



*Much Ado About
Nothing*

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company

Staff

Artistic Director Jeff Watkins

Director of Education and Training Laura Cole

Development Director Rivka Levin

Education Staff Kati Grace Brown, Tony Brown, Andrew Houchins, Adam King, Amanda Lindsey

Box Office Manager Becky Cormier Finch

Marketing Manager Jeanette Meierhofer

Company Manager Joe Rossidivito

Unless otherwise noted, photos appearing in this study guide are courtesy of Jeff Watkins.

Study guide by Kati Grace Brown

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company

499 Peachtree St NE
Atlanta GA 30308

404-874-5299

www.shakesporetavern.com

Like the Atlanta Shakespeare Company on Facebook and follow ASC on Twitter at @shakesporetav.





Photo Credit:
National Portrait
Gallery

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote thirty-seven plays, which have become staples of classrooms and theatre performances across the world.

The son of a glove-maker, Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he received a strong education in Latin and rhetoric at the local school. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

By 1592, Shakespeare had journeyed to London, where he became an extremely successful playwright and actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He profited from being a shareholder in the Globe after its construction in 1599.

Shakespeare's plays were popular with all types of people, including the two monarchs who ruled England during his lifetime: Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and James I (1566-1625).

Shakespeare found both artistic and commercial success through his writing. He amassed a sizable fortune, acquired valuable real estate in Stratford, and purchased a coat of arms, which gave him and his father the right to be called gentlemen. Shakespeare was well-known in England at the time of his death in 1616, and his fame only increased following the publication of his plays in The First Folio in 1623.

2016 was the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and celebrations honoring Shakespeare's contribution to literature took place around the world.

“He was not of an age, but for all time.”
- Ben Jonson on Shakespeare

Shakespeare: Did You Know?

