WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born on April 23, 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, England to Mary Arden and John Shakespeare. His dad made some money in the glove business, eventually opened a general store and over the years bought some property. Historical evidence strongly suggests John Shakespeare could not read or write.

Will was the third of eight children and received a free boyhood education because of his father’s position as alderman. Indications in his later writing suggest that as a kid Shakespeare enjoyed football, field sports and arguing with the referees. The Shakespeares were comfortable, but not aristocrats by any means. By the time William was fifteen the family’s fortunes were in decline. Business was bad. This just meant that when Will came of age, he had to work for a living.

Obviously, there were not a lot of entertainment options at the time. Books were not in wide circulation and anyone with half a brain could only take so much of that crappy recorder music and those inane puppet shows - so Shakespeare had the brilliant idea of becoming an actor.

Theatrical troupes of Elizabethan England were kind of like the garage bands of their time. Actors would often write their own plays, improvise lines and dress up in drag. It wasn’t unusual for them to rave for hours, or to bore their friends into oblivion. Incontrovertible historical evidence strongly suggests actors of Shakespeare’s times would regularly trash inns, drink heavily, chase locals and generally wreak havoc.

When Will was eighteen he fell in love with Anne Hathaway. After the requisite amount of head-banging they were married. Aside from the birth of his children, little is known about Shakespeare between 1582 and 1592, except that he built a career as an actor and eventually became an established and popular member of the London theatre circuit.

Shakespeare’s play writing success began with historical works. Between 1590 and 1593 he wrote “Henry VI, Parts 1, 2, and 3,” “Richard III” and “A Comedy of Errors.” “Romeo and Juliet” was written around 1594-1595. As an actor, he was a member of a theatrical company known as the LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth and later King James, they had great success in two famous theatres, THE GLOBE and THE BLACKFRIARS.

King James was cool and actually became a sponsor of Shakespeare’s reformed outfit THE KING’S MEN—lending the group money and hanging out with the lads backstage and on tour. Theatre of the time was enjoyed by commoners as well as the privileged. Often the audiences were completely illiterate. Public theatres like THE HOPE, THE FORTUNE, THE RED BULL and THE SWAN were “open air” so the players had to compete with livestock sales, screaming street hawkers, and the ubiquitous drunks.

To reach this crowd Shakespeare could not rely on a large stack of amplifiers. He needed the most electrifying words and images ever created in the English language. Concepts that would galvanize common people and make them stop, lose themselves, rise above the muck for an hour or two.

It was crass. It was business. It was art. And it was genius.

Shakespeare had the rhymes. Everyone knew it. In fact, he used cadences we’re still hearing today to reinforce some of his most important concepts and lines.
The Bard’s group was bad. They kicked ass so bad his competitors used to send out speed writers, shorthand artists and bribe other actors in his plays to try to make their own bootlegged copies of his plays. The unauthorized “boots” were known as “The Bad Quartos.” (Weird but true.)

Shakespeare was pissed off by this of course, so he hired his own publishers and came out with “The Good Quartos”, which are pretty much the way he intended his work to sound. Over the years theatre companies and scholars pieced together so called “original texts” of the plays from various notes and good and bad Quartos. [For the kind of detail and scholarship worthy of Shakespeare we suggest enrollment in Oxford University for a few decades.]

There are many differences from text to text. And Shakespeare probably would have kicked all their asses.

While none of his plays are set in Florida, it’s interesting to note that The Pilgrims who settled in America spoke Elizabethan English and that Shakespeare’s language and culture were transplanted to the “new continent” in his lifetime.

As his fame and success grew Shakespeare was able to buy the second-largest house in Stratford, called New Place, a cottage and garden nearby, and 107 acres of soccer field.

In about 1611, Shakespeare retired permanently to Stratford, having earned the status of “gentleman.” After writing many successful tragedies and comedies, he finished as he started, with a historical play, “Henry VIII.” In early 1616, he wrote his will, leaving his property to his daughter Susanna, who had married a prominent doctor, 300 English pounds to his other daughter, Judith, who was married scandalously at age 32 to a wine maker, and his second-best bed to Anne, because it was her favorite.

