When Claudio begs Isabella to comply with Angelo's demand, she rejects his plea. But the disguised duke intervenes, arranging an assignation in which Angelo's rejected fiancée Mariana will substitute for Isabella in Angelo's bed. Although he believes he had slept with Isabella, Angelo nonetheless orders the execution of Claudio. When Angelo is accused of injustice in the last act, after many confusions and revelations, the play can end happily with four unions: Claudio and Julietta, Angelo and Mariana, Lucio and Kate Keepdown, the duke and Isabella.

Unusually for Shakespeare, the play deals extensively with a brothel and with syphilis.

The play differs from standard Shakespearean romantic comedy in many ways other than its peculiar plot. The characters cannot be romantic or lighthearted: they are far too troubled by the power of lust, the abuse of authority, and the threat of dishonor and death. The actions occur in stifling and claustrophobic places, and the jokes are gallows humor.

Instead of being a source of life and pleasure, sex is a source of death and pain. It brings people to hatred of themselves and lack of charity to others. Unusually for Shakespeare, the play deals extensively with a brothel and with

syphilis. At 1.2.108–110, Claudio compares the workings of sexual desire to those of rat poison. At 3.1.137–148, the threat to Isabella's chastity leads her to denounce her brother Claudio as a bastard. In his soliloquy at the end of 2.2, in one of Shakespeare's great speeches of personal awareness, deserving of a close reading, Angelo is filled with self-loathing upon the discovery of sexual desire. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

Questions to Consider

1. Trace the motif of "fairness" in the play as covered in this lecture. Is the duke fair to Angelo by placing him in a position of tempting power? Is Angelo fair to Claudio—both at the beginning and the end of the play? Is Claudio fair to Isabella? Is Isabella fair to Claudio? What other endings could you envision for this play?

2. Compare Shakespeare's treatment of sex in this play to any of the other comedies covered in this course of lectures. What reasons can you adduce for the negative "spin" he puts on sexual desire in *Measure for Measure*?

Measure for Measure—Justice and Comedy

Lecture 10

Measure for Measure **was not a popular play in the nineteenth century. The Victorian period did not like to discuss sexual matters of this kind on the stage. But at the turn of the century, critics began to take a fresh interest in the play, and differentiated it from Shakespeare's other comedies by calling it a "problem play," or "problem comedy"—that is, a play dealing with social problems.**

Measure for Measure deals with some weighty problems: sin, mercy, law, sexual probity (or lack thereof) and more. It is also a play about authority and the problems of authority. This lecture will explore these issues and will consider, at the end, the "problem" of the genre of dramatic quality against which this play strains.

The title of the play recalls a passage in the Sermon on the Mount (The Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 7). In this Gospel account, Jesus warns his followers that people will be judged by the standards by which they themselves judge others. Isabella points out to Angelo at 2.2.113–126 that human beings are inclined to abuse authority and judgment.

The particular law central to the plot makes fornication a capital crime. It is normal in Shakespearean comedy for law to form an obstacle to the happiness of young lovers. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a young woman must marry the man her father selects, or die or enter a convent. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia must marry the man who correctly solves the lottery devised in her late father's will. Such laws are not realistic but they set up revealing dramatic situations. The fornication law in *Measure for Measure*, however, although not historically accurate, is nonetheless realistic. Concerned people in Shakespeare's London seriously advocated the death penalty for fornication.

The play explores the way in which various authority figures attempt to cope with the teeming and often gross sexuality of Vienna. Although authority may

err, the play never doubts that authority is necessary. Angelo's prescription is "repress," a Puritan formula that allows little room for the urges and weakness of human nature. Isabella's prescription is "withdraw," a monastic formula that may work for gifted individuals but not for society at large. The duke's prescription is "forgive and marry," a formula that leads him into disguise and manipulation of other people's lives.

Although authority may err, the play never doubts that authority is necessary.

The final problem of this problem comedy is that comedy itself may be a problem. Patterns of comedy may not be adequate to the stresses of the human condition. Some of the marriages at the end of the play seem contrived and unpromising. *Measure for Measure* is a provocative experiment testing whether standard theatrical patterns can satisfactorily contain the difficulties of the human condition. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

Supplementary Reading

Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*."

Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*, chapter 6.

Questions to Consider

1. Compare and contrast Angelo and Isabella in matters of justice and mercy, life and death.

2. Is the ending of the play satisfactory? By what standard?

Richard III—Shakespearean History

Lecture 11

Now there was a flood of historical writing at this period, in the 1590s. Shakespeare drew his information especially from two enormous books, one compiled by Edward Hall, called *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York*, and one by Raphael Holinshed called *The Chronicles of England, Ireland, Scotland*.

History is not a usual term for a dramatic genre like "comedy" and "tragedy." The First Folio uses it as a category, but it was not a consistent Elizabethan usage. Shakespeare took liberties with facts, but within limits. He seeks to reflect accurately the conditions of the time of which he writes. Thus major events, such as the outcomes of significant battles, must not be altered. The boundaries of genre that distinguish Shakespeare's plays are porous. For instance, many of his tragedies have

Corel Stock Photo Library.

Richard III, King of England.

historical subject matter. Shakespeare's histories are defined as such by the nature of their subject matter.

There was much historical writing in Shakespeare's England. There were historical works in prose, narrative poems, and plays. (We know of some seventy historical plays, of which some thirty-five are extant.) History was patriotic. Patriotism was felt especially intensely by Elizabethan Englishmen in the wake of the repulse of the Spanish Armada in 1588. History could carry lessons. It provided heroes and villains to be upheld as either positive or negative models of behavior. History was a resource for playwrights in need of new plots.

Shakespeare's work in historical drama was unusual. He rewrote plays of the Queen's men. He wrote eight plays on a continuous stretch of English history (the years between 1399 and 1485), though not in chronological order. These plays examine the decline and fall of the House of Plantagenet. The "Lancastrian Tetralogy" consists of *Richard II*, *Henry IV 1-2*, and *Henry V*, and the "Yorkist Tetralogy" consists of *Henry VI 1-3* and *Richard III*. Other Elizabethan playwrights examined historical topics. Christopher Marlowe wrote one English history play. Ben Jonson wrote several plays based on Roman history, but they lack Shakespeare's sense of the variety of character and the fullness of human experience. Shakespeare's plays stressed both public events and private passions. His history plays were vital preparation for his tragedies.

Shakespeare's plays stressed both public events and private passions.

Richard III carries especial historical weight. It is the final play of the cycle considered in historical order. It is concerned to get in as much historical detail as possible. Shakespeare wants to give the play historical weight and fullness, to "get it right." It leads into the Tudor era, in which Shakespeare was writing. ■

Essential Reading

Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, chapter 1, appendix, genealogies.

Shakespeare, *Richard III*.

Supplementary Reading

See a video of *Richard III*, preferably the Olivier film.

Lindenberger, *Historical Drama*.

Questions to Consider

1. Discuss the value of modern plays and films based on historical fact; e.g., Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*, the BBC-TV series on various English monarchs, Christopher Burns' TV documentaries on American history.

2. How much, and in what ways, does it matter that the facts be correct in a historical play?

Richard III—The Villain's Career

Lecture 12

Lengthy and detailed though the play is, it is built with iron girders.

This lecture considers the shape of Richard's career and the play. Despite the length and detail of the play, Shakespeare builds a firm structure from fifteen years of medieval history, 1471 to 1485. The play opens with the victory of Richard's oldest brother, Edward IV, and his firm establishment upon the throne of England in 1471. It then compresses the events of some dozen years into a few scenes, arriving quickly at Edward's death in 1483. The short reign of the boy-king Edward V is dramatized in greater detail. The final two acts cover the reign of Richard III. The chief actions during the play are the conspiracy of Richard and his allies, and the lamentations of those whom he displaces and leaves bereft.

The structural firmness of *Richard III* is evident in its symmetrical balancing of scenes and in its pattern of retribution. The two courting scenes (Richard's courtship of Anne, and his later courtship of Elizabeth Woodbridge for the hand of his niece, Elizabeth of York) parallel each other, the second having been invented out of the first. The first courtship marks Richard's extraordinary power and skill, especially in twisting Anne's words back against her. The second courtship marks his loss of skill. This time Elizabeth assumes rhetorical dominance over Richard. The scene shows how thoroughly Richard has lost his control over other people.

The structural firmness of *Richard III* is evident in its symmetrical balancing of scenes and in its pattern of retribution.

The two nightmare scenes parallel each other, the second (Richard's nightmare before the battle of Bosworth) being invented out of the first (Clarence's nightmare in the Tower the night before his death). The first establishes the ultimate frame of moral reference for the play. The second brings that frame to bear on Richard. Shakespeare turns the scenes that advance the story into a moral structure. There is a second, more rigid form of structural firmness in

the play: a pattern of retribution. The curses of Queen Margaret of Anjou in Act 1 are balanced by her gloating in Act 4.

Richard is a star part of great audience appeal. We enjoy his role-playing, his wit, and his histrionic skill. He attains the crown by playing a series of parts, thereby deceiving and entangling the other characters. Often he warns the audience of what role he will play, then comments in soliloquy upon his performance afterward.

He confides in us, so that we share his triumphs over others. In Shakespeare's later plays, soliloquy becomes a more internalized, more subjective monologue of self-exploration. In *Richard III*, however, soliloquy is a means by which Richard describes and presents himself directly to the audience. We admire his intelligence and cunning, and we become in a sense co-conspirators with him. He may act out for us desires (such as brother-hatred) to which we ourselves would dare not yield.

Richard eventually loses his hold over us. We cannot tolerate his murder of the two innocent princes, though we might be less outraged by his murder of his brother, the guilty Clarence. His blunt announcement of Anne's death and, late in the play, his odious silencing of his mother's rebukes likewise win him no sympathy. It is a testimony to Shakespeare's richness that he can evoke in us several different emotional responses to Richard during the course of the play.

Shakespeare tries to give Richard an interior self in his nightmare speech. He develops a conscience and acknowledges himself as a murderer. In this soliloquy, Richard unveils for the first time the inner workings of the self, rather than simply to present already formulated ideas and plans to us. ■

Essential Reading

Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, chapter 7.

Shakespeare, *Richard III*.

Supplementary Reading

Hammond, Introduction to *Richard III* (Arden edition).

Sher, *The Year of the King*.

Questions to Consider

1. At what moment do our feelings change about Richard? Consider closely his treatment of the princes, his treatment of Buckingham, and his treatment of the women in 4.4.

2. Compare the different handling of Richard in Olivier's film, Ian McKellan's film, and the BBC-TV version.

Richard II—The Theory of Kingship

Lecture 13

In our century, readers and playgoers are likely to regard *Richard II* as a lyrical tragedy about a beautiful and eloquent man who happens to have been born king, but who lacks the talents necessary for the job. Its interest is chiefly personal, psychological. ... In its own time, *Richard II* was perhaps the most political play Shakespeare wrote.

A performance of *Richard II* was commissioned in 1601 by a supporter of the attempt by the earl of Essex to take over Elizabeth I's government. The Lord Chamberlain's Men were exonerated of conscious complicity in Essex's treason. They denied that the play would motivate any listener to engage in political action. The play shows the spectacle of a divinely anointed king deposed by his subjects, and those subjects' justifying their action as proper. This action raises questions not at issue with obviously illegitimate kings such as Richard III.

It was common doctrine, propagated in sermons, that kings were divinely appointed to rule, and that disobedience and rebellion against kings were therefore wicked. St Paul argues that "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). A rebel is led into committing all seven deadly sins and breaking all Ten Commandments.

It was common doctrine, propagated in sermons, that kings were divinely appointed to rule, and that disobedience and rebellion against kings were therefore wicked.

This homiletic doctrine of obedience asserts the king's authority; it does not necessarily assert that the king is always right. Hence the royal uncles in the play, Gaunt and York, choose at crucial moments loyalty to the crown over loyalty to their own sons. Hence York's vehemence in denouncing Bolingbroke's return to England against Richard's decree of exile, and Carlisle's vehemence in predicting disasters to follow if Richard is deposed.

On the other hand, the doctrine of royal authority does not explain the whole of *Richard II*. We are also invited to compare the political virtues and defects of Richard and Bolingbroke. Shakespeare's abundance frequently entails such an invitation to compare different characters in similar situations. Richard and Bolingbroke must each deal with angry quarrels among their nobles. Richard's decisions in Act 1, although defensible, are flawed in various ways. Bolingbroke, in Act 4, retains more royal control.

Richard and Bolingbroke must each confront rebellion. Richard in Act 3 does little in response, relying on his divinely sanctioned authority. He takes little constructive action to impede Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke is swift and efficient in practical action to foil the plot to restore Richard. Since Bolingbroke's effective rule follows Richard's mistakes, the play suggests that (despite the illegality of Bolingbroke's seizure of power) the kingdom is better off in his hands.

The visual and verbal pattern of vertical movement contributes to the political content of the play. The chief action of the play may be diagrammed as an X, with Richard as the descending line, Bolingbroke as the ascending line. Richard is aloft at Coventry in Act 1, but he is "on the ground" when he returns from Ireland in Act 3. Later, Bolingbroke stands amid the kneeling Yorks in Act 5. Their paths cross in the scene at Flint Castle in Act 3, when Bolingbroke and his army catch up with Richard. Linguistically, the many verbal references in the play to "up" and "down" focus when Richard describes his descent from the Flint Castle walls to the "base court" as the fall of Phaeton. The vertical patterns of the play, both visual and verbal, suggest not that Bolingbroke is at fault for rebelling, but that Richard is at fault for ruling so poorly that he must be overthrown.

The play, in depicting a conflict between a political theory proclaiming the supervening authority of the king and practical facts displaying the superior abilities of a usurper, presents a perfect political dilemma. Bolingbroke can rid the realm of a damaging king only by further damaging the realm, leaving it open to civil war and kinstrife. In consequence, the actual removal of Richard is a politically ambiguous event. York considers it a resignation, Northumberland wants an impeachment, Richard handles it as a de-coronation that sacrilegiously reverses the ceremonies of anointment and

investiture. The event remains open to interpretation and violent dispute for a century to come. ■

Essential Reading

Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, chapter 2.

Shakespeare, *Richard II*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV videotape of *Richard II*.

Barkan, "The Theatrical Consistency of Richard II."

Gurr, Introduction to *Richard II* (New Cambridge edition).

Kastan, "Proud Majesty Made a Subject: Shakespeare and the Spectacle of Rule."

Questions to Consider

1. The American constitution provides a legal way to remove an unsatisfactory president from office: impeachment. The English Parliament had in fact discovered and developed powers of impeachment just before and during Richard's reign, but it used them only to eliminate unsatisfactory ministers of the crown, not the king himself. Would the political issues posed by Richard's rule be better solved by legally impeaching him?

2. The garden scene (3.4) allegorically represents the powers of government by analogy to the tasks of gardeners. Is the analogy useful? Does it satisfactorily suggest what Richard should have been doing as king? Does it satisfactorily suggest what should be done about Richard?

Richard II—The Fall of the King

Lecture 14

Bolingbroke is successful in taking Richard's kingdom, whether or not he intended to, because Richard, in effect, throws it away.

This lecture considers the personal aspects of the leading characters of *Richard II*. Bolingbroke is an opaque character, forceful but not fully revealed to the audience. Although normally talkative, he is silent at key moments. Neither in public utterance nor in soliloquy does he tell us at what moment he decides to reach for the crown itself instead of merely the restoration of his stolen inheritance. As a consequence of Bolingbroke's opacity, an actor or a reader may interpret him either as secretly ambitious from the start or as a wholly accidental king.

Also as a consequence, the psychological interest of the play is focused on Richard. Richard forfeits his moral authority through his complicity in his uncle's death. He forfeits his economic power because of his extravagance. He forfeits his legal power by illegally seizing Bolingbroke's estates, thereby upsetting the natural order of society.

Richard forfeits his moral authority through his complicity in his uncle's death.

Richard's character appears in the power of his language. His language may be powerful for extrinsic reasons: he is king. The scene at the Coventry lists (1.3) demonstrates repeatedly his royal ability to translate his wishes into reality. Richard's language is also powerful intrinsically. The Barkloughly Castle scene (3.2) shows his expressiveness in a variety of emotional modes: parental concern for the land of England, inspiring vigor in comparing himself to the sun, noble melancholy in resigning himself to misfortune, piercing grief on the fate of kings.