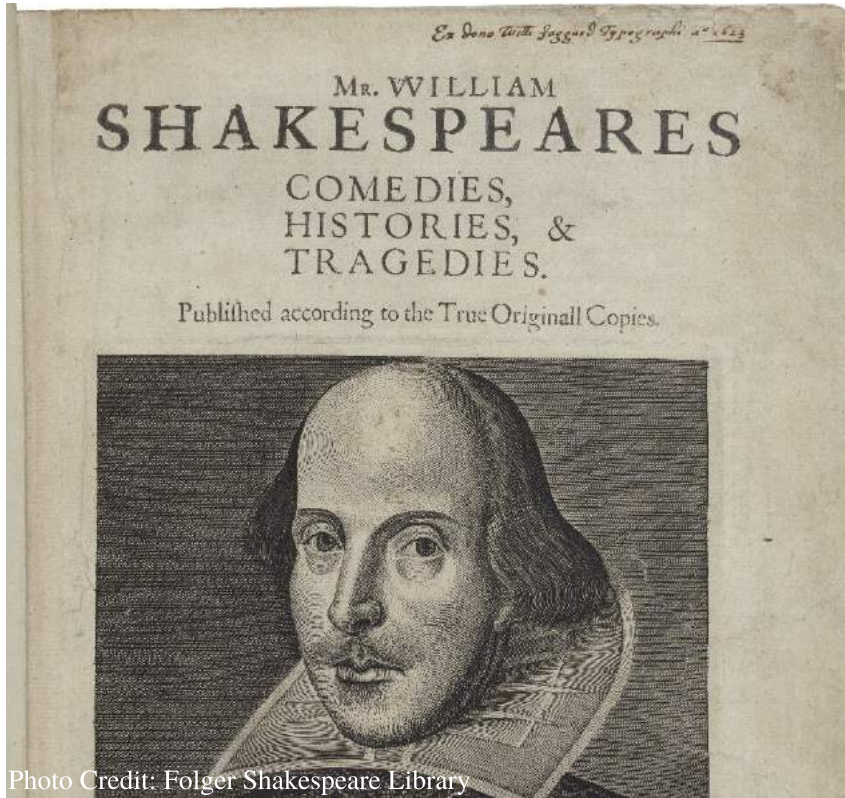


Photo Credit: Folger Shakespeare Library

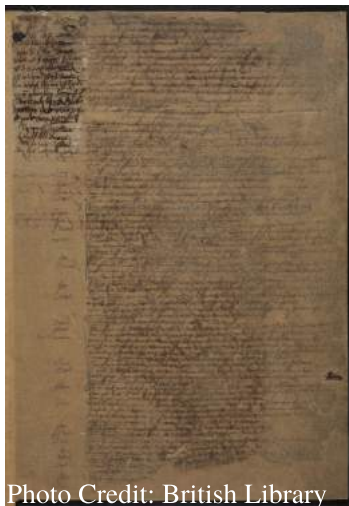


Photo Credit: British Library

Shakespeare's Handwriting

The only record that we have of Shakespeare's handwriting is a play script of *Sir Thomas More* (above), which Shakespeare helped revise in 1603. Shakespeare added at least 147 lines to the play. His handwriting was not necessarily bad but it is hard to decipher for modern-day readers who are not experts in Elizabethan *paleography*, the study of old handwriting.



Photo Credit: Samantha Smith

Shakespeare's Last Wish

Shakespeare was buried in 1616 at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. His grave reads "Good friend for Jesus sake forebeare, to dig the dust enclosed here: blesete be [the] man [that] spares these stones, and curst be he [that] moves my bones" ("Shakespeare FAQ"). However, a recent radar scan suggests that Shakespeare's head might have been stolen by grave robbers.

Shakespeare's Reception and Legacy

While Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity in his time, he did not escape some criticism. Robert Greene, a jealous contemporary writer, warned Shakespeare's fellow playwrights, Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and Christopher Marlowe, that Shakespeare "supposes he is well able to bombast out blank verse as the best of you; and...is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country" (Dunton-Downer 11). While Shakespeare received some criticism in the following centuries for the inconsistent quality of his plays, most critics have looked on Shakespeare very favorably. Similarly, while his popularity has risen and fallen over the years, Shakespeare has been predominantly popular and well-loved by readers. Shakespeare was so popular in certain eras like the Victorian era that critics came up with the word *bardolatry* to describe intense admiration of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is proving very popular in modern times as well. His plays are performed across the world and they have been adapted into successful films and television series.

**Shakespeare penned
884,647 words and
118,406 lines.**

Did Shakespeare write his own plays?

Yes. Over the years, people have made arguments that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere. However, scholars firmly believe that Shakespeare wrote his own plays, citing at least fifty references in Elizabethan and Jacobean texts that connect Shakespeare to his plays. Scholars also cite the fact that the actors John Hemminge and Henry Condell, who put together the First Folio, and Ben Jonson, a contemporary playwright who wrote the dedication of the First Folio, all credit Shakespeare with authorship of his own plays.

Did Shakespeare get along with his wife?

Probably, but we'll never know for sure. Shakespeare spent a lot of time away from his wife, Anne, but that was because he needed to spend time in London to build his career. In his will, Shakespeare left Anne the family's "second best bed" ("Shakespeare FAQ"), but he was not snubbing his wife because that bed would have been the one that he and Anne shared.

Understanding the Elizabethan Era

"I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too..."

- Queen Elizabeth I to troops at Tilbury facing the Spanish Armada in 1588

The Elizabethan era refers to the period of time in which Queen Elizabeth I ruled England from 1558–1603. The Elizabethan era is often referred to as the Golden Age of England. Elizabeth's reign saw a substantial decrease in the political and religious turmoil that defined the decade before she assumed the throne. Under her rule, England asserted its power, famously triumphing over the invading Spanish armada in 1588. While Elizabethans did endure plague and some unrest, conditions of the era were reasonably favorable.

Playwriting flourished under Elizabeth's reign; Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare found great success during this time. Theatre during the Elizabethan era was a touchy subject; theatres themselves were not allowed to exist within the city limits and moralists decried the frivolity of theatrical outings and the numbers of unsavory characters and pickpockets attending public theatres. However, Queen Elizabeth enjoyed theatrical performances when the actors came to her court. Moreover, she actively involved herself in theatre of the age by forming and serving as the patron of The Queen's Men in 1583. Elizabeth I died in 1603 and was succeeded by her Scottish nephew James I.



ELIZABETHAN LONDON WAS...

HIERARCHICAL

A sense of hierarchy dominated the Elizabethan worldview. Elizabethans believed in the Great Chain of Being, in which God and the angels were superior to humans, who in turn were superior to animals and the natural world. On earth, the English monarch was superior to all his or her subjects, and nobles were superior to people of lesser socioeconomic stations. Everything from clothing that people wore to where they sat in a playhouse--if they attended public theatres at all--showed their status.