The power of Richard's language may cause conflicting responses of sympathy and impatience. We may be moved by its beauty and pathos. We

may be irritated by its excess, and by Richard's reliance on talk when action is necessary.

Richard uses language largely to construct roles for himself. Greeting the English earth, he plays parental guardian of the land. Invoking the analogy of king to sun, he assumes the splendor and glamour of the sun. The fantasy of becoming a pilgrim (3.3.147–171) shows fully the detailed elaboration, the self-deception, and the double effect of these verbal self-portraits. His favorite role is Jesus Christ. The analogy is justified: the king is God's deputy. The analogy is unjustified: it is presumptuous and inaccurate.

In the prison scene (5.5), Richard starts to use language for self-exploration rather than self-dramatization. His language is halting, tested, and considerate, rather than fluent and easily elaborated. He arrives at *anagnorisis*, a realization of what he is and how his own actions have contributed to his downfall. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Richard II*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV videotape of *Richard II*.

Altick, "Symphonic Imagery in *Richard II.*"

Calderwood, "*Richard II* and the Fall of Speech."

Questions to Consider

1. Read what Henry IV says about his usurpation of Richard's crown in *Henry IV*, Part 1, 3. 2, and *Henry IV*, Part 2, 3.1 and 4.4, and compare that to his actions, speeches, and silences as Bolingbroke in Richard II. How much can we conclude about his intentions and motives?

2. What may we infer about Richard II's character from his treatment of the dying Gaunt in 2.1? From his dialogue with the groom in 5.5? Richard's queen at the time of his deposition was actually a child, a French princess whom he married for diplomatic reasons. It was Shakespeare's decision to make her a mature woman. What does he gain thereby? What is Richard's relationship with his wife?

Henry IV—All the King's Men

Lecture 15

With *Henry IV*, we reach the heart of the histories. The two plays named after this king constitutes the most diverse, entertaining and profound accomplishment by any playwright I know of in the dramatic rendition of history.

The political narrative of *Henry IV Part 1* and *Henry IV Part 2* hinges on the legitimacy of Henry IV's crown. Anyone dissatisfied with his rule can claim that he ought not to be king anyway. The Percy family, led by the fiery young Hotspur, helped to put Henry on the throne, and it feels under-rewarded. Edmund Mortimer, a Percy in-law, was a closer heir by blood to Richard II. The archbishop of York, kin to the Percys, rises in arms to settle grievances.

The central role is Henry IV's eldest son, nicknamed Hal, whom legend had made a madcap prince, a prodigal son who haunts taverns with his friend Falstaff. Shakespeare makes him a self-conscious prodigal, deliberately courting a bad reputation in order to astonish England with his real excellence when he comes to the crown. Accordingly, although each play ends with Hal's historical deeds as prince of Wales, most of his scenes concern his private dealings with his tavern cronies and his father. The plays alternate public events with scenes not only in taverns but also in rural locations with artisans, servants, and farmers.

Organizing this rich diversity is the principle of contrast among three main groups: the king and his advisers, Falstaff and the tavern crew, and Hotspur and the rebels. One of the things that distinguishes these three groups is their attitude toward time. The court group, focused on the king, regards time as a linear chain of necessity, full of dangers, requiring constant calculation. The tavern crew, focusing on Falstaff, lives for entertainment and pleasure, disregarding time. It seeks to evade or defuse emergencies rather than to meet them. The rebels, led by Hotspur, regard time as the opportunity for chivalric exploits. Hal has significant resemblances to each group, but no one sees his overall plans. Each group underestimates him.

In this world, any sense of the divine right of kings has gone underground. Kingship has no aura or mystique in this play. Henry IV never speaks of the glory of the crown as Richard II had. He exploits the trappings of majesty purely as political tools. He is disappointed with Hal because Hal seems to have no political awareness.

Kingship has no aura or mystique in this play.

Hal is in fact highly political; his tactics differ greatly from his father's. His soliloquy in 1.2 outlines his scenario, hinging entirely on the principle of foil or contrast between his current lax behavior and his intended reformation. He believes that he can handle all contingencies. We may wonder to what extent he is rationalizing mere self-indulgence. Like Saint Augustine, Hal seeks to postpone his reformation. He does publicly earn acclaim for traditional royal virtues at the end of each play: valor and military honor at the end of Part 1, justice and good rule at the end of Part 2. ■

Essential Reading

Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, chapter 3.

Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV videotapes of *1 and 2 Henry IV*.

Bevington, *Introduction to 1 Henry IV* (Oxford edition).

Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*."

Kernan, "The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays."

Melchiori, *Introduction to 2 Henry IV* (New Cambridge edition).

Questions to Consider

1. The historical Hotspur was two years older than King Henry IV: Shakespeare makes him a young man of Hal's age. Why? Discuss in detail the personality of Hotspur and the way Shakespeare uses him in Part 1.

2. What is Hal's conception of kingship? What is the relevance of personal characteristics—and the reputation a person in public life has for private behavior—to his or her capacity to lead or rule? Do the *Henry IV* plays throw any light on public debates such as those America has had about the behavior of President Clinton?

Henry IV—The Life of Falstaff

Lecture 16

[Falstaff] is not only one of the great creations in the drama of the English-speaking peoples; like Hamlet, he has taken on a life independent of the plays, become a figure in the mental world of English-speaking peoples. He's an intensely significant character.

Falstaff, the Shakespearean character most frequently mentioned in surviving comments on Shakespeare's plays from his own time, remains one of his two or three most enduring creations, a dominating figure in the mythology of English-speaking peoples. Like Hamlet, he has been interpreted and re-interpreted. To avoid excessively abstract intellectualization, it is wise to remember that on stage he is an imposing physical figure, a very fat man.

Although Falstaff appears in two history plays, he is not based on a historical person. Instead, he is an adaptation of various theatrical types. He derives from the Vice, the tempter figure, in medieval morality plays. Hal, however, is not deceived by him, as the protagonists of morality plays were by the Vice. He derives from the *miles gloriosus*, the braggart soldier of ancient Roman comedy. Unlike that prototype, however, he is not humorless. He derives from the parasite, the sponger of classical life and comedy and of early Elizabethan comedy. Unlike the parasite, however, he gives as well as takes. He derives from the medieval court jester who entertains the prince, but he is also an acute social critic.

James H. Hackett as Falstaff in *Henry IV*.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-90018.

His characteristic action is to turn things upside down, to invert the established order of things. Excusing highway robbery, he claims it as his vocation. Inventing a story to cover his cowardice in the Gadshill robbery, he accuses Hal and Poins of cowardice and tells a tale that is obviously unbelievable. He turns the serious concerns of the world into a game, a game that has no fixed rules but is pure improvisation. He inverts conventional morality by accusing Hal of corrupting him. Although he himself is old, he says that members of the staid elder generation "hate us youth." On the battlefield, he plays dead to stay alive. Hal observes that Falstaff is like quicksilver; he can change roles very rapidly.

Although Falstaff appears in two history plays, he is not based on a historical person.

As Hal comes to represent leadership, he embodies what we now call the Protestant Ethic: a form of this-worldly asceticism that stresses devotion to duty, sobriety, and working for the public welfare. Hal's version of the Protestant Ethic is unusual in that it is always present in him, even during his early experience as a wastrel, but it becomes apparent only over time. Falstaff comes to embody everything that is the opposite of this Protestant ethic; he represents the ethic of pleasure and self-fulfillment, and the rejection of the Establishment and its values and pretensions.

Hal's rejection of Falstaff at the end of Part 2 is a great, almost mythical moment in Western civilization, codifying a deep division in human nature as we have known it. It is one of the great marks of the abundance of Shakespeare that he creates and contains this moment, while he rejects neither Hal nor Falstaff. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV videotapes of *1 and 2 Henry IV*.

Hunter, “Shakespeare’s Comic Sense as It Strikes Us Today: Falstaff and the Protestant Ethic.”

Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff*.

Questions to Consider

1. Would you allow your twenty-year-old son to spend time with a hard-drinking, fornicating, funny old thief with a claim to military distinction? (Note that Falstaff does have a knighthood; at some point someone in authority thought he had behaved meritoriously on a battlefield.)

2. What significant differences exist between Falstaff as he appears in Part 1 and Falstaff as he appears in Part 2? Consider not only his personal characteristics—his way of speaking, his treatment of other people, his health, for example—but the kinds of things Shakespeare gives him to do, the sorts of scenes he appears in. Note for example that in Part 2 he appears only twice with Prince Hal, in 2.4 (where Hal is disguised for most of the scene) and 5.5 (where Hal has just been crowned king).

Henry V—The Death of Falstaff

Lecture 17

You must remember that in Shakespeare's day people believed in a literal Hell, that if one died unreconciled with God, one would suffer for all eternity.

This is a different kind of lecture from those I have been giving. Instead of talking about a big subject, a genre, a theme, a leading character, I want to do a close-up on detail. I want to show you the abundance of Shakespeare in a short passage. I will take about forty lines and show you the richness of their texture, share with you the ways in which Shakespeare can provoke in us—readers and playgoers—a multitude of emotional and intellectual responses. This will be what critics call a close reading. The passage is in *Henry V*, the first forty lines of Act 2 Scene 2, when the Hostess of the tavern describes to Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, and the Boy the death of Falstaff.

It is a simple passage. I have deliberately *not* chosen a stretch of high-flown verse rich in metaphor and mythological allusion. It is prose, they are down-to-earth characters grieving the death of a dear friend, not rising to royal eulogy but simply talking about what happened at the deathbed. A youngster could understand the basic sense without explanations. But it is remarkably rich in its effect upon an attentive audience.

The premise of the scene involves some emotional complication. These are comic characters, but at the moment they are sad. The audience will be sad too. The original audience in 1599 may have been not only sad but also surprised. They had been promised, in the epilogue to Shakespeare's previous history play, *Henry IV Part 2*, that the sequel, pursuing Prince Hal as king and his conquest of France, would also contain more adventures of Falstaff. The character has appeared in two or three plays already. He was a great public favorite. A serial character ought not to die. I am reminded of an old cartoon, of a boy sitting up in bed late at night, reading, with an expression of horror on his face. He's just reached the death of Sherlock Holmes. And of course, Conan Doyle wasn't allowed to get away with killing Holmes;

he had to go on, write more stories, invent some way of getting him out of that waterfall.

Why Shakespeare decided to kill Falstaff is a matter open to speculation; but *since* he decided to kill him, he had to give him an appropriate send-off. Consider who Falstaff was: an embodiment of tremendous vitality, a man who joked and drank and schemed and fornicated and saw through the public pretenses of kings and social order. A man witty in himself and the cause of wit in other men. The greatest drinking buddy, the greatest boon companion in English, or any other literature I know. To say that he is dead is almost to say that life itself is dead, or at least that all the *earthly* delight of life is dead. So there is great reason for sorrow. But the scene is not wholly sad.

Let's take it line by line. The characters come on as Pistol and the other men are departing King Henry's war in France. The Hostess, who has now married Pistol, begs to accompany them a short part of the way.

Hostess. Prithee, honey-sweet husband, let me bring thee to Staines.

Pistol. No, for my manly heart doth yearn.

Bardolph, be blithe; Nym, rouse thy vaunting veins;

Boy, bristle thy courage up; for Falstaff he is dead,

And we must yearn therefore.

That's the only bit of verse in the scene, and it's verse because Pistol likes to talk in the manner of ranting old plays. He's another imitator of Marlowe's Tamburlaine, like the prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, fond of big alliterative phrases like "vaunting veins." But the inflated rhetoric merely makes more abrupt what Pistol actually tells us, "Falstaff he is dead." The guy's gone; he's not going to appear in the play. True, we were told in an earlier scene that he was sick, but throughout the *Henry IV* plays, Falstaff had been moaning about his diseases and discomforts: they didn't stop him from joking and lying and fornicating, let alone living.

Bardolph responds with the direct simplicity of grief and loyalty:

Bardolf. Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell.

But that raises a frightful possibility that the Hostess quickly rejects:

Hostess. Nay, sure, he's not in hell; he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom.

You must remember that in Shakespeare's day people believed in a literal Hell, that if one died unreconciled with God, one would suffer for all eternity. This is a prospect too horrible for the Hostess to contemplate about the fate of her dear friend. He must be in Heaven. But there's a funny little twist in the line. Her biblical reference is a little shaky. She's made a mistake about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, from the Gospel of Luke:

> And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at the gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.
>
> (Luke 16.20-23)

That parable is very well known, regularly read as a Gospel lesson in church, and Abraham's bosom has thereby become a familiar phrase for Heaven. We may laugh a little, that the hostess, while asserting herself so strongly, gets it wrong. Oh well, Abraham, Arthur, they both begin with A, what does it matter?

The Hostess goes on:

Hostess. 'A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any chrissom child.

Now a “chrissom child” is a newly baptized infant. Cleansed by baptism of Original Sin, too young to commit any sins on its own, such a child, if it died, would go straight to Heaven. There is no doubt about salvation here. The Hostess goes on:

> **Hostess.** ‘A parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning of the tide.

We have here two familiar images for death, midnight and the ebb tide. Midnight and the ebb tide occur regularly, naturally. They are not things to be feared. Falstaff’s death is made to seem easy and gentle physically as well as spiritually. We are consoled by such a description.

The hostess continues:

> **Hostess.** After I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers’ end . . .

Falstaff was apparently delirious, hallucinating on his deathbed. The Elizabethans embroidered their sheets with colored thread. Evidently Falstaff was plucking at such colored sheet-borders, perhaps imagining he was in a garden, picking flowers, perhaps the first garden he had played in as a child. Maybe his death wasn’t only easy, it was happy. That at least was my thought about that line, until two years ago, when I delivered a public lecture on the subject. The next day I got a message from my doctor, who’d heard the lecture. He told me that plucking at the sheets, or at imaginary things in the air, is a symptom of patients in the later stages of alcoholic liver disease, hepatic encephalopathy.

Shakespeare is clearly drawing on some experience of watching an alcoholic die. And since Falstaff was indeed a heavy drinker, I’m afraid my doctor’s tough interpretation of the lines is far more convincing than my earlier sentimental one. Even the Hostess knows that these gestures are a sign of the coming end. Let me give you her full sentence:

> **Hostess.** After I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers’ end, I knew there

was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen,
and ‘a babbled of green fields.

She knew that there was but one way, and the sharp nose is another clear medical sign. Early in the history of medicine, Hippocrates and Galen recorded the apparent sharpening of the nose as a sign of approaching death. The face seems to lose flesh so that the bone structure stands out, an effect also noticeable in cancer patients, and particularly clear when the person has been fat, as Falstaff was. As for the green fields, well, we already know the shakiness of the Hostess’s hold on famous Biblical texts, but she really ought to have recognized what Falstaff was saying when he babbled of green fields:

> The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
>
> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
>
> He leadeth me beside the still waters.
>
> He restoreth my soul:
>
> He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.
>
> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
>
> I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
>
> Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
>
> (Psalm 23)

He was trying to pray, to utter the 23rd Psalm, the great psalm of trust and faith in the Lord even at the point of death.

The Hostess continues:

Hostess. “How now, Sir John,” quoth I, “what, man? be o’ good cheer.” So ‘a cried out, “God! God! God!” three or four times.

Now that to me is the most mysterious line in the Hostess’ narrative. *How* did Falstaff cry out “God! God! God!”? Was he still humbly praying? Was it a cry of greeting—did he imagine he saw God welcoming him into heaven? Was it a cry of terror, as he saw an angry God, like the Christ of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*, hurling the sinners down to hell? Any of those three is possible, and we just don’t know, since we are getting this account second-hand. Maybe the hostess knew, and her tone of voice in reporting his cry can be relied on, but we know that she’s better at facts than at their implications. Indeed, the next thing the Hostess says is really ghastly. In response to Falstaff’s cry to God, she says she replied:

Hostess. Now I, to comfort him, bid him a’ should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.