PATRIARCHAL

Despite having a female queen, the world was very patriarchal, with men controlling many if not all of the actions of their female relatives.

CROWDED AND DIRTY

200,000 people lived in London when Elizabeth took the throne. Without modern conveniences, the city was overflowing in certain places and ripe with the smell of people and animals.

Playing Shakespeare Through the Ages



The Globe, built in 1599 on the south side of the Thames, was an open-air theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed. The Globe likely was able to hold up to 3,000 tightly-packed audience members. Poorer spectators paid a penny to stand during the performance while richer theatre-goers paid two pennies for a seat and another penny for a cushion. Audience members, especially those standing in front of the stage, were loud and opinionated, often talking to each other or even voicing their thoughts on the play to the actors onstage. Performances took place at 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. to take advantage of the day light, but the time of day meant that many people skipped work to attend the plays, which contributed to conservative politicians' dislike of theatre. While the original Globe does not exist today, a reconstruction, seen in the picture to the left, was built in 1997 in Southwark, London.



The Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, built in 1990 on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia, features a stage with similar features to the Globe's stage. ASC strives to create productions that are also very similar to the ones that Shakespeare's audience would have seen. All ASC productions incorporate Original Practices, which involve the active exploration of the Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques that Shakespeare's own audiences would have enjoyed nearly four hundred years ago. Performances at the Playhouse feature period costumes, sword fights, sound effects created live by the actors rather than pre-recorded sounds, and live music played on the stage. ASC's actors are trained to speak Shakespeare's words directly to the audience instead of using the more modern acting convention of ignoring the audience's presence as if there was an imaginary "fourth wall" separating the actors and audience. Audience members at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse should gain a better understanding of Elizabethan style, language, and drama by seeing it performed as Shakespeare's own company might have performed it.



The ASC touring set, which is used in the touring production of *R&J:60*, is a playhouse-inspired unit with three curtained entrances from which actors can enter and exit. Like a production at the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, all touring productions employ Original Practices. However, the connection between ASC's productions and the performances Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen is not limited to period-inspired costumes and direct address to the audience. The act of taking a performance like *R&J:60* on tour echoes the Elizabethan practice of actors touring the countryside when outbreaks of the bubonic plague forced theatres, which fostered the spread of disease by enclosing many people in a small area, to close. Elizabethan theatre companies often brought a condensed set, props, and costumes to perform at country estates for noble families or at inns for the common people when the London theatres were closed. In bringing *R&J:60* on tour, ASC strives to carry on this Elizabethan tradition of bringing live theatre to people outside the city.

Characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Beatrice- a quick-witted woman, niece of Leonato

Benedick- a quick-witted soldier in Don Pedro's army

Hero- a young woman, daughter of Leonato

Claudio- a young soldier in Don Pedro's army

Leonato- governor of Messina

Antonio- brother of Leonato and uncle of Hero and Beatrice

Don Pedro- the prince

Don John- soldier and bastard brother of Don Pedro

Conrade- soldier and lackey of Don John

Borachio- soldier and lackey of Don John

Ursula- waiting woman of Hero

Margaret- waiting woman of Hero

Dogberry- captain of the night's watch

Verges- assistant to Dogberry

The Watch, Messengers, Soldiers and Servants

"But then a star danced, and under that was I born." -Beatrice

Plot of *Much Ado About Nothing*

Returning from battle, having put down a rebellion by his younger brother John, Don Pedro and his men (including his good friends Claudio and Benedick) arrive in Messina. There, Benedick and Beatrice revive their ongoing battle of wits. Signor Leonato, the governor of Messina welcomes them all to stay at his home.

Claudio and Leonato's daughter, Hero, have fallen in love and wish to marry. Though Don John, Conrade and Borachio attempt to thwart their union by convincing Claudio that Don Pedro will marry Hero instead, their plot is easily unraveled and Leonato consents that they should

be married. While Claudio is eager for the wedding, Leonato tells him he must wait. Don Pedro proposes that, to fill the interim, they contrive to make Benedick and Beatrice fall in love with one another.

Don John, bitter over his loss, hatches another plot with Borachio to trick Claudio into believing that Hero is cheating on him.

Moving forward their scheme, Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio discover Benedick hiding in the orchard and loudly discuss Beatrice's love for Benedick. Believing their tale, Benedick greets Beatrice with unaccustomed kindness when she comes to call him to dinner.