What terrible advice to give a dying man! (She “knew there was but one way.”) And Elizabethans would recognize it as especially terrible advice. They were experts on deathbeds. Slight digression here. You can tell much from an age by its favorite self-help books—what topics do people try to master in their lives? The Victorians were concerned with class. Having made their money in industrial fortunes, they wanted to behave as if they were born to it. So their most popular self-help books were books of etiquette: how to behave as if you were born noble, how to give dinner parties and write letters. My generation grew up in the sixties, we were preoccupied with sex. So we made bestsellers of books on the art of intercourse, *The Joy of Sex*, how to achieve the “big ‘O.’” Nowadays it’s money. In my local bookstore, I see books on investing, how to navigate the shoals of the economy, *Five Ways to Get Rich*.

Well, for Shakespeare’s England, it was death. The most important moment of life was the moment of dying, because all eternity depended on it. Dying was a public act, not conducted behind screens in a hospital, but in the family bed, with the family, the friends, and the neighbors gathered round. And there

was plenty of printed advice available on how to prepare, how to repent, how to pray, what final temptations to ward off. There was a medieval treatise, the *Ars Moriendi***,** that got into print as soon as Gutenberg invented the press and spread all over Europe in vernacular translations. There is the medieval play *Everyman***.** Erasmus wrote *A Comfortable Exhortation against the Chances of Death*. Thomas More wrote a dialogue with an almost identical title. Francis Bacon wrote an essay, "On Death." A man named Lupset wrote *A Compendious and Very Fruitful Treatise Teaching the Way of Dying Well.*

The most interesting case is a book known at the time as "Parsons on resolution." The actual title is *A booke of Christian exercise appertaining to resolution, that is, shewing how that we should resolve our selves to become Christians indeed, to live and die well*. It was published in 1582, when Shakespeare was eighteen years old. The author, Robert Parsons, was a Jesuit priest, and naturally the advice contains some matters, such as prayer to saints and instruction on purgatory, things that Catholics accepted but Protestants rejected. But Protestants thought that it was a good book, too. So an Anglican clergyman named Edmund Bunny went over it, cut out the papist parts and put Protestant stuff in those places, and republished it three years later. And over the next twenty years or so, which were the years of Shakespeare's writing career, some fifteen new editions were published, either the Parsons Catholic version or the Bunny Protestant one. People must have been buying this book, or the printers wouldn't have churned out so many editions. And of course, contrary to what the Hostess says to Falstaff, what all these books say is that the dying person should be thinking of God, intently, continuously. When she tells Falstaff not to trouble himself with God, most Elizabethans would be as horrified as we would be if we heard some one advising children to accept rides from strange men. And yet, and yet, we know what the Hostess is doing. She's a kindly woman, and she wants people to be comfortable and happy, so why trouble yourself with ugly thoughts like divine judgment?

There's one more bit of her narrative.

Hostess. 'A bade me lay more clothes on his feet. I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were cold as

> any stone. Then I felt to his knees, and so upward and upward, and all was cold as any stone.

Now when I first read this play in college, I had three responses to those words. The first was a pure gut response. I found it spooky. The idea that the feet can be so cold, that they are dead, while the mind is still working, and the mouth can speak—the idea that death creeps so slowly up the body, plain frightens me.

The second was to think, I've heard something like that before. And indeed I had. What I had heard, or rather read, was this:

> The man who gave him the hemlock now and then looked at his feet and legs. After a while he pressed his foot hard, and asked if he could feel. He said, "No." And then his legs, and so upward and upward, and showed us that he was cold and stiff.

That is Plato, in *The Phaedo*, describing the death of Socrates. And I'm really not sure what to say about that coincidence. Is it merely a coincidence? Or did Shakespeare, as he invented the death of Falstaff, happen to think of Plato's description, remember how effective it is, and just lift it? Or does he mean something by it? Is there some analogy between the wise old Greek, whose wisdom so outraged his own city that they killed him, and Falstaff the jester who could see through the pretenses of the great men of his own time. I'm afraid I must leave you to ponder on that.

I had a third response. I'm afraid I sniggered. I thought of the Hostess putting her hand on the flesh of Falstaff's feet, and then upward and upward, and I giggled. And then I said to myself, come on, Peter, stop being such an adolescent. This is supposed to be one of the great passages in Shakespeare and all you can think of is the Hostess's hand on Falstaff's private parts. Grow up, guy. So I grew up, and I became a Shakespeare scholar, and eventually I found out that I had been right to snigger. "Cold as any stone"? I found out that in Elizabethan English, the word "stone" can mean "testicle." It is their ordinary word for that organ of the body. Holinshed reports that at the battle of Shrewsbury the earl of Douglas was wounded "in the stones." Of course it also means "a rock." The Hostess isn't being intentionally obscene, and

the men she's talking to don't respond that way. But most members of the audience would have noticed the accidental obscenity. This moving passage about a beloved character's death ends with a bawdy joke.

The scene continues in dialogue (professor's commentary is in brackets).

Nym. They say he cried out of sack.

[The dying Falstaff wanted one more mug of the strong wine he was fond of.]

Hostess. A, that a' did.

Bardolph. And of women.

Hostess. Nay, that 'a did not.

[She's upset at that idea, that Falstaff could be asking for more sex while he was dying.]

Boy. Yes, that 'a did, and said they were devils incarnate.

[Oh, that's okay then, if he was crying out not *for* a woman but *against* women, who had led him into sin… But the Hostess doesn't understand fancy words like "incarnate."]

Hostess. 'A never could abide carnation, 'twas a color he never liked.

Boy. 'A said once the devil would have him about women.

[That is, he would be damned because of his loose sex life. And the Hostess admits:]

Hostess. 'A did in some sort, indeed, handle women, but then he was rheumatic, and talked of the whore of Babylon.

Another unconscious pun from the Hostess, he did *handle* women—Falstaff certainly did, but she means *handle* in the sense of talk about, discuss. At one moment on the deathbed he mentioned the whore of Babylon. Why on earth would he talk about her? Well, it's one more Biblical reference that the Hostess doesn't seem to recognize:

> [And the angel said] unto me,
>
> I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters;
>
> With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication,
>
> And the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.
>
> So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness:
>
> And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns
>
> And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and
>
> Decked with gold and precious stones and pearls,
>
> Having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication;
>
> And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.
>
> (Revelation 17.1-5)

That terrifying passage has been used as a text for many sermons, hellfire and damnation sermons, sermons threatening sinners. Falstaff was clearly thinking of his sins, fearing damnation for his drunkenness and fornication.

The Boy has one more line:

> **Boy.** Do you not remember, he saw a flea stick upon Bardolph's nose, and said it was a black soul burning in hell?

The joke about Bardolph's nose, repeated many times through the Henry plays, is that he too is a heavy drinker, and his nose has turned red with the alcohol. And I love the "Do you not remember...?" It marks a change in tone, a modulation from direct grief into reminiscence. These people have something wonderful to talk about. They can sit around of an evening, chatting like this, saying "Do you remember when he said this?" "Do you remember when he did that? How funny that was! How lucky we were to know such a remarkable man!" A new feeling comes into the scene. They are no longer mourning, but in a mood both happy and sad, a mood we call bittersweet. But even that is emotionally complicated, because the particular joke the Boy recalls is not a purely merry one, it's a joke about damnation. They don't want to think about Falstaff going to Hell, but the possibility does recur.

Let me generalize about all this. What I've been doing here is entering into Shakespeare's imagination. He imagined fully the death of Falstaff. He imagined Falstaff in easy moments of illness, sleeping like "a chrissom child." He imagined Falstaff in hope and prayer, plucking at the sheets ends, hallucinating. He imagined Falstaff feeling his feet go cold. He imagined the Hostess fondling Falstaff's balls. He imagined Falstaff crying out for sack (fortified wine, his favorite drink), crying out for women (or against women—it's hard to be sure). He imagined Falstaff ranting out of the book of Revelation, seeing his fornications embodied in the wine of the scarlet woman.

He imagined a scene that was peaceful, hopeful, bawdy, silly, childish, drunken, lecherous, and terrifying, terrifying both physically and spiritually. All at once, in only forty lines. No single performance can highlight everything, but it is all there. I haven't made any of this up: I've been pointing out where it all lies in Shakespeare's words. Different performances

will bring out different aspects of the abundance. And the more we ourselves know the more we can be alert to the abundance as we read him.

This is the point in the course when I lay my cards face up on the table: this man is a genius. He can write anything he wants, on a complex multifaceted scale. He's a genius on the order of Michelangelo, the Michelangelo of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

Different performances will bring out different aspects of the abundance.

What's on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? Well, there are three major elements to that vast composition. Going down the center of the vault are nine narrative scenes from Genesis, from God creating light, through Adam and Eve onto Noah and the Flood. On the curve of the vault are twelve large figures, Hebrew prophets and their female classical equivalent, the Sibyls of ancient Rome. And the third principal element is twenty male figures, young nude atlantes, supporting on their shoulders the narrative scenes out of Genesis, turned and twisted in nearly every possible human posture. And what is it all about? Art historians have discussed that at length; I'm asking as an ordinary educated person who has been there, who has asked what does the whole of this amount to? I lay down on the floor of the Chapel and tried to take the whole thing in, tried to find the sense, the emphasis, the organization. And I discovered something very curious. You can read it in at least three ways, and it makes sense in each way.

My first instinct was to go for the narrative. The scenes from Genesis are central. This is a historical epic, it's about an action, God's creation of the world and his first interactions with mankind. In that context, the prophets and sibyls fit in, they *see* these events and convey them to ordinary mortals, and the events are of course physically supported by the male nudes. But, if you shift your focus a little, the prophets and sibyls gain greater prominence. They are in fact larger than the Genesis figures, and closer to us since they are on the curve of the vault. Then the ceiling becomes a composition concerning vision, inspired vision, artistic vision, the sort of ability possessed by mystics and artists to see deeply into the truth and to record what they see.

The Genesis paintings become part of their context, *what* sages and sibyls and artists can see that they convey to ordinary mortals. And you can shift once again, and focus on the male nudes. They are not larger, but there are so many of them, their powerful arms and backs and legs are at work throughout the whole composition. It becomes a painting about human energy, muscular strength, the windswept exertions of the human race that are the basis for all action and vision in the earthly world. At which point I find it impossible not to think about the sheer physical labor that Michelangelo himself exerted to paint all that, lying on a scaffold. Each reading of the whole composition makes sense, each takes in a major thing that is really there and makes coherent sense with the others.

Shakespeare is like that in his abundance and the complexity of his composition. That is why there can be so many interpretations of his plays. So many good interpretations—I don't mean the crackpot ones where people merely insert their own obsessions. I mean interpretations that stress things genuinely there, because there is so much there, artfully inter-coordinated. What speaks to you at one particular reading, what one actor or director finds, is a genuine resonance with things pouring forth from a spacious plenty. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Henry V*.

Supplementary Reading

Film by Kenneth Branagh. Judi Dench is excellent in this scene.

Footnotes on *Henry V*, 2.3, from Gurr (New Cambridge edition) or Taylor (Oxford edition).

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think might have happened, in the audience and to the play, if Shakespeare had decided to put the death of Falstaff on stage instead of having it described at second hand by the Hostess and her friends?

2. Why might Shakespeare have allowed Falstaff to die "with his boots on," as it were, instead of in battle serving his prince or in some other more dramatic or heroic manner?

Henry V—The King Victorious

Lecture 18

Since 1920 ... both directors in the theater and scholars in the academy have had deep misgivings about this play. They have regularly seen it, as it were, with bifocals. Long range, it is a play celebrating a heroic king who inspires his country to an outstanding victory. Close up, it is not celebratory, but satiric; it exposes the brutality of war and the connivance of politicians who resort to war to achieve their own self-serving purposes.

Twentieth-century response to *Henry V* has been double-sided. It can be seen as celebratory and patriotic. It can also be seen as critical and satiric exposure. This doubleness has been clear in times of public debate over particular wars. Vietnam influenced Michael Kahn's direction of a savage presentation of *Henry V* at Stratford, Connecticut, in 1969. The Falklands war and conflict in northern Ireland influenced Kenneth Branagh's film version in 1989, which vividly illustrated the human costs of war.

The play supports both readings. The vigorous Choruses that open each act celebrate the king and his enterprise, and the Agincourt victory is highlighted as an epic achievement. On the other hand, the play highlights the ugly and costly side of war. Henry is urged by self-interested churchmen to wage war on France. While in northern France, Henry consents to the execution of his old tavern crony, Bardolph. During the battle, he ruthlessly orders the slaughter of French prisoners who have surrendered. A common soldier offers a very inglorious and unchivalric account of death in battle.

Dualism neglects the variety of experience in the play. There are many different kinds of soldiers in the play:

- Henry speaks of a rampaging slaughterer and rapist.
- Henry evokes the heroism of ancestral warriors.
- Soldiers are knights bound in brotherhood.

- A soldier may be a pedant.
- A soldier may be afraid.
- A soldier may be eager for battle.
- A soldier may be an athlete.
- A soldier may be a beast.
- A soldier may be a fake.

Henry himself plays many roles. He is an able politician and diplomat, as shown in his message to the French ambassadors in response to the Dauphin's insult. He dispenses justice (as shown in his consent to the execution of Bardolph) and mercy (as shown in his pardon of a man who has slandered him). He is a warrior and leader of men. He is a lover. While wooing the French princess, he graciously pretends to be a rube in order to put her at ease.

Henry both sees that kingship is a fiction and uses it well.

Henry both sees that kingship is a fiction and uses it well. He deconstructs kingship into a set of stage props, as illustrated in his soliloquy on Ceremony the night before the battle of Agincourt. He realizes that kingship is a fiction, with nothing real about it except the responsibility. He reconstructs kingship by asserting his mastery of the props. ■

Essential Reading

Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings,* chapter 4.

Shakespeare, *Henry V*.

Supplementary Reading

Film of *Henry V* by Kenneth Branagh or by Laurence Olivier.

Introduction to *Henry V*, Gurr (New Cambridge edition) or Taylor (Oxford edition).

Loehlin, *Henry V: Shakespeare in Performance*.

Rabkin, "Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*."

Questions to Consider

1. Consider each of Henry's major public speeches. What role is he playing in each one? By what means? For what audience? To what end?

2. Compare Henry to any modern political leader you know well. Compare the Olivier film with the Branagh film: cuts, decisions on how to play particular scenes, use of comedy, lighting, means of filming the battle, placement of climax, etc.

Romeo and Juliet—Shakespearean Tragedy

Lecture 19

The precise definition of a particular genre is a tricky task. Critics and schools of criticism can dispute these matters without end. The genre before us this morning, tragedy, has been particularly productive of dispute; dispute not only among professional critics and serious students, but also amongst ordinary people who see or read a play and care to talk about it.

The word "tragedy" is used both as a term of classification and a term of evaluation, of respect or praise. This confusion does not occur with other generic labels. Precise definitions of tragedy tend to exclude things or to measure things. Neither activity promotes dramatic and literary appreciation or understanding. We should, instead, concentrate on individual plays, i.e., tragedies, instead of trying to precisely define "tragedy." Aristotle's discussion of tragedy, although occasionally involving evaluation, is largely a taxonomic description, offering some useful terms (fully defined in the Glossary):

- *peripeteia* ("reversal")
- *hamartia* ("error" or "failure")
- *anagnorisis* ("recognition")
- *katharsis* ("purgation" or "purification")

Tragic theory in Shakespeare's time was sketchy. The word "tragedy" was applied to many stories and real-life events, simply meaning that they involved calamity and suffering, usually for people in high places. More sophisticated tragic theory developed shortly after Shakespeare's time. Most subsequent tragic writers have felt obliged to define what they were doing. By the nineteenth century, this led to theories of a "tragic sense of life," independent of any event or literary form.

Shakespeare was free to try various kinds of tragic effect. It is wiser to concede this multiplicity than to try to tie his plays to a definition of an abstraction called "Shakespearean tragedy." *Titus Andronicus* is tragedy of blood revenge modeled after the works of the ancient Roman playwright Seneca. *Richard II* and *Richard III* draw tragedy out of English history, offering close connections between public events and private life. Shakespeare pursues connections similar to those of the English histories in his series of Roman tragedies, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* build tragedy out of love stories, but the first is romantic and the second, satiric. The four most acclaimed tragedies, *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth*, are not very closely tied to previous models or historical events.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LOT 8520.