Upon overhearing another staged conversation between Hero and Ursula in which they speak of Benedick's love for Beatrice and her ill treatment of him, Beatrice decides she will love Benedick.

Don John, finding Don Pedro and Claudio alone, tells them of Hero's disloyalty and promises to give them proof that night. Later that evening, the town constable, Dogberry, and his assistant, Verges, give the Watch their charge of duty for the evening.

As they stand guard in the square, they overhear Borachio bragging of his deception of the Prince and Claudio. The Watch apprehend the malefactors.

Hero prepares for her wedding with Ursula, Margaret and Beatrice. Margaret taunts Beatrice for loving Benedick.

Dogberry arrives at Leonato's home to tell him that the watch apprehended "two vagrom men" during the evening, but Leonato sends him away to examine them and get their testimonies as he is on his way to his daughter's wedding.



At the wedding, Claudio rejects and shames Hero calling her a “rotten orange” and tries to make her confess to sleeping with Borachio on the night before her wedding, though it was really Margaret. Hero loses consciousness and all of the groomsmen leave except for Benedick.

Leonato rages at Hero when she revives, but she is able to convince him of her innocence. The Friar suggests that they tell everyone Hero is dead. Beatrice and Benedick are left alone, and they confess their love for one another. She bids him to show his love for her by avenging her cousin and challenging Claudio to a duel.

However, the truth of Don John’s deception comes out. Claudio, ashamed of his treatment of Hero (and believing Hero to be dead) agrees to marry Leonato’s “niece.” When he arrives for this second wedding, he finds that his new bride is actually Hero. Benedick and Beatrice agree to wed as well and Don John is captured attempting to flee the city.



Understanding Shakespeare's Language

Recognizing Verse vs. Prose

Verse: Verse is defined as “a succession of metrical feet...composed as one line [one sentence pattern]” (Steine 1462).

Example: "What fire is in mine ears, can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?"

Blank Verse: “The term blank verse serves to describe unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter: that is, in the strictest sense, lines of verse with five metrical feet, in which the stress falls on the second syllable of the foot. Irregular blank verse contains nine to fourteen syllables per line....Each of Shakespeare’s plays offers examples of blank verse employed in a drama” (Barton 29).

Example: "Your daughter here the princes left for dead.
Let her awhile be secretly kept in,
And publish it that she is dead indeed."

Prose: Prose is defined as "[s]poken or written language without metrical structure, as distinguished from poetry or verse” (Steine 1062). Prose does not have a specific pattern of rhyme.

Example: "This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady; it seems her affections have the full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited."

Note: Verse is always written with line breaks, and the first word of each new line is capitalized, while in prose each sentence leads into the next and looks like this sentence on the page.

Understanding Iambic Pentameter

Iambic pentameter: Shakespeare sometimes wrote in iambic pentameter, which is "a common meter in poetry consisting of an unrhymed line with five feet or accents, each foot containing an unaccented syllable and an accented syllable" ("iambic pentameter). The rhythm of iambic pentameter is often compared to a heartbeat. You can scan, or mark the beats of iambic pentameter. You can use this symbol — for unaccented syllables and this symbol / for accented syllables.

Example:
— / — / — / — / - /
Contempt farewell, and maiden pride adieu.

Understanding Shakespeare's Language

Unfamiliar words: Sometimes you will come across unfamiliar words while you are reading Shakespeare, often because words that were popular during Shakespeare's era are not so frequently used now. Be sure to select an edition of the play with copious footnotes because editors often explain words that seem foreign to modern readers. If you encounter an unfamiliar word that is not defined in your edition, look it up in a dictionary. If your school has access to academic databases, look up the word in the Oxford English Dictionary database. Another helpful resource is David and Ben Crystal's book *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary & Language Companion*.

Example: Before the wedding, Margaret tells Hero, "Troth, I think your other rebato were better." The footnotes in The New Folger Library edition of *Much Ado About Nothing* lets the reader know that a rebato is a "tall, ornamental, stiff collar." When rehearsing for a live performance of the play, the actors, director and costume designer will need to make the costume pieces and stage business clear in this moment so that the audience will understand the word "rebato" in the context of the situation as it is not a term used by modern Americans.

Figurative language: You will no doubt discuss all types of figurative language in your class discussions. Pay attention to Shakespeare's frequent use of imagery, or intense, visually descriptive language.