Romeo and Juliet on the balcony.

Shakespeare's independence of any strict definition of tragedy or tragic sense of life leaves his characters free to seek for themselves the causes and significance of their suffering. One of the most moving things about them is their effort to understand their own lives.

Shakespeare's independence of any strict definition of tragedy or tragic sense of life leaves his characters free to seek for themselves the causes and significance of their suffering.

Romeo and Juliet could have been a romantic comedy. The title characters are lovers confronting barriers erected by their parents and their society, the standard situation in Shakespearean comedy. The plot develops by a series of accidents that could

have produced a happy outcome. The bourgeois setting is customarily found in comedy rather than tragedy. The Capulets and Montagues, although rich and "alike in dignity," are not aristocrats. In seeking to marry his daughter to Count Paris, an aristocrat and kinsman of the Prince of Verona, Capulet aims at social advancement. The marriage of Viola de Lessups to Lord Wessex in the film *Shakespeare in Love* is a parallel situation. The unhappy outcome results from the impetuousness of the lovers, the stubbornness of the parents, and sheer bad luck. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*.

Supplementary Reading

Leech, *Tragedy*.

Margesson, *The Origins of English Tragedy*.

Questions to Consider

1. What preconceptions do you have about tragedy? How do you use the word?

2. Does the film *Shakespeare in Love* make a reasonable use of the play?

Romeo and Juliet—Public Violence and Private Bliss

Lecture 20

The love that Romeo and Juliet have for each other is presented as extraordinarily pure and ideal. It is sharply differentiated from the view of love held by other characters.

Romeo and Juliet manifests a deft and resilient architectural form, organized around three big scenes: one at the start (the street fight in Act 1 Scene 1), one in the middle (the duel in which Mercutio and Tybalt die in Act 3 Scene 1), and one at the end (the tomb scene in Act 5 Scene 1). In each, an accidental encounter leads to a fight that escalates until the Prince must intervene to stop it. The scenes are big not only in cast requirements, but also in their rapid pace. The scenes anchor the play like pillars, but their speed is such that they are baroque pillars, like Bernini's spiral columns in St. Peter's.

The scenes are big not only in cast requirements, but also in their rapid pace.

The haste and violence of the play appear not only in the young men who start the fights but in older characters, women characters, and in the extraordinary speed of the plot. The parental tyranny of Capulet (to some modern readers the most repulsive example of patriarchalism in Shakespeare) is perhaps explicable in this context of haste and violence.

Within this violent context, the love of Romeo and Juliet is presented as a pure and ideal private world. Their love is sharply differentiated from the view of love held by Mercutio, Capulet, Friar Lawrence, or the Nurse. It is also different from the conventional Petrarchan passion expressed by Romeo for Rosaline before he meets Juliet.

Their love is built by poetry. It is first expressed in a sonnet, 1.5.92–105. In John Donne's phrase, a sonnet was a "pretty room" in which lovers could be private together. In the balcony scene (2.2), love is more than a pretty room: Romeo revises the world so that "Juliet is the sun." In awaiting their wedding night (3.2), Juliet revises astronomy to turn day into night, a night

uniquely expressive of not only Romeo's beauty but also the splendor of their anticipated sexual union. Romeo even turns the tomb (5.3) into a brilliantly lit banqueting hall.

Romeo grows in strength, and Juliet matures as she faces adversity, but their special achievement is the creation of a unique, if transitory, world. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*.

Supplementary Reading

See either the Zeffirelli or the Luhrmann film of *Romeo and Juliet; West Side Story*.

Evans, Introduction to *Romeo and Juliet* (New Cambridge edition).

Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*.

Kernan, "The Plays and the Playwrights," especially section 7.

Questions to Consider

1. How effective was the Broadway play and movie, *West Side Story*, in capturing the "public violence" and "private bliss" of the original? Can you find parallels between certain passages in *Romeo and Juliet* and the lyrics of *West Side Story*?

2. Review the three major scenes around which the play is constructed. Sketch out changes in them to create a romantic comedy. What does this exercise teach about dramaturgy? About Shakespeare's ability to create something unique and perhaps unexpected out of what appears to be a dramatic formula?

Troilus and Cressida—Ancient Epic in a New Mode

Lecture 21

Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida* about 1602. He had written *Romeo and Juliet* about seven years earlier. ... Both are love tragedies; both tell the stories of young lovers conducting secret affairs who are broken apart by the hostile society that surrounds them. ... But they're quite different in their tone, quite different in their final result.

Like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida* (1602) is the story of lovers whose relationship comes to an unhappy end because of conflict in the society around them. The story, however, is far older. The Trojan War comes down from Homer and the later classical poets Virgil and Ovid. It continued through the medieval *Troy Book* of Lydgate and the first account printed in English, Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. There were also subsequent translations of the older versions such as those of Chapman, a younger contemporary of Shakespeare.

The names Troilus, Cressida, Diomedes, and Pandarus occur in Homer. The story that links them in a love-affair was invented by a medieval Frenchman, Benoît de Sainte Maure. It was worked into Latin prose by Guido delle Collonne, developed into an Italian poem by Boccaccio, and reached Britain in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*. Thus, by Shakespeare's time, we have a primitive, heroic story and a medieval courtly love story.

In Shakespeare, this august heritage becomes a harsh story of love mingled with infatuation and calculation, leading to betrayal, bitterness, and savagery. The disrespectful, possibly satiric tone is apparent in the prologue. The prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* treats the story about to be performed with sympathy and the audience with courtesy. The prologue of *Troilus and Cressida* starts with lofty language but becomes flippant about the characters and curt to the audience.

The war story has idealism on the one hand and baseness on the other. In Act 1 Scene 3, Ulysses gives a major speech on the moral and metaphysical order

of the universe, a full statement of the Elizabethan notion of a hierarchical world. All forms of sin, trouble, and destructiveness can be described as violations of degree. Ulysses' plan to bring the sulky Achilles back into the Greek ranks, however, does not involve restoring order: instead he sets up Ajax as a rival in a way that will inspire Achilles' jealous competition. In speaking directly to Achilles in Act 3 Scene 3, Ulysses converts the Christine doctrine that talents must be used in the world in order to be of any value into a vulgar argument for constant self-promoting publicity.

The war story has idealism on the one hand and baseness on the other.

Ulysses' schemes and speeches actually have no real effect: Achilles returns to the battlefield in Act 5 only when Patroclus is killed. The heroic friendship of Achilles and Patroclus is described as a squalid self-indulgence by Thersites. Patroclus is "Achilles' male varlet." Thersites denigrates all the Greek heroes and describes the cause of war as merely "a whore and a cuckold." With Helen herself, for whose appearance we wait until Act 3, our expectation of surpassing glamour collapses into silliness. The harshest judgment of her comes from a fellow Greek, Diomedes. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV video.

Muir, Introduction to *Troilus and Cressida* (Oxford edition).

Questions to Consider

1. This play offers a chance directly to compare Shakespeare with other writers of equal stature. Most of Shakespeare's sources are minor writers, but here he is borrowing from Homer and Chaucer. Compare Achilles in Shakespeare with Achilles in Homer (the scene where Ulysses tries to

persuade him in 3.3 and Homer's scene of the Embassy to Achilles in *Iliad*, Book 9, makes an especially good comparison). Or compare the scenes between the lovers with the parallel places in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

2. Assess Shakespeare's reworking of the twin sources of this play, namely, the heroic Homeric tradition and the medieval courtly love tradition. Is it an effective synthesis? What new elements does Shakespeare add?

Troilus and Cressida—Heroic Aspirations
Lecture 22

The painful thing in this play, the moving thing about *Troilus and Cressida*, is not that a cynical manipulator like Ulysses doesn't succeed in achieving the object of his manipulations. It's that people who do try to act upon loftier motivations are defeated and, in Hector's case, destroyed.

This lecture continues to explore the complexity of *Troilus and Cressida* with a detailed examination of two characters, Cressida and Hector. Cressida is one of Shakespeare's most complex women. The characterization was a strategic problem for Shakespeare. Unless he changed the story radically, Cressida could not be deeply inhibited, strongly virtuous, or extraordinarily hard to win. Yet she could not be simply wanton either.

In Cressida, Shakespeare depicts the problems of women in a society where men set the standards and women are reliant on male opinion for any kind of value. Her first scene and soliloquy (1.2) reveal her self-protective wit and her genuine feelings. It is worth noting that a verse soliloquy by a female character is unusual in Shakespeare. The kissing scene (4.5) shows how women can be treated and leaves us wondering how much she cooperates with that treatment.

Cressida mingles heroic aspirations with fear and vulnerability.

Cressida mingles heroic aspirations with fear and vulnerability. The love scene (3.2) shows Troilus and Cressida hesitant on the brink of fulfillment and then attempting to shape themselves into archetypes of faithful love. When faced with separation (4.2), Cressida attempts heroic resistance. Shakespeare writes his most complex scene when Cressida yields to Diomedes (5.2).

Hector is the most tragic and sympathetic of the characters in the play. It is typical of English writers to by more sympathetic to the Trojans than to the Greeks. Hector is the only character directly to face the question, is Helen

worth all this suffering? In Act 2 Scene 2, Hector states the case for giving up Helen, then abandons this moral position for the sake of glory. Hector's very chivalry proves to be his undoing, in his mercy to fallen enemies, in his desire for honor and booty, and in his expectation that others will be as noble as he is.

The play could end with Troilus mourning the death of Hector and facing the now inevitable fall of Troy. Instead, Shakespeare adds a curious epilogue for Pandarus, in which he bequeaths the audience his venereal diseases. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*.

Supplementary Reading

Adelman, "'This Is and Is Not Cressid': The Characterization of Cressida."

Coghill, *Shakespeare's Professional Skills,* chapter 5.

Rabkin, "*Troilus and Cressida*: The Uses of the Double Plot."

Questions to Consider

1. Reread the play looking just at the part of Cressida (which of course includes what is said to her as well as what she says). What are her choices and motivations?

2. How do the love story and the war story fit together? Consider similarities in situation between Hector and Troilus, between Achilles and Helen, between Ulysses and Pandarus.

Julius Caesar—The Matter of Rome

Lecture 23

A century and a half ago, English literature was not considered a proper school subject. Boys in what the British call public schools, and what we call prep schools, spent most of their time studying Latin. Then English literature began its invasion of the curriculum. It began with *Julius Caesar* and other Shakespearean plays, but particularly this one.

Julius Caesar occupies a special place in the modern conception of Shakespeare because the play appears so frequently in the high school curriculum. There are good reasons why it should be assigned to beginning readers of Shakespeare, but the experience may lead us to regard it as a play only for young people. The language is relatively straightforward. It covers a classical topic. It provides moral maxims of some educational value. It may also lead us (erroneously) to regard it as an authentic account of ancient Rome. In fact, the dying Caesar did not say, "*Et tu, Brute.*"

Julius Caesar marks a turning point in Shakespeare's career.

Julius Caesar marks a turning point in Shakespeare's career. It follows closely on his sustained work with English history (it was written immediately after *Henry V*) and begins his sustained engagement with ancient Rome. Rome was a vital subject for the Elizabethans, both in their education and on the stage. For them, it was the major ancient civilization. The large body of Roman literature in Latin was available to educated Europeans. Writing commentaries on Roman literature was a major preoccupation with Europeans from the Renaissance on. Unlike the Elizabethans, we tend to think of Greece as more important because of its influence on philosophy, literature, and art.

Shakespeare tries to depict Rome with fidelity. He recognizes that ancient Roman views of some matters were different from those of his own time: suicide is an important example. He removes his customary web of explicit and implicit Christian assumptions. The supernatural in *Julius Caesar* is

mysterious and rarely the subject of the characters' speculation. In *Julius Caesar*, reality is political, ethical, psychological, and not theological or metaphysical.

Shakespeare's specific debt for his Roman material is to Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, in the translation of Thomas North (1579). Plutarch wrote history as a series of analytical biographies. Shakespeare stayed very close to Plutarch and his world view. Shakespeare was especially skillful in mingling private and public events, in showing how public events have private subtexts and private concerns lead to public actions. One excellent example is the Lupercal procession at the opening of Act 1 Scene 2. Another example is the tent scene between Cassius and Brutus in Act 4 Scene 3. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*.

Supplementary Reading

See BBC-TV video or Mankiewicz film.

Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*.

Spevack, Introduction to *Julius Caesar* (New Cambridge edition).

Questions to Consider

1. How do the wives of Caesar and Brutus affect our understanding of these leading characters? Consider their appearances both in public and in private.

2. What does the Ghost of Julius Caesar actually do? Compare him and his effects to the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

Julius Caesar—Heroes of History

Lecture 24

One of the reasons why he's so important to us is in his own comprehensiveness. Shakespeare's perception of how the parts of our lives are heartily interconnected can make us realize that our private lives and our public lives are interwoven.

The European Renaissance did not hold a single, monolithic understanding of ancient Rome. Different lessons were drawn from events such as the assassination of Julius Caesar. The events were so well known, however, that Shakespeare endowed his characters with an awareness of their historical importance. They conceive of themselves as characters in history, tied to the Roman past, and imagine what history will say of them. When Brutus and Cassius propose that the conspirators formally wash their hands in Caesar's blood (Act 3 Scene 1), they are ritualizing a moment that they believe will be re-enacted over the ages, either in real life or on the stage. They self-consciously speak of themselves in the third person, observing whether or not their behavior matches up to their images of themselves.

Their ceremonial behavior as historical figures is sometimes undercut by subsequent events or descriptions. To cry "Peace, freedom and liberty!" (3.1.110) while smearing one's weapons with a murdered man's blood produces an ironic shock. When Antony shakes hands with the conspirators, he de-symbolizes the blood. It is no longer nourishment for a tree of liberty, it is literal blood.

Brutus has a heroic and ideal aspiration, a refusal to accept human limitation.

Similar ambivalences appear in the characterizations, showing how skillfully Shakespeare can mix private and public personas. Caesar's pride and defects are sharply marked; at the same time he is direct, decisive, and shrewd. He has achieved what no other man had before: his faith in himself is matched by his deeds. Cassius has a similar energy, although he lacks Caesar's grand imagination

of himself. His desire for personal and political independence runs very deep, making him on the one hand testy and demanding and on the other, passionate and committed. His is the sort of personality one will find at the heart of any revolutionary movement.

Brutus has a heroic and ideal aspiration, a refusal to accept human limitation. He is an impressive Stoic, rejecting passion for reason. The tent scene with Cassius (Act 4 Scene 3) is illustrative of this. Politically, he acts on principle, not passion. This equips him poorly, however, to understand how passion operates in other people, especially in mobs. Antony is driven by loyalty to Caesar, but also by large-scale callousness. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*.

Supplementary Reading

Mack, "*Julius Caesar*."

Sterling, "'Or Else This Were a Savage Spectacle.'"

Questions to Consider

1. What is the nature of heroism in the play? Note that the question is not "Who *is* the hero of this play?" That question has been debated fruitlessly: the title character dies in Act 3, the role of Brutus is not much longer than that of Cassius, Antony seems to take over at crucial moments. What is more important is, what behavior can be considered heroic and why?

2. Analyze the play to find examples of peripety, catharsis and, for each of the major characters, *anagnorosis* and *hamartia.*

Hamlet—The Abundance of the Play

Lecture 25

A favorite line for me in the play just now is, "Thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls." It's one of Hamlet's lines when he's first confronting the ghost. ... What a marvelous and paradoxical line it is: "Thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls," thoughts that we can't actually think.

It is the mark of a classic that it always seems both new and old. Shakespeare's *Hamlet s*eemed new and old even when it first appeared in 1600. The earliest written version of the story was by the monk Saxo Grammaticus about 1200. It appears in French in François de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* in 1570 and reached the Elizabethan stage in the late 1580s in a play now lost, referred to by scholars as the "Ur-Hamlet," probably written by Thomas Kyd. Contemporary references to this play are derisory.

Shakespeare's version is his longest play (nearly 4,000 lines) with his longest leading role. It is so full of material that even those who know it may be surprised by some of its contents when reading or seeing it again. It contains characters of all sorts: kings, courtiers, pirates, players, gravediggers, a ghost, and many others. The action ranges from a formal court council to a scene in which two young men jump into the grave of a suicidal madwoman. The title character is a prince, a son, a nephew, a lover, a poet, a swordsman, a near-suicide, a student of philosophy, a critic of the theatre.

The material of the play is often deliberately placed so as to surprise the audience. The first appearance of the ghost interrupts what had seemed to be a speech of sustained exposition. The visual effect overtakes the narrative. When Hamlet first sees the ghost, the same kind of ambush is arranged, but with greater impact and significance. A fourteen-line academic discourse on *hamartia* is interrupted by the ghost's appearance. The ghost is undeniable, but ambiguous. The unexpected event overtakes theory. Hamlet shifts from exposition to prayer. Scenes are arranged so that the focus of the audience is split (as noted by the critic Maynard Mack). The second scene of the play is an example of this. Do we look at Claudius, or at Hamlet, off to the side?

Much of the play takes place in the interrogative mood: people frequently ask questions, from the opening "Who's there?" to the famous "To be or not to be: that is the question." The play questions facts and raises mysteries. The questioning reaches its highest pitch with the appearance of the ghost in Act I. Tragedies regularly end in death, but this tragedy questions what it is like to *be* dead. C. S. Lewis proposed that death could well be the subject of this play. In *Hamlet*, being *after* death is a central feature.

The ghost exemplifies the mysterious qualities of the play.

The ghost exemplifies the mysterious qualities of the play. Catholic writers of the sixteenth century suggested that ghosts came from Purgatory with legitimate requests to make of living people. Protestant writers suggested that ghosts were demons seeking to draw the people to whom they appeared into damnation. Skeptics suggested that ghosts were hallucinations produced by unsound minds.

Shakespeare uses all three theories without privileging one. The ghost describes its condition in mostly Catholic terms. Hamlet contemplates the possibility that the ghost is a devil (the Protestant theory). Horatio tends to think of it as a hallucination, as does Gertrude. Shakespeare uses this ghost to give Hamlet a problem and to give us the experience of encountering a ghost, thus forcing us into the same position as Hamlet. This ghost is real, ambiguous—and dangerous. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

Supplementary Reading

See *Hamlet* in BBC video (with Derek Jacobi) or one of the films starring, respectively, Laurence Olivier, Mel Gibson, Kenneth Branagh.

Booth, "On the Value of *Hamlet*."

Mack, “The World of Hamlet.”

Wilson, *What Happens in* Hamlet.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you agree with C. S. Lewis that the subject of Hamlet could well be death? Count the number of deaths and consider both the ways these characters died and the reactions of the remaining characters to these deaths. What insights does this exercise yield?

2. How effective is the ghost in startling twentieth-century viewers, as compared to those in Shakespeare’s time? If your answer is “very effective,” why do you say so? If your answer is “not very effective,” suggest another way for Hamlet to be roused to action early in the play.

Hamlet—The Causes of Tragedy

Lecture 26

What is the matter with Hamlet himself? We have been asking, we have eagerly been discussing for about three centuries.

Hamlet is an intellectual and epistemological play distinguished by its thoughtful and reflective speeches. Older characters—Polonius and Claudius—give long speeches of advice. Younger characters—Hamlet, Horatio, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern—are university students.

Hamlet manifests interests in education, in the classics, and in the theater, sometimes linking the three: Hamlet evidently saw the Players enact a play on a classical subject at Wittenberg. Wittenberg was one of the new universities of the Renaissance, founded by Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, in 1502. It was particularly concerned with humanism and with Protestantism. Martin Luther took a degree at this university. It is also the university of the fictional character Doctor Faustus. Shakespeare's play seems particularly to have interested a university audience in its own time: it was performed at Oxford and Cambridge and earned the praise of a Cambridge don, Gabriel Harvey.

The range of Hamlet's mind and education is clear in his efforts to explain the causes of evil.

The range of Hamlet's mind and education is clear in his efforts to explain the causes of evil. In Act 1 Scene 4, he explores Aristotle's theory of the tragic flaw (*hamartia*). We need to ask whether Shakespeare construct his own tragedies on the basis of this theory. In Act 2 Scene 2, Hamlet's request for a speech on the fall of Troy leads to a speech on Boethius' theory (propounded in the early sixth century A.D.) that Fortune is the cause of tragic falls. Invoking Troy leads us back to the archetypal tragic story. Kenneth Branagh's casting of John Gielgud and Judi Dench as Priam and Hecuba in his movie of *Hamlet* supports that sense of going back to older tragic models.

In Act 3 Scene 4, Hamlet invokes the prophetic theory, to be found in Isaiah, that God selects human agents to serve as scourges and ministers dealing with evil on earth. King Richard III is an example of the former. Richmond, future King Henry, is an example of the latter. Hamlet combines prophet and minister in one person.

Hamlet's wide-ranging search for the origins of tragedy has been followed by many critics seeking the reasons for Hamlet's own troubles. Goethe suggested that Hamlet was too delicate, too sensitive. Coleridge thought that Hamlet was constitutionally given to thought and indisposed to action. The critic Kitto suggested that Hamlet was too shocked by his father's death and mother's rapid remarriage to his uncle to do anything. Freud held that Hamlet was unable to revenge himself on his uncle because Claudius has carried out his own (Hamlet's) Oedipal fantasy. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

Supplementary Reading

Edwards, Introduction to *Hamlet* (New Cambridge edition).

Goldman, *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama*, chapter 6.

Questions to Consider

1. Consider the analyses of Hamlet in Paragraph IV of the outline. Which one(s) do you agree with? Explain your reasons. Can you come up with any reason for Hamlet's troubles not mentioned in the lecture?

2. Why is Hamlet's status as a university (drop-out) student significant?

Hamlet—The Protestant Hero

Lecture 27

The tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is the drama of the Protestant conscience, led into doubt by the puzzlements of the world and the self, trying to amend that doubt with all the learning that antiquity and humanism can make available, and arriving heroically at his own convictions and then acting on them.

Claudius has been played in a variety of ways, from the repulsive king of Basil Sydney in Laurence Olivier's film to the able and affable king of Patrick Stewart in the BBC-TV videotape. However he is played, his guilt, although not necessarily obvious at first, becomes clear, and may be tragic and moving in the prayer scene. Claudius shows us the picture of the usurper, guilty of the "oldest primal curse" of fratricide, and what he does to himself because of this.

Claudius shows us the picture of the usurper, guilty of the "oldest primal curse" of fratricide, and what he does to himself because of this.

The extent of Gertrude's awareness of what is going on in Elsinore is not clear in the script. Her knowledge may be clarified by performances such as that given by Glenn Close in the duel scene of Zeffirelli's film and Julie Christie in the closet scene of Branagh's film. The part of Gertrude is really underwritten.

Hamlet's tragedy is the tragedy of youth. He is trying to cope with problems not of his creation. He contrasts with the middle-aged Macbeth and the old Lear. He has trouble coordinating his excellent mind and education with his passionate feelings and impulses. He admires both the stoical Horatio and the emotional Player. His feelings about Ophelia veer from love to profound mistrust. In the grave scene, he professes his love. But earlier, when he is suspicious of her, he actually insults her. In one soliloquy he first rages at Claudius and then mocks his own rage.

Hamlet embodies Protestant doubts and anxieties, the isolated soul without the clear guides provided by the Catholic Middle Ages. His soliloquy ("what a piece of work is man") shows an awareness of medieval humanistic doctrine, yet he can't assent to it. Upon his return from the sea voyage, however, he shows a belief in the divine governance of the world ("There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow"). Hamlet stops trying to control things from this juncture forward. Since God governs all things, we do not need to look for explanation in theories (e.g., Aristotle, Boethius, Isaiah). Rather, "readiness is all," and Hamlet is now ready to act. ■

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LOT 8521.

Hamlet at the grave of Yorick.

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

Supplementary Reading

Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, chapter 9.

Lewis, "Hamlet—The Prince or the Poem."

Rose, "*Hamlet*—the 'Mona Lisa' of Literature."

Questions to Consider

1. In line with this lecture's title, assess Hamlet as a "Protestant hero." Why is it important to make this distinction, especially since there is no overt theology or religion in the play? Can Hamlet be considered a hero in any other context?

2. The lecture also points up the fact that Hamlet is a young "hero" whose doubts and impetuosity war with each other. One observer said that the play could be summed up by two maxims: "Look before you leap" and "he who hesitates is lost." Identify key junctures in the play where Hamlet "looks" and where he "leaps." What are the consequences of these actions at these points? What might have happened if he reversed the actions?

Othello—The Design of the Tragedy

Lecture 28

Much that happens in *Othello* depends on the location of what you might call the tragic deed, that act that disrupts nature, disrupts the order of society and causes other bad things to happen in its wake.

Othello achieves its unique effect in ways different from the other Shakespearean tragedies. *Othello* lacks the sense of large metaphysical forces: the ghost of *Hamlet*, the supernatural prophecies of *Macbeth*, the frequent speculations about the gods that occur in *King Lear*. *Othello* deals more with private life than do the other tragedies. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the death of the lovers has a direct impact on the civil order of a city, Verona; in *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *King Lear*, the welfare of kingdoms is at stake. Although *Othello* begins with great historical conflict between the Christian state of Venice and the Muslim empire of the Turks, that issue evaporates before the end of Act 2. The value of the play depends on characterization, psychology, psychic interplay, and plot construction.

In order to create the tragic effects of the play, Shakespeare must first lead the audience to feel the value and preciousness of the love between Desdemona and Othello.

The design of the play places the tragic deed in a different location. In *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *King Lear*, fatal events happen early and the characters must reflect on them. In *Othello*, nothing fatal occurs until the last act. Thus the characters have little time to reflect; they can only express their shock and horror. They are helpless to do anything about it or explain it. The tragic facts prove to be utterly destructive. In Othello, the stakes are lower—only the lives and happiness and commitment of the central couple—but those are altogether annihilated. Unlike the central characters of the other tragedies, Othello and Desdemona are degraded as well as destroyed.

In order to create the tragic effects of the play, Shakespeare must first lead the audience to feel the value and preciousness of the love between Desdemona and Othello. The first two acts of the play constitute a romantic comedy. Shakespearean comedy assumes that romantic love between a man and a woman is good, natural, irrational in its choices, justifies temporary indecorum, and leads to marriage. In *Othello*, the lovers are an unlikely pair, differing in age, race, background, and experience. They are also already married. They encounter the usual obstacles of comedy: a crotchety father, Brabantio; a ridiculous rival lover, Roderigo; and a villain, Iago. Their situation is investigated and blessed by a good duke, and nature itself appears to cooperate in blessing their union.

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Irish actor G. V. Brooke (left) as Othello.

In the first scenes, Othello and Desdemona survive vilification. These two characters are introduced in a bad light (cf., the Iago-Roderigo scene opening Act I). Iago describes Othello as repulsive in character, appearance, and behavior. But when he appears, Othello speaks and behaves in a way that demonstrates the descriptions to be almost wholly false. Brabantio describes his daughter as a shy girl who has been bewitched, but Desdemona proves to be a self-possessed young woman who deliberately chose Othello as her mate.

Although there is no literal wedding scene, the arrival and reunion of Othello and Desdemona on Cyprus after the sea voyage constitutes an equivalent celebration. Iago plays the role of the cynic who cracks dirty jokes at weddings. Cassio's speeches constitute an *epithalamium*, a wedding song celebrating the lovers and their union. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Othello*.

Supplementary Reading

See video with Olivier.

Sanders, Introduction to *Othello* (New Cambridge edition).

Questions to Consider

1. Compare Othello and Desdemona with Romeo and Juliet as central characters in a tragi-comedy involving lovers in terms of the "public violence, private bliss" model of Lecture 20.

2. A recent version of *Othello* reversed the race of the two central characters, with a white Othello and black Desdemona. What differences might this make in audience perception or reaction to the fatal working out of the plot? Is the theme of the play general enough to admit of still other character reversals based on age, gender, or some other factor? Or would this just ruin an excellent drama? Do you think that we, as late twentieth-century viewers, are able to overcome our own biases on some of these issues in order to appreciate the play in an alternative version?

Othello—"O Villainy!"

Lecture 29

Iago is one of the big problems in Shakespearean criticism. There has been much throwing about of brains as to why Iago chooses to destroy Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, the rest of them. Why does he do the terrible things he does?

As mentioned in the last lecture, and as suggested by the title, the role of Iago is a central one to this play. His villainy is somewhat hard to handle, since his motive is hard to pin down, and Shakespeare doesn't really give us any help at the shocking end of the play. This lecture will advance some of the theories put forth to explain Iago and lead us to consider the nature of evil.

Iago proposes to destroy the happiness achieved by Othello and Desdemona. Why he does this is problematic. He adduces some five motives for his schemes, but they are not dwelt upon consistently: Othello has deprived him of a promotion in favor of Cassio. Othello has possibly cuckolded Iago. He fears that Cassio has also cuckolded him. He seems to admit a desire for Desdemona, but this is not really clear. He admits that Cassio makes him feel ugly. In the final scene Shakespeare ostentatiously refuses to explain Iago.

As critic Bernard Spivack points out, Iago may be a Renaissance embodiment of a character from medieval drama, the Vice of the morality play, a tempter who takes pleasure in deceit for its own sake and has a special relationship with the audience. Is Iago a "demi-devil?" He uses much language and imagery of Hell and the devil. In the final act, Othello looks at Iago's feet, expecting to see cloven hooves.

Modern psychoanalysis suggests that Iago is motivated by repressed homosexuality: he destroys Othello and Cassio because he resents their attractiveness to him, displacing his love for them onto Desdemona, and then punishing her for it. The language with which he describes Cassio suggests sexual desire. The poisoning of Othello's mind is a seduction climaxing in a quasi-marital vow.

The Vice theory and the psychoanalytic theory are abstractions. Neither catches the full experience of Iago's hatred. Shakespeare's business as a dramatist is to capture the texture of living, not the explanations people offer in intellectual analysis. Promiscuous hatred and envy do exist. In this case, they transcend any specific motives Iago offers for his actions. Shakespeare allows his characters to probe the meaning of their suffering. In the case of Iago, this involves probing why he is inflicting suffering on other people. As Coleridge said, Iago is "the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity."

Modern psychoanalysis suggests that Iago is motivated by repressed homosexuality.

Iago believes that the secret of life lies in self-knowledge, self-love, and self-control. This is well illustrated in his dialogue with Roderigo in the last sixty lines of Act 1 Scene 2. The view has sound Elizabethan basis but omits any suggestion of spiritual life or grace. His language in many passages debases human life. He places his emphasis on his own will. He denies any spiritual operation in such relationships as love, heroism, or self-sacrifice. He denies everything that makes a human being anything other than a calculating animal.

Iago is envious of those who live more idealistically. Iago really does possess an irrational hatred and envy. He therefore tries to "enmesh them all." He is really entirely self-centered and cannot stand others who are not. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Othello*.

Questions to Consider

1. Evaluate the five possible motives given in paragraph I.A. that might have impelled Iago to carry out his actions. Are any or all of them compelling?

2. Have we encountered any other villains like Iago elsewhere in Shakespeare? If so, where? Support your conclusion with specific examples of the behavior and psychology of the other character(s).

Othello—"The Noble Moor"

Lecture 30

Hamlet held a Renaissance ideal of man, that man was "in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel." Othello does not have the philosophical subtlety of Hamlet; he's not going to quote Pico della Mirandola on the freedom of man. He doesn't need to. He's achieved the Renaissance perfection of action that Hamlet can only dream of.

As we discussed in Lecture 28, *Othello* is different from the other great tragedies in many ways. Therefore, it is not surprising that the lead character is also different from the other tragic protagonists. In this lecture, we will first compare Othello with Hamlet to note key differences in character and then consider what negative things critics have said about Othello in an attempt to determine the aptness of his sobriquet of "the noble Moor."