Example: Benedick's "She speaks poniards, and every word stabs. If her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her. She would infect to the north star. Claudio's "... for beauty is a witch against whose charms faith melteth into blood."





Character Analysis: Dogberry

What are Dogberry's main characteristics?

Constable Dogberry seems to be very comfortable in his position of authority, easily giving orders to Verges and the rest of the Watch. He takes his position very seriously, and he easily answers questions and dissolves the doubts posed by his followers. His language towards Leonato and Don Pedro suggests that he is comfortable communicating with people in positions of authority and of a higher class than himself. His vocabulary also suggests that he would like for everyone around him to believe that he is very intelligent. Judging by the way he treats Borachio, it also appears that Dogberry can hold a grudge and has an elevated sense of justice.

How does Dogberry advance the plot?

The capture of Borachio and Conrade by Dogberry and his men leads to the restoration of honor to Hero and Leonato's entire family. Because of their capture, Don Pedro knows that Don John is still working against him and, though he was captured and his rebellion put down, he still cannot be trusted. Owing to the actions of the Watch, the second wedding takes place between Claudio and Hero which also sets the stage for Benedick and Beatrice to finally come together. Interestingly, if Leonato had gone to the jail when Dogberry asked him to originally, the entire plot would have advanced *before* Claudio ever publicly shamed Hero.

What is Dogberry saying?

The character of Dogberry uses phrases and words that are now called "malapropisms." The definition of malapropism is "the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with unintentionally amusing effect." In Dogberry's third line of the play he says, "who think you the most desertless man to be constable?" He is asking who is the most *deserving* man, but he does not quite get it right. He also uses phrases that he passes off as sage knowledge that have no real meaning or historical significance, such as "for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it cries will never answer a calf when he bleats." Lastly, the character of Dogberry has an interesting system for counting that numbers 1-2-3-4-5-6 as 1-moreover-2-6-3-conclusion as seen in Act V, Scene 1, line 2288.

Bibliography

- Barton, Edwin and Glenda Hudson, eds. *A Contemporary Guide to Literary Terms with Strategies for Writing Essays About Literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflan, 2004. Print.
- The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore*. 1601-1604. British Library, London. British Library. Web. Accessed 28 Aug. 2016.
- Coles, Prophecy. *The Shadow of a Second Mother: Nurses and Nannies in Theories of Infant Development*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print.
- Dunton-Downer, Leslie and Alan Riding, eds. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*. London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2004. Print.
- Geggel, Laura. "Shakespeare's Skull May Have Been Stolen by Grave Robbers." *Scientific American* 31 Mar. 2016: n. pag. Web. Accessed 20 Sept. 2016.
- Gillespie, Stuart and Neil Rhodes, eds. *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*. London: Thomson Learning, 2006. Print.
- "Globe stage as seen from the pit." Flickr. 6 Jan. 2005. 12 Dec. 2015.
- Gurr, Andrew. *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Hotson, Leslie. "Not of an Age: Shakespeare." *The Sewanee Review* 49.2 (1941): 193-210. Jstor.
- "Iambic pentameter." Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon. Dictionary.com, LLC, 1 Sep. 2016.
- Laroque, Francois. *The Age of Shakespeare*. New York: Abrams Books, 1993. Print.
- Law, Robert Adger. "On Shakespeare's Changes of His Source Material in Romeo and Juliet." *Studies in English*, no. 9, 1929, pp. 86-102. Jstor. Accessed 1 Dec. 2016.
- Kotker, Norman, ed. *The Horizon Book of the Elizabethan World*. New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc. 1967.
- McMillan, Scott and Sally-Beth MacLean. *The Queen's Men and their Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.
- Peltonen, Markku. *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.
- Queen Elizabeth I*. 1575. Oil on Panel. Painting. National Portrait Gallery, London.
- Rusche, Harry. "Shakespeare Illustrated." Emory University, http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html. Accessed 1 Jan. 2017.
- Schoenbaum, S. *Shakespeare: The Globe & The World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. Print.
- "Shakespeare FAQ." Folger Shakespeare Library. Web. Accessed 1 Sept. 2016.
- Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. Ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011. Print.
- "Elizabeth's Tilbury Speech." British Library. N.d. Web. 10 Dec. 2016..
- Snyder, Susan. *Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002. Print.
- Taylor, John. *William Shakespeare*. 1600-1610. Painting. National Portrait Gallery, London.