Othello is a man of action and achievement. In many ways he is the opposite of Hamlet. Hamlet is a young university student; Othello, a middle-aged soldier. Hamlet is European; Othello is African. Hamlet is a failure at love; Othello is happily married. Hamlet is not free, but rather caught in a situation not of his own creation, subject to his birth as a prince and the actions of his parents and his uncle. Othello, although born a prince in Africa, has pursued a career of his own choosing and can show his own accomplishments. He is free.

Early in the play, Othello behaves with unfailing resourcefulness. In Act 1 Scene 3, he handles Brabantio and the Senate with courteous firmness. In Act 2 Scene 3, he handles Cassio with both affection and professional judgment. It is his characteristic action in both Act 1 and Act 2 to quell disorder. His imposing quality appears in his speech, the "Othello music." The critic G. Wilson Knight has described this stately, brilliant, picturesque, and exotic mode of expression as typified by strong verbs, the imperative mode of address, and imagery, as exemplified by his famous "Pontic sea" speech in Act 3 Scene 3.

The heroic authority of this figure is reinforced by his color. There is the visual importance of blackness on the stage. It makes Othello separate, free, and commanding. The racial entanglements of blackness are particularly conflicting for modern audiences. Is Shakespeare saying that Othello is tricked because he is black? If so, then the play is racist. If Othello thinks he is inferior to the white Europeans around him, we have missed the self-confidence of the character. He has not suffered the dehumanization of subsequent race slavery. A particular mark of his heroism is his capacity for personal commitment: to his profession as warrior and then to his love for Desdemona.

The heroic authority of this figure is reinforced by his color.

This heroic figure suffers unusual degradation. The degradation is both physical and verbal. In Act 4 Scene 1, he sprawls on the floor in an epileptic fit, and his stately language turns into animalistic spluttering. Critics degrade him by finding him full of flaws. Except for Coriolanus, he is the only Shakespearean tragic hero whom people have thought stupid. In fact, while he may lack Hamlet's intellectual subtlety, he is not stupid. We may be irritated that he is taken in by Iago's lies. Unlike other deceptions in Shakespeare, which work quickly, Act 3 Scene 3 of Othello dramatizes this deception in agonizingly extensive detail. His most serious mistake may be not in believing the lies told by his trusted subaltern, but that he lets them corrupt his mind and emotions. His speech at 3.3.260 shows him moving from love to indifference to murderous vengeance, a transition that happens in other plays with white protagonists.

In Act 5, Othello attempts to handle his revenge with the disinterested quality of a judge. He imagines himself a judge acting merely for "the cause," but his emotions overwhelm this attempted detachment and he kills Desdemona in a rage. He ends the play, as he had started, as a judge and defender of civilization, but now the enemy to be defeated is not the Turks or civil riot, but himself. His suicide is therefore the last act of heroism of the "noble Moor." ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Othello*.

Questions to Consider

1. Consider the issue of Othello's blackness. Is this metaphor? Is Shakespeare sending a subtle racial message (consider both positive and negative aspects of any such "message")? Is it possible for modern listeners, especially Americans, to view the play unhindered by the realities of racial history occurring after Shakespeare's time?

2. Do you think it is plausible that a character with Othello's obvious sense of self could let innuendo drive him to his crime? How many other parallels in other literature can you find of the jealous husband (or wife) slowly succumbing to suggestion, resulting in such a tragic end? Are these other works any more plausible? Why or why not?

King Lear—"This Is the Worst"

Lecture 31

For Lear himself, he began as a king in charge of everything, trying to behave in a rational fashion. He was moved into wrath; that's the invasion of strife. He ends up in a state of total psychic chaos, which is madness, chaos in the head.

King Lear has proved to be the most painful of Shakespeare's tragedies for our time. *Hamlet* was considered to be the greatest of the tragedies in the nineteenth century; Lear is considered to be the greatest in the twentieth century. It is painful in term of physical atrocities: blinding, madness, exposure of old men to storms, murders. It is emotionally painful in terms of verbal and emotional exchanges: bargaining for love, cursing people to sterility, rebuking helpless people, feelings of shame.

The chief dramatic techniques by which the play brings people from positions of power and prosperity to the condition of "poor, bare, forked animals" are repetition and disintegration. In contrast to the variety of *Hamlet*, everything that happens in the opening scenes of *King Lear* happens several times: banishments, abuse of fathers, multiple mad scenes. There is a full double plot. The language is full of repetition. An ordered kingdom, with an enthroned king commanding obedience from his hierarchically ordered subjects and family, is reduced to a collection of poorly clad or naked people in a storm speaking random dialogue.

The Elizabethans thought of the universe is a battleground between strife, which produces chaos, and love, which creates and sustains orderly nature.

The disintegration is most vividly shown on a personal level in Edgar's soliloquy "I have heard myself proclaimed" (2.3). He has lost his social position and his inheritance, and is pursued as a criminal. He adopts nakedness, mutilation, and madness as a disguise. There are numerous thematic elements here:

- Loss of civilized trappings;

- Reduction of a character to a bestial level;

- Madness, forcing unwilling and scarcely clad humans to give alms to their fellows;

- Identity (e.g., Edgar has been disowned by his father, Gloucester. As Tom o'Bedlam, he is no longer Edgar).

The implications of this disintegration are most vividly shown on social and cosmic levels in Lear's speech "O most small fault" (1.4.265–271), which reflects an Elizabethan conception of the universe. This speech can be compared with Othello's speech in the last lecture. The Elizabethans thought of the universe is a battleground between strife, which produces chaos, and love, which creates and sustains orderly nature. Once love is withdrawn, life and the universe move toward chaos. The storms are good symbols of strife entering the world. In the first three acts of *King Lear*, the withdrawal of love produces personal, social, and cosmic chaos. Both Lear and Edgar go through the same transitions. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *King Lear*.

Supplementary Reading

See videotape of *King Lear* (the one directed by Michael Elliott and starring Laurence Olivier is better than the BBC version).

Goldman, *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama*, chapter 7.

Questions to Consider

1. Consider the use of repetition in *King Lear*. Is so much of it necessary? What would be the effect without the double plots, mad scenes, or other thematically echoing scenes?

2. Compare Lear to Othello in terms of psychological disintegration, specifically, in their attempts to control a crumbling universe (whether personal or public).

King Lear—Wisdom Through Suffering

Lecture 32

The subtitle of this second lecture on *King Lear* is "Wisdom through Suffering." I take the phrase from Aeschylus, where it occurs in the *Agamemnon*, the first chorus, "Wisdom comes only through suffering." It is perhaps too optimistic a phrase to use. I am not sure that wisdom in fact comes through suffering; only of the assurance that it will only come through suffering if it comes at all.

Since atrocities recur in *King Lear*, a frequent action of the play is coping, that is, people's effort to deal emotionally and intellectually with disaster. Gloucester's response to the supposed schemes of Edgar in Act 1 Scene 2 offers a typical example of coping techniques: rage, denial, and attempted explanation. Lear has the same reactions to Cordelia in the first scene. Act 4 offers "malice of the gods" as a reason for the suffering. This coping mechanism relies on an astrological explanation. Edmund demolishes this weak argument and places responsibility on human nature itself. Gloucester then advances another possible explanation: the gods who kill men for sport. In Act 5, Edgar offers an explanation—justice of the gods is being visited on the sufferers because of Gloucester's adultery that resulted in the birth of Edmund.

Gloucester moves through various further stages of response as the plot unfolds. In Act 2, as Lear's relationship with his daughters deteriorates, he tries to compromise, to "have all well betwixt you." In Act 3, he tries secret action and defiance. He shows himself to be on Lear's side against his (Lear's) wicked daughters. He takes his actions secretly, but is betrayed by Edmund and is blinded. In Act 4, he collapses and seeks to die.

Lear manifests a remarkable capacity for taking in new experience.

Edgar's movement is one of growth. He experiences complete abasement as Tom o'Bedlam. He kills the two men who curiously mirror his own condition, his half-brother Edmund and the steward Oswald. He thus becomes those

things against which he later fights. He emerges as a heroic knight and presumably the next king of Britain in the final act. His progress appears to be a surrealistic version of the education of Prince Hal in the *Henry IV* plays.

Lear manifests a remarkable capacity for taking in new experience. He recognizes his own responsibility for mistreating Cordelia by the end of Act 1. Amid his anger and cursing in Act 2, he also recognizes the need for patience and the need to grow morally. He comes to empathize with a kind of suffering he had not known about before: he prays for the "poor naked wretches" (3.4.28–36) in a plea for distributive justice. He finds a fundamental embodiment of the human condition in mad Tom o'Bedlam. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *King Lear*.

Supplementary Reading

Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*.

Halio, Introduction to *King Lear* (New Cambridge edition).

Howard, *Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration* (references to *King Lear*).

Questions to Consider

1. Are there other coping mechanisms in this play that were not discussed in the lecture? Identify them and give examples (Act and Scene) where they occur.

2. Compare the growth of Edgar with that of Prince Hal. What are the similarities and differences in their "apprenticeship" for kingship?

King Lear—"Then We Go On"

Lecture 33

By the middle of *King Lear*, the characters have reached the condition of chaos, the condition where man is unaccommodated, where man is a bare, poor, forked animal.

The second half of the play asks, with increasing intensity, how we can go on from chaos. Six ways appear to be suggested. One may attempt to reconstruct a just civilization through the formal process of a legal trial. Lear's attempted trial of Goneril and Regan (represented only by wooden household stools) in Act 3 Scene 6 becomes a mad parody of a nursery quarrel. The trial eventually asks the question "*unde malum?*"; that is, whence comes evil? Or why are people callous and cruel and do evil things? Various answers (e.g., the gods, inexorable dumb forces, the stars, etc.) are suggested in later scenes. Love and hate are presented as first causes.

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American actor Edwin Forrest as King Lear.

One may act charitably to others. Act IV is full of helping, acts of charity and forgiveness. Kent and Cordelia return to help Lear. Edgar helps his blinded father, Gloucester.

One may kill oneself. Blind Gloucester attempts suicide from what he thinks is the Dover cliff in Act 4 Scene 6. This is the weirdest scene in Shakespeare. The Bard exploits the conventions of the bare Elizabethan stage to make this scene work. His despair is cured—by a combination of shock treatment and blatant deception.

One may rage defiantly against the world. Lear rages madly against "love," which he insists on portraying in terms of debased sexuality. He rages against "justice," which he insists on portraying as hypocrisy and tyranny. Lear rages against social injustice in Act 4 Scene 6. Lear reduces man to an animal who lusts and punishes—and weeps. The blind Gloucester's sobbing causes Lear to recognize and pity him and to preach patience on "this great stage of fools" just as a preacher might take the primal birth cry of humanity as his text.

Lear rages madly against "love," which he insists on portraying in terms of debased sexuality.

One may come to self-recognition (*anagnorisis*): "I am a very foolish fond old man."

One may simply endure. Edgar suggests in Act 5 Scene 2 that endurance leads to ripeness. ("What? In ill thoughts again? Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither. Ripeness is all.") To this, Gloucester replies "And that's true, too," indicating that this is just one of many truths. All the older versions of the Lear story have both Lear and Cordelia surviving their travails and being restored in the end. Shakespeare's version is full of "false dawns"—good is done and justice partly vindicated, but the ending is tragic.

The last act suggests that there are more than six ways. It keeps producing more truths that must be endured. What does Lear see on the lips of Cordelia just before he dies? This is the play's final mystery. Like a distant sentry, Lear reports from the margins of our existence. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *King Lear*.

Questions to Consider

1. Count up the instances of *anagnorisis* in this play. To whom do they occur and where in the plot do they happen? How does this help to drive the action?

2. What does Shakespeare achieve by altering the conventional ending of the older Lear stories mentioned above? Is the ending fully satisfying or perhaps better, cathartic, in the Aristotelian sense?

Macbeth—"Fair Is Foul"

Lecture 34

Of all Shakespeare's major tragedies, assertions about ultimate providential order are most credible with this one.

Macbeth is a tragedy that can readily be understood as affirming an ultimately orderly and beneficent universe. Terrible deeds occur, but the protagonist is a bad man who is ultimately destroyed by better men, as his wife is tortured and driven to death by her own guilt. Their behavior appears to be unnatural both in the sense of being wicked and in the sense of being foreign to them. Evil is something alien and perverse. Lady Macbeth's distortion of her own nature is clear in her invocation to "murdering ministers" in Act 1 Scene 5. Macbeth indicates the terrible price he is willing to pay for his own comfort in his greeting to the witches in Act 4 Scene 1. Both of them declare their willingness to perform the extreme, Herod-like act of tyranny: the murder of children.

The murder of Duncan, a sanctified king, is clearly marked as a hideous act, producing chaos in nature (a fierce storm, the cannibalism of the royal horses) and in the state until the proper order is restored when Duncan's son Malcolm wins the crown. Malcolm declares that his final victory manifests divine providence, "the grace of Grace." But Malcolm's own line will be replaced by the Stuarts, as Shakespeare and his audience well knew. Macbeth's tyranny is counterbalanced by the excellent rule of the English king, Edward the Confessor, praised in Act 4 Scene 3.

The final description of the Macbeths as "this dead butcher and his fiendlike queen" is understandable but far from satisfactory.

This orthodox reading of *Macbeth*, although defensible, neglects features of the play that are less optimistic. The final description of the Macbeths as "this dead butcher and his fiendlike queen" is understandable but far from satisfactory. From the battle against rebels described in Act 1 to the final praise for Young Siward, Scotland is a land in which savage

butchery regularly occurs and inspires praise and admiration. Macduff is the hero who replaces Macbeth as the loyal warrior fighting for his king, but Macduff is responsible for as much blood as Macbeth is, and not just on the battlefield—he is unintentionally responsible for the death of his own mother and his own children.

Thus, the forces of virtue are, without realizing it, as destructive as Macbeth's. Echoes and parallels between the opening and closing of the play underline this. There is no marriage at the end. The sacred dynasties are male and mutilated by the end. The masculine virtues of courage and honor exemplified by the better men who defeat Macbeth lack continuity without the female principle of nurturance. Malcolm tries too hard to civilize and tame the force of tragedy, to "recuperate" these cruel and bloody events in a cruel and bloody country for some providential order.

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Actor John Henderson as Macbeth.

Crucial to our understanding of the nature and governance of the universe in which *Macbeth* takes place is the question of free will. Does Macbeth choose to kill Duncan, or does the prophecy of the witches mean that he has no choice in the matter? On this issue, the play engages the chief theological dispute of Reformation Europe: the conflict between free will and predestination. Who are the "weird sisters?" Are they, in effect, fates, and is their prediction for Macbeth a destiny he cannot escape? Or are they temptresses who do not and cannot overcome Macbeth's free will? The possibility of predestined, immutable damnation—a possibility that Macbeth may embody in this play—was the most terrifying of all in the mind of Reformation Europe. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.

Supplementary Reading

Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, lectures 9 and 10.

Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments*, chapter 7.

Questions to Consider

1. *Macbeth* can be read on many levels. Consider it as a history play and compare it with Shakespeare's others in that genre. Can you find common themes in Shakespeare's handling of such topics as the nature of kingship, liege loyalty, and what we might call today "problems of succession?"

2. Why do you think Macbeth killed his honored guest? You can frame your answer in terms of the "free will versus predestination" argument adduced in the lecture or in any other context (e.g., his wife pushed him into it).

Macbeth—Musing on Murder
Lecture 35

> **Soliloquies in early Shakespeare tend to be a direct address to the audience. ... As Shakespeare goes on in his career, his soliloquies become more interior. ... With Macbeth, we reach the fullness of that process. Macbeth's soliloquy, "If it were done," is musing, is the interior life of a man who is not an extrovert, who does not go around exposing himself to all and sundry.**

In this lecture, we attempt to go inside of Macbeth's mind to hear him, as it were, contemplate his action and motives as he delivers a soliloquy or interior monologue. By using this technique, Shakespeare is able to develop numerous perspectives for his audience to consider as the play progresses.

With Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 7 ("If it were done"), we happen to overhear him. Although Macbeth is a villain like Richard III and Edmund, he is not, like them, an ironist entertaining us with sardonic wit. Instead he is "rapt" in his own thoughts. He thinks associatively, not logically. He may not be fully conscious of the process by which he moves from one idea or emotion to another. Ian McKellan in playing Macbeth overrode the full stops and took his pauses in the middle of sentences. This is the most effective performance of this passage that the professor has seen.

Macbeth is at first reluctant directly to confront the idea of murdering Duncan. The soliloquy opens with an ambiguous generalization: is he making a moral or a pragmatic judgment? "Assassination" is an exotic and euphemistic word for murder. Macbeth does not refer to Duncan by name.

The phrase "bank and shoal [or school] of time" sets up three different contexts in which to evaluate the proposed murder. The first is risky physical action by a body of water. The next is teaching in a lecture hall (time is an arena wherein we learn lessons). Finally, there is passing judgment in a law court (time is a forum in which we are judged, perhaps for all eternity, a thought that Macbeth wishes to avoid).

Macbeth's inner argument can be seen also in both secular and religious terms. Macbeth argues against murder in term of earthly sanctions (reasoning, in effect, that "what goes around, comes around"). However, the words "chalice" and "host" suggest a religious, supernatural condemnation and punishment for murder. Macbeth also invokes the double, actually triple, trust in which King Duncan is held: He is Macbeth's king, kinsman, and guest. The sanctions are ultimately divine. There is a strong web of barely unconscious associations in Macbeth's thoughts here at this juncture.

Macbeth's inner argument can be seen also in both secular and religious terms.

The observation that Duncan's "virtues will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking-off" suggests a full scale Last Judgment. In Bernard of Clairvaux's allegory of the Four Daughters of God, the virtues that "plead" before God's throne are Justice, Truth, Mercy, and Peace. The ultimate result of their pleading was the birth of a Redeemer, Christ. The Redeemer will grow from baby to judge. Macbeth, in this amazing baroque passage, has vividly imaged forth a universal tempest of divine wrath that will be unleashed against him should he commit the enormity of murder, especially the murder of the Lord's anointed, who is also his guest and relative.

Against this, Macbeth finds that only his vaulting human ambition spurs him on. He knows, perhaps somewhat inchoately, that his attempt to "jump" eternity is futile from the start. He is cut off amid this train of thought by the arrival of Lady Macbeth, who will prove to be the "spur" of his vaulting ambition. By this abrupt close of this remarkable speech, we know more about Macbeth and what is going on in his mind than

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D. P. Bowers as Lady Macbeth.

Macbeth himself consciously knows. Macbeth may not fully understand all the implications of what he has said, but he has experienced their emotional effect. ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.

Supplementary Reading

The detailed notes on Macbeth's soliloquy in the Arden edition edited by Kenneth Muir or the New Cambridge edition edited by A. R. Braunmuller.

It is useful also to look up all the words used in this speech in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (complete version).

Questions to Consider

1. Given all the arguments against murder that Macbeth comes up with in his soliloquy, why doesn't he—or can't he—talk himself out of the evil deed?

2. Can we instructively compare Macbeth to Hamlet in his introspection and hesitancy? If so, to whom or what can we compare Lady Macbeth?

Macbeth—“Enter Two Murderers”

Lecture 36

“Enter two murderers”—that is a frequent stage direction in Shakespeare. The hired thugs of *Richard III*; there are murderers also hired in *Macbeth*; it occurs elsewhere in other plays. The great Shakespearean scholar Alfred Harbage ... once remarked that the whole play of *Macbeth* might be considered an expansion of the stage direction “Enter two murderers,” taking it seriously; not just a couple of hired thugs, but the lead roles of the play.

In this concluding lecture on Macbeth (and the concluding lecture of the series), we will continue the psychological probing begun in the last lecture. It is the unusual achievement of this play that we are brought into deep sympathy with two murderers while remaining fully aware of the horror of their crimes. The focus is on the Macbeths. Their victims appear in only a few scenes. This is not a modern story in which we can sympathize because the evildoers have themselves been mistreated prior to their crime. We are not given that kind of psychological motivation for them, and their crime is in fact unnecessary. If the weird sisters’ prophecy is unconditional—at one point Macbeth thinks it is so—why does Macbeth have to do anything at all?

They are not very able murderers. Lady Macbeth desires to kill, but cannot. Macbeth can kill in battle, but needs elaborate gearing up in order to kill Duncan (whose murder we don’t actually see). Macbeth commits no further murders thereafter, but relies on hired thugs. Both Macbeths suffer enormous guilt over their act.

Only by a strange sexual cooperation can the Macbeths achieve their crime. Lady Macbeth imagines power and then suppresses her human and womanly faculties to act on her desire. Macbeth is driven by imagination of the crime itself, yet his imagination is also “strong against the deed.” In Act 1 Scene 3, he responds to the witches’ prophecy by thinking of murder. In Act 2 Scene 1 (the “dagger” scene), he drives himself to the deed by imagining it

as a theatrical scene. This imagining draws him on; he is emotionally both excited—and repelled—by these imaginings.

Lady Macbeth suppresses Macbeth's moral and pragmatic objections to the crime by making him think of the deed as manly. Here she knows she has a strong handle on her husband's emotions. She suggests that he would be a coward not to kill Duncan. Lady Macbeth's persuasion in Act 1 Scene 7 opposes males to females. Macbeth at first demurs, saying that too much aggression is not manly, but devilish. Macbeth thus arrives at two motives aside from (and maybe overshadowing) his ambition: (1) The imaginative appeal of the crime (the "glamour of evil") and (2) Lady Macbeth's appeal to his manliness.

Macbeth is driven by imagination of the crime itself, yet his imagination is also "strong against the deed."

Macbeth is Shakespeare's most searching portrayal of human self-destructiveness. We watch as Macbeth goes from a high pitch of emotion and imagination to a state of emotional and imaginative deadness after his crime. He achieves no self-recognition; instead, he condemns life for its tedium and futility. As a dramatist, Shakespeare doesn't tell us whether this condemnation is right. He loses his ability to respond emotionally to events.

Lady Macbeth undergoes a reverse process as the result of psychological self-mutilation. She starts out unimaginative and then becomes extremely imaginative, as (perhaps significantly) only in her sleep she is tortured by the sense of self-pollution that the crime has brought. She achieves a terrible self-recognition (*anagnorisis*). ■

Essential Reading

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.

Supplementary Reading

Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition and Tragedy*.

Questions to Consider

1. Who "wears the pants" in the Macbeth household? How does Lady Macbeth play on her husband's psychosexual makeup to overcome his objections to the murder of Duncan? Although we didn't do so in the course of the lectures, can you construct a Freudian interpretation of this play? A feminist critique?

2. Having now read and discussed them, can you say that one of Shakespeare's "big four" tragedies is his greatest play? Why or why not?

Chart of Shakespeare's Plays

This chart suggests the general course of Shakespeare's career as a playwright by listing all his plays vertically according to genre and horizontally according to date of probable first performance. In many cases the dates given arise from limited evidence that scholars interpret in different ways.

Date	Comedies	Histories	Tragedies	Romances
1589–1593	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* *The Comedy of Errors* *The Taming of the Shrew*	*Henry VI Part 1* *Henry VI Part 2* *Henry VI Part 3* *Richard III*	*Titus Andronicus*	
1594–1596	*Love's Labor's Lost* *A Midsummer Night's Dream*	*King John* *Richard II*	*Romeo and Juliet*	
1596–1598	*The Merchant of Venice* *The Merry Wives of Windsor* *Much Ado about Nothing*	*Henry IV Part 1* *Henry IV Part 2*		
1599	As You Like It	Henry V	Julius Caesar	
1600			Hamlet	
1601	Twelfth Night			
1602			Troilus and Cressida	
1603	*All's Well That Ends Well*			
1604	Measure for Measure		Othello	
1606			Macbeth	

Date	Comedies	Histories	Tragedies	Romances
1607			*Antony and Cleopatra*	*Pericles*
1608			Coriolanus	
1609			*Timon of Athens*	*Cymbeline*
1610				*The Winter's Tale*
1611–1613		Henry VIII		The Tempest The Two Noble Kinsmen

Other plays in which Shakespeare appears to have had a hand include:

- *Edward III*, a history performed before 1595 and printed in 1596; some scenes probably by Shakespeare.
- *Love's Labor's Won*, a comedy by Shakespeare with this title is mentioned in a book published in 1598 and printed before 1603. No copy is now known. Possibly it is one of the comedies listed above with an alternative title.
- *Sir Thomas More*, a history surviving in manuscript, to which Shakespeare contributed some scenes, perhaps around 1604.
- *Cardenio*, apparently a collaboration with Fletcher based on Cervantes, performed around 1613, never printed, now lost.

Timeline

Major Events in Politics, the Theater, and Shakespeare's Life

(See the Chart of Shakespeare's Plays for probable dates of individual plays.)

1509–1547.. Reign of Henry VIII. He presides over the English Reformation, severing England from the Church of Rome. He begets three children who survive him, one each by the first three of his six wives. Small troupes of players tour the country.

1547–1553.. Reign of Henry's son Edward VI. *The Book of Common Prayer* establishes an English liturgy for the Church of England.

1553–1558.. Reign of Henry's elder daughter, Mary I (Bloody Mary). A Catholic, she restores England to Roman obedience. She marries Philip of Spain but dies childless.

1558... Accession of Henry's younger daughter, Elizabeth I. In the first years of her reign, the Protestant (Anglican) church is re-established by the Act of Supremacy (Elizabeth declared to be "Supreme Governor of the Church in England") and the Act of Uniformity (church attendance required upon pain of fines).

The Book of Common Prayer is revised and republished. English translations of the Bible become standard: the Bishop's Bible for church use and the Geneva Bible for private reading. William Cecil (later Lord Burghley) serves as Elizabeth's chief secretary.

1560s... Theatrical companies named after their patron lords begin regularly playing at nonce sites in London, as well as touring the country and playing at Court when asked. A purpose-built theater called the Red Lion is built in the London suburb of Stepney (it appears not to have lasted long).

1564... William Shakespeare born in the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, son to glover John Shakespeare and his wife, Mary Arden Shakespeare.

1568... Elizabeth's cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, having misruled Scotland since 1561 and having been forced to abdicate in favor of her infant son James VI, flees to England. She is kept confined in various castles, but by letter repeatedly conspires with various English and continental Catholics to take Elizabeth's crown.

1569–1570..................................... Elizabeth puts down northern rebellion in favor of Mary Queen of Scots. Pope Pius V proclaims Elizabeth excommunicated and deposed.

1570s .... Two outdoor amphitheaters are built for playing in the northern outskirts of London, The Theatre and The Curtain. Over the next four decades some seven other large theaters are built in the northern outskirts and on the south bank of the Thames River, but usually only two or three are in operation at any given time. Two small indoor theaters within London are used by companies consisting of choirboys.

1577 .... Francis Drake sets sail around the world (returns and is knighted in 1580). Raphael Holinshed publishes the first edition of *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland.*

1579 .... Thomas North publishes his English version of Plutarch's *Lives,* the major source for Shakespeare's plays on Roman subjects.

1582 .... Shakespeare (aged eighteen) marries Anne Hathaway (aged twenty-six).

1583 .... Susanna, Shakespeare's elder daughter, born. The Queen's Men are established with the celebrated comic actor Richard Tarlton. They become the leading company in London and on tour for the decade.

1585 .... Hamnet and Judith, Shakespeare's twin son and daughter, born. Failed attempt to establish an English colony at Roanoke.

Later 1580s...................................... The Elizabethan drama becomes a significant literary as well as commercial activity with the plays of Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, and Robert Greene. Sometime at the end of this decade, Shakespeare starts acting and writing.

1587... Mary Queen of Scots beheaded for complicity in plots against Elizabeth. Second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, a major source for Shakespeare's plays on English history and for *King Lear, Macbeth,* and *Cymbeline.*

1588... With the backing of Pope Sixtus V, Philip II of Spain sends the Spanish Armada against England. It is defeated and dispersed by English ships and English weather.

1590... Edmund Spenser published the first three books of *The Faerie Queene,* the great Elizabethan epic poem (remainder published in 1596).

1592... Earliest surviving reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright (a sneering allusion by Robert Greene, including a line parodied from *3 Henry VI*) and the earliest surviving account of a performance of a Shakespeare play (an enthusiastic description by Thomas Nashe of the audience's emotional response to *1 Henry VI*).

1593–1594....................................... Marlowe killed in a tavern brawl. A severe outbreak of plague keeps the London theaters closed for some eighteen months. Theater companies are disrupted. Shakespeare turns to writing narrative poetry, publishing *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece.* When the playhouses reopen, all playing in London is in the hands of two newly consolidated companies: the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose, with Edward Alleyn as their leading actor and Marlowe's plays in their repertoire, and the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Theatre, with Richard Burbage as leading actor, Will Kemp as leading comic, and Shakespeare as chief playwright.

1596.. Shakespeare secures the grant of a coat of arms for his father, giving the family the right to describe themselves as gentlemen, members of the gentry class. Shakespeare's son Hamnet dies at age eleven. Ben Jonson's career as a playwright begins. Robert Cecil becomes Secretary of State as his father, Burghley, moves toward retirement.

1597.. Shakespeare buys New Place, a large house in Stratford. The owner of the Shoreditch land upon which the Theatre stands refuses to renew the lease and attempts to take over the building, which is owned by Richard Burbage and his brother. The Lord Chamberlain's Men play at the Curtain.

1599... The Lord Chamberlain's Men tear down the Theatre and use its timbers to build the Globe Theater on the south bank of the Thames. They play there until 1642.

1601... The earl of Essex, Elizabeth's last favorite, rebels against her and is executed. Shakespeare's father dies.

1603... Death of Elizabeth I, accession of James I (James VI of Scotland). In the subsequent reshuffling of Court patronage, the Lord Chamberlain's Men become the King's Men, by which name they are known for the rest of their career.

1604... James I concludes peace with Spain (England has been technically and often actually at war with Spain since the Armada). At the Hampton Court Conference, James commands a new English translation of the Bible.

1605... Francis Bacon publishes *The Advancement of Learning.* Gunpowder Plot to blow up the royal family, and parliament (Guy Fawkes being one of the conspirators) is discovered.

1606... Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher begin their career as playwrights.

1607... Captain John Smith settles Jamestown. Shakespeare's daughter Susanna marries John Hall, physician of Stratford.

1608.. Shakespeare's mother dies. Shakespeare's granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall, born (dies 1670, his last surviving descendant).

1609.. The King's Men, having taken over the indoor theater in the Blackfriars district formerly used by boy companies, use it for their winter performances, while continuing at the Globe in the summers. Several other small roofed theaters within London come into regular use in the following decades, eventually becoming more important than the large amphitheaters in the suburbs. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* published, apparently without his cooperation.

1611.. The King James Version of the Bible is published, and gradually becomes the standard English translation.

1612.. About this time Shakespeare retires to Stratford. He appears to have written several of his last plays in collaboration with Fletcher, who then takes over as principal playwright for the King's Men.

1613.. The Globe theater burns down during a performance of Shakespeare's and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. It is rebuilt and reopens the next year.

1616.. Shakespeare's daughter Judith marries Thomas Quiney, a Stratford vintner. Shakespeare dies at Stratford. Ben Jonson publishes his poems and plays in folio format under the title of *Works,*

the first time such lavish publication had been given to contemporary stage-plays in England.

1618... Thirty Years War starts in Europe.

1620... English Pilgrims settle on the coast of Massachusetts.

1623... Death of Anne Hathaway Shakespeare. Two of Shakespeare's fellow actors, John Hemings and Henry Condell, publish in folio format *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* (now called by scholars the First Folio). The volume contains thirty-six plays, of which eighteen had previously been available in cheap quarto format, and eighteen had been unpublished. Not included are some plays now thought to have been at least partly written by Shakespeare.

1625... Death of James I, accession of his son Charles I.

1642... Parliament passes an act forbidding all playacting in England and closing the theaters. The theater companies dissolve.

1649... Charles I is executed after losing a civil war to parliamentary forces led by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell and being tried for treason against his own people. The monarchy is abolished and England declared a Commonwealth.

1660.. Within two years of Cromwell's death, the monarchy is restored in the person of Charles I's son, Charles II. Theater is once again allowed in England. By this time, all the playhouses established in the 1560–1642 period have been demolished or adapted to other purposes. Some of the plays of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher are revived in new theaters.

1700–1800...................................... Shakespeare's plays continue in production, often in adapted versions suited to the changing tastes of the times. He comes to be regarded as the greatest of English playwrights; actors become famous for their performances in his major roles. The plays begin to receive scholarly editions and commentary.

Glossary

action: used in these lectures in three related but differing senses. (1) Any physical movement on stage: entrances, duels, kissing, falling to the ground, crossing the stage. (2) The collective ongoing movement of the play, including not only physical movement but also dialogue, display of emotion, etc.; the movement of the story as a whole. (3) What a play is "about," usually put in a summary phrase; the action of *Richard II* is the fall of a king, the action of *The Taming of the Shrew* is named in its title, the action of *King Lear* might be described as Lear's self-discovery.

amphitheatres: also called "public theaters," large polygonal buildings in the suburbs of London, the playing-spaces of theater companies starting in the 1560s (see **hall theatres**). The audience stood in an unroofed yard around a large stage projecting from one wall, or sat in three stories of galleries surrounding the yard. Performances took place in the afternoon by natural light. Elizabethan accounts refer to their capacity as 2,000 or 3,000 people. The foundations of two, the Rose and the Globe, have been recently discovered. A full-size replica of the Globe has been built near its original site on the south bank of the Thames and now produces Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights from May to September.

anagnorisis: (Gk: "disclosure," "recognition") the sudden revelation of important information, such as the real identity of a disguised character. In discussion of tragedy, it has come to be used especially for the protagonist's recognition of his faults, or of his real nature and position.

anti-Stratfordian: a person who believes that the plays performed and printed as William Shakespeare's were written by someone else and passed off under Shakespeare's name in a conspiracy to protect the identity of the real author. Anti-Stratfordians have proposed many different candidates for the authorship, most frequently Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and the earl of Oxford.

catharsis: the purgation of emotions. Aristotle considered the aim of tragedy to be the purgation of the emotions of pity and fear. The precise meaning of his brief statement has been disputed.

chorus: in Greek drama, twelve or fifteen characters stood aside (largely) from the action and commented on it in choral lyrics to which they danced. In Elizabethan drama, a chorus is one person, speaking as representative of the acting company, usually presenting a prologue, epilogue, and other extra-dramatic speeches to frame the action.

climax: a moment in a play or a scene in which emotional tension or interest is at its highest, usually marking a turn in events.

company: a group of actors working together to put on plays. The Lord Chamberlain's Men were a legally chartered company consisting of six or eight sharers (the senior members who put up the money, organized the productions, paid playwrights and others for their work, played the leading roles, and took whatever profits there were), hired men (who for wages played minor parts and worked as theater functionaries), and several boys (apprenticed to senior members, playing the roles of women and children). There were also Elizabethan companies consisting entirely of boys, managed by a schoolmaster, choirmaster, or other adult.

conflict: the struggle(s) with which a play is concerned, between the protagonist and forces opposing him. Opposition may be provided by another character (the antagonist), by the protagonist's own conflicting desires, or by outside forces such as society, fate, the gods.

convention: the tacit agreement between actors and audience that certain stage actions correspond to certain experiences that might be difficult to reproduce realistically. In the Elizabethan theater, entrance with a torch signified that the scene was taking place at night. The term can be extended to practices of play-writing, such as the "aside" that can be heard by the audience but not by other characters on stage, or ending the play with an epilogue that directly addresses the audience requesting their applause, or the pretense that disguise makes a person utterly unrecognizable.

denouement: the resolution of the plot, in which the complications are unraveled and solved. Given the many plot lines of most Elizabethan plays, the denouement can be quite an elaborate scene.

dramatic irony: the term "irony" refers in general to a phrase or situation in which there are two levels of experience that contrast with each other. A dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows more than the characters do about the identity, the intentions, or the situation of a character.

dramaturgy: the art of writing plays.

Elizabethan: the adjective describing any person or thing dating from the reign of Elizabeth I (1588–1603). The equivalent adjective for the reign of James I (1603–1625) is Jacobean, of Charles I (1625–1649), Caroline. Many scholars use "Elizabethan" as an omnibus term to cover things (especially the plays) of all three reigns.

flaw: a fault or failing in a character, usually having consequences in the plot. Some critics hold that a flaw in the protagonist (what Aristotle called "*harmartia*") is crucial to the structure of a tragedy; others find the theory less useful.

exposition: information about events happening offstage or prior to the action of the play.

foil: a character used to provide contrast that will set off the qualities of another character. Shakespeare frequently uses dissimilar characters put in similar situations as foils to each other. Prince Hal uses the metaphor of foil (a metal used as background setting for a jewel) when outlining his plan to let his past behavior highlight his future reformation (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2).

folio: a book format: a single sheet of printing paper is printed on each side with two blocks of type and then folded once, creating two double-sided leaves, four pages. A book composed of such folded sheets was a large and lavish form of publication, used chiefly for history, theology, and other prestigious matter. Ben Jonson's printing of his play in folio was considered

unusual and hubristic, but it set an example followed by Hemings and Condell for their collected edition of Shakespeare's plays.

hall theaters: often called "private theaters," these were smaller, roofed-over performance spaces, illuminated by candles, with the whole audience seated, charging higher prices than the amphitheaters. Used by companies consisting wholly of boys until about 1609, when the King's Men began the custom of using hall theaters for winter performances. Other adult companies followed suit.

hamartia: Aristotle's term for "failure" or "error" applied to the protagonist of a tragedy. Sometimes erroneously termed "tragic flaw," this term really applies more to what the character does than to any inherent flaw. Acting out of overweening pride (i.e., out of hubris) is often an example of *hamartia.*

pace: the speed at which a scene is acted, sometimes deducible from the way it is written.

peripety: a sudden reversal of fortune.

property (prop): an object used in the action of a play; e.g., a sword, a crown.

protagonist: in Greek drama, the "first actor"; i.e., the actor who played the largest role. By extension, the term means the central character in any play. In this sense, the word is more useful than "hero," since it may without awkwardness refer to a woman (Rosalind is the protagonist of *As You Like It*) and it avoids the favorable moral connotations of "hero": many plays have villains, such as Richard III and Macbeth, as protagonists. Strictly speaking, there can be only one protagonist in a play, but usage varies on this.

Puritans: Radical Protestants, those who wished to carry the reformation of the Church of England further, purifying doctrine, ritual and church government of elements still left from Roman Catholicism.

quarto: a book format: a single sheet of printing paper is printed on each side with four blocks of type and then folded twice, creating four double-sided leaves, eight pages. Single plays were usually published in this inexpensive

format and sold unbound, with the folded pages merely stitched or tacked together.

soliloquy: a speech spoken by an actor alone on the stage.

speech prefix: in a written playtext, the name appearing before a speech, indicating who is to speak the words.

stage direction: in a written playtext, a statement indicating an actor's movements: e.g., "Enter Lear," "Exit Queen," "he dies." Elizabethan plays are usually sparse in stage directions compared to the lengthy descriptions given by Shaw and O'Neill, but often the reader may notice implicit stage directions in the spoken lines. When Cordelia says to Lear, "No, sir, you must not kneel," clearly Lear has at least begun to kneel down.

suburb: as now, a town or settlement immediately outside a city, in Shakespeare's case, London. The associations of the term are quite different from those of today: they could be regarded as places of vice. Since London itself was ruled fairly strictly by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, the owners of taverns, brothels, and theaters found it convenient to locate their establishments in suburbs.

Biography of William Shakespeare

Biographical information about William Shakespeare is sketchy: we know that he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in England and was baptized on April 26, 1564. Although we celebrate April 23 as his birthday, the exact date is not known. His parents, John and Mary Arden Shakespeare, were solid citizens of Stratford, his father a tanner and glover and a dealer in farm produce, as well as a holder of various local offices. Nicholas Rowe, in his 1709 biography of Shakespeare, reported that William attended a grammar school, the King's New School at Stratford-upon-Avon, where Latin works would have formed the basis of the curriculum. In November 1852, at age eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years older than he was. Their first child, Susanna, was born in May of the following year, and three years later the couple had twins, Hamnet and Judith, in February 1585.

The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and dramatist in London came in 1592, in a critical mention in a work by another playwright, Robert Greene, who called Shakespeare "an upstart crow." Between 1592 and 1594, plague forced theatres to suspend performances. By late 1594, when Shakespeare was listed as a member of Lord Chamberlain's company, there were several plays to his credit (see timeline). From 1594 to 1601, Shakespeare was successful as a dramatist and actor in Lord's Chamberlain's Men, and, in 1599, his family was granted rank as gentlemen and was granted its own heraldic coat of arms. William Shakespeare was a part-owner of the best-known Elizabethan theatre, the Globe, which was built in 1599. After Elizabeth I died and King James I ascended the throne in 1603, Shakespeare's company became the King's Men and enjoyed the king's patronage. In 1608, Shakespeare and his company signed a twenty-one-year lease for the Blackfriars Theatre.

Surviving records attest to Shakespeare as a substantial property owner in Stratford and in London. He suffered the deaths of his son Hamnet in 1596, his father in 1601, his brother Edmund in 1607, and his mother in 1608. He

returned to Stratford to live in 1611 or 1612 and died there on April 23, 1616. The largest share of his estate went to his married daughter Susanna, and a dowry went to his recently wed daughter Judith; by law, a third of the estate went to his wife Anne, although there was little mention of her in his will.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, some of his plays and poems were published without his permission. The sonnets were published in 1609, apparently without Shakespeare's involvement. The first complete edition of the plays, the First Folio of 1623, was based on manuscript copies and on prompt-books used by actors in the plays, materials that were collected by Shakespeare's fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell. There are no known surviving manuscript copies of any Shakespearean plays.

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Primary Texts

Primary reading on Shakespeare consists of the plays themselves, which are available in many modern editions. Since Shakespeare wrote 400 years ago, the present lecturer recommends a text with good explanatory footnotes. Paperback series such as Signet, Bantam, and New Penguin offer a single play per volume with footnotes and introductions. Some also offer an account of Shakespeare's life, an account of stage history, and lists of supplementary reading. They are easily portable, and one need buy only the plays one wants.

One-volume complete works of Shakespeare offer the similar footnotes and introductions for all the plays, plus substantial prefatory material on Shakespeare and his times, documentary material, and fuller bibliographies. Although such a large book is cumbersome, the lecturer recommends any of the following:

The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. David Bevington, 4th edition updated, Addison Wesley Longman, 1997. (Used by the lecturer)

The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, Houghton Mifflin, second edition, 1997.

The Norton Shakespeare, based on the Oxford Edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, W. W. Norton & Co., 1997. (The most comfortable of the three to carry and read. Some of its textual innovations have been disputed. The general introduction is good; some of the introductions to individual plays are tendentiously political).

Serious study of an individual play benefits from the more substantial multi-volume complete works of Shakespeare, of which there are three outstanding series:

The oldest is the *New Arden Shakespeare*, published by Methuen from 1952 to 1982. These volumes are gradually being replaced with a re-editing known as "Arden 3," published by Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Two newer series are the *Oxford Shakespeare* and the *New Cambridge Shakespeare*, which started appearing in the 1980s from the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge, respectively, and are not yet complete. These three series, publishing one play per volume in both hardback and paper cover, offer comprehensive introductions and detailed notes referring to the most recent scholarship and interpretation. Below are listed the plays in this course, with the names of the Arden, Oxford, and Cambridge editors. When no editor is listed, that particular play has not yet been published in that series:

Hamlet—Jenkins (Arden, 1982). Hibbard (Oxford, 1987). Edwards (Cambridge,1985).

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Sher, Antony. *The Year of the King*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1987. A distinguished actor's account of preparing and playing the role of *Richard III.*

Sterling, Brents. "'Or Else This Were a Savage Spectacle.'" *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Leonard Dean. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961. The use of ceremony in Julius Caesar.

Stevenson, David L. *The Achievement of Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure*." Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.

Taylor, Gary. *Reinventing Shakespeare*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. A witty account of the ways in which Shakespeare was been reinterpreted by succeeding generations.

Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. London: Chatto & Windus. 1943. How some people of the 16th century imagined their world to be organized.

———. *Shakespeare's History Plays*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1944. A classic study of the history plays, now widely disagreed with.

Williams, Penry. *The Later Tudors: England, 1547-1603*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. Currently the most useful introduction to the history of the period. Chapters 10–13, on the social order, religion, and family structure, are very relevant to readers of Shakespeare.

Wilson, J. Dover. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

———. *What Happens in Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935. An old study, still valuable for understanding the ghost.

Films and Videos

If you want to see Shakespeare and do not live or travel near on of the Shakespeare theatre companies, there are many films and videos, some fairly faithful to Shakespeare's scripts, some heavily adapted (in English and other languages). A complete listing up to 1989 is available in Kenneth S. Rothwell and Annabelle Henkin Melzer, *Shakespeare on Screen* (New York and London: Neal-Schuman, 1990). Leading English-language versions are:

The Complete Plays done by BBC and Time-Life. All the plays, some good, some not so good, videotaped in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Not commonly available at local video rentals, but can be secured from Insight Media (1-800-233-9910) or Ambrose Video Publishing (1-800-526-4663). May be available at good public or university libraries.

Individual plays often available by catalog sales or at video rental stores:

1. Three directed by and starring Laurence Olivier:

Henry V (1944)

Hamlet (1948)

Richard III (1955)

Olivier also plays the title role in the 1965 filmed version of a National Theatre Production of *Othello*, directed by Stuart Burge, and Shylock in a 1974 TV video on Jonathan Miller's National Theatre Production of *The Merchant of Venice.*

2. Three directed by and starring Orson Welles:

Macbeth (1948)

Othello (1952)

Chimes at Midnight (1966), also called *Falstaff*; script put together from parts of *1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V.*

3. Three plays directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh:

Henry V (1989)

Much Ado About Nothing (1993)

Hamlet (1996: the complete text, four hours long)

4. Three plays directed by Francisco Zeffirelli:

The Taming of the Shrew (1966, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor)

Romeo and Juliet (1968, starring Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting)

Hamlet (1990, starring Mel Gibson, Glenn Close, and Alan Bates)

5. Various directors:

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935, a Hollywood black-and-white spectacular directed by Max Reinhart, with the young Mickey Rooney, James Cagney, Olivia de Havilland, and others, with Mendelsohn pouring from the sound track; great fun)

Julius Caesar (1953, directed by Joseph Mankiewicz, with James Mason, John Gielgud, Marlon Brando)

Macbeth (1971, directed by Roman Polanski; remarkably bloody)

Macbeth (1979, Ian McClellan and Judi Dench, based on Trevor Nunn's 1976 RSC production; very good acting, but hard to find)

Richard III (1995, starring Ian McClellan, set in a Fascist Britain of the 1930s)

Othello (1995, Lawrence Fishburne, Kenneth Branagh)

Twelfth Night (1996, directed by Trevor Nunn, starring Imogen Stubbs, Nigel Hawthorne, Helena Bonham Carter, Ben Kingsley)

King Lear (1983, directed by Michael Elliott, starring Laurence Olivier, for Granada TV, 1983)

Romeo and Juliet (1996, directed by Baz Luhrmann, set in Verona Beach, Florida, and shot in MTV style, with Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes)

Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1996) is about the problems of producing *Richard III* for a modern audience. It contains scenes from Shakespeare's play.

Midsummer Night's Dream (1999; directed by Michael Hoffman, Italy/UK; set in late Victorian Italy (the lovers ride bicycles), with suitable operatic music; a fairy world of special effects supervised by the lush figures of

Michelle Pfeiffer and Rupert Everett and the charmingly bewildered Bottom of Kevin Kline.

Shakespeare in Love (1998, directed by John Madden, screenplay by Tom Stoppard, US/UK); multiple Oscar®-winning film; Tom Stoppard's dialogue is replete with outrageous anachronisms; the story is charming and the jokes are sly; the theatres, streets, and costumes are authentic; and the acting, especially that of Gwyneth Paltrow and Judi Dench, glows.