He died young—on his 52nd birthday. William Shakespeare was buried at Trinity Church in Stratford as an honored citizen. On his tombstone is carved a rather wry inscription:

```
Good Friend, for Jesu’s sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he who moves my bones.
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http://www.romeoandjuliet.com (2 Dec 1996)
Life in Elizabethan England: Schools

In general, only boys go to school. A girl’s education is accomplished at home, although it usually includes reading and arithmetic. Of course, noble children get their education at home, from private tutors.

Public education refers to going out to school, as opposed to being tutored at home. It does not mean they are paid for out of public funds. Hence, the great “public schools” like Eton.

The school day begins at 7:00am in winter or 6:00am in summer. After prayers, they work till about 9:00 when they are permitted breakfast, then they work till 11:00. Dinner is from 11:00 to 1:00. The school day ends at 5:00 or 5:30pm.

It is understood that students must have their education beaten into them, like their manners and deportment.

The most elementary level of schooling is called petty school. You learn to read and write in English and do sums, but the main idea is to get you into grammar school.

The petty school is often run by a young wife who teaches the local children in her home for a small fee, like the “dame schools” of Colonial days.

The primary study of a grammar school is Latin grammar, using Lily’s Grammar as the basic text, with Plautus, Terence, and Seneca as classical sources. Any history, literature, or drama is mainly a vehicle for illustrating the grammar.

The function of the grammar school is to prepare you for university, where courses are conducted in Latin, even after the Reformation. Music, modern languages, and science are irrelevant.

Latin is also the language of international affairs, and men of affairs are expected to be able to communicate in it. Or employ someone who does. Anyone (not-noble) who wants to make his way in the world must have at least a working knowledge of Latin.

A private education takes a slightly broader view. The young earl of Essex followed this daily programme while a ward in Burghley’s house:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00-7:30</td>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>1:00-2:00</td>
<td>Cosmography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>2:00-3:00</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00-9:00</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>3:00-4:00</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-10:00</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>4:00-4:30</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:30</td>
<td>Writing and Drawing</td>
<td>4:30-5:30</td>
<td>Prayers, Recreation, Supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-1:00</td>
<td>Prayers, Recreation, Dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that there is time for writing but not for spelling. After all, what good is a man who can only spell his name one way?

A Classical Education

If you have a university education (or know someone who has), you should be at least slightly familiar with the following course of study, which has been in place since medieval times. Courses in beer and mayhem are supplementary.

In the Faculty of the Arts
Aristotle on:...
- Logical or Rational Philosophy: Organon, Categories, On Interpretation, Analytics, etc.
- Moral Philosophy: Ethics, Politics, Rhetoric, Poetics
- Natural Philosophy, or Natural History: Physical Discourse, On the Heavens, On the Soul, On Parts of Animals, Meteorologies etc.

The Seven Liberal Arts
1 Grammar (authors: Priscian, Donatus, Villedieu, Cassiodorus, and some pagan and early Christian writers.)
2 Rhetoric (Quintillian, Cicero, Eberhard de Bethune)
3 Logic (Porphyry, Gilbert de la Poré, Hispanus)
4 Arithmetic (John of Holywood, John of Pisa)
5 Geometry (Euclid, Boëthius)
6 Music (Boëthius, Jehan de Muris of Paris)
7 Astronomy (Gerard de Cremona)

In the Faculty of Law
The principal Latin authorities are:
- In civil law:
  Corpus Juris Civilis, the Code, the Pandects (a digest), the Institutes, the Novellae

- In canon (church) law:
  Gratian, Bartholomew, Pope Gregory IX, Pope Boniface VIII, Constitutiones Clementiae

In the Faculty of Theology
The Bible, Peter Lombard, Church Fathers and great doctors of the church such as Origen

In the Faculty of Medicine
Hippocrates, Galen, Arabic and Jewish medical texts, Theodore of Lucca, Lanfranci, Chauliac
Some specialized authorities
  Isidore of Seville: Etymologiae (On Language) and Sententiae (Maxims)
  Rabanus Maurus, On the Universe and On the Instruction of the Clergy
  (Emperor) Frederick II, The Falcon Book
  Gordanus Rufus, On Horse Healing

Classical References

The Muses
The Muses are nine sisters, daughters of Zeus and Memory, who preside over the arts and philosophy. They reside on Mount Helicon, and are under the patronage of Apollo.
In the Classical period, the following names and assignments were accepted, although they may vary (and may be useful when planning Masques).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calliope</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clio</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyhymnia</td>
<td>Mime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euterpe</td>
<td>Instrumental music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terpsichore</td>
<td>Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erato</td>
<td>Choral music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melpomene</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalia</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urania</td>
<td>Astronomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Deities of Our Acquaintance

- Morpheus is the winged god of dreams, one of the children of Sleep.
- Jupiter (or Jove) is the king of the Gods in the Roman pantheon. His Greek counterpart is Zeus. Both are into thunderbolts.
- Mars (Ares) is the god of war. Note: Ares the god is not Aries the ram of the Zodiac.
- Venus (Aphrodite) is understood to be the goddess of Love; she is married to Vulcan, who forges thunderbolts for Jupiter in a volcano. Her son is Cupid (Eros).
- Vulcan (Hephaestus) is lame and ugly; Venus was once caught in flagrante with Mars!
- Minerva (Athena) is the goddess of Wisdom. (Yes, we comfortably interchange Greek and Roman names. Hey, it’s the Renaissance.)
- Iris is the goddess of the Rainbow.
- Hermes (HER-meez) is messenger of the gods, and has special winged sandals for speed. He is also god of commerce, and speeds travelers on their way.
- His son is pastoral Pan, who makes us panic.
- Ganymede (GAN-ee-meed) is the cup bearer of the gods, and thus any young boy or girl serving at table, or a page.

Proverbs And Wise Sayings

On Husbandry:

A wife, a spaniel, a walnut tree:
The more you beat them, the better they be.
A woman fit to be a man’s wife is too good to be his servant.
Women commend a modest man but like him not.

How to tell character by coloring:

Red wise
Brown trusty
Pale envious
Black lusty

On international relations

Germans woo like lions,
Italians like foxes,
Spaniards like friars,
and Frenchmen like stinging bees.

On various topics:

Age and wedlock tames man and beast.
Many kiss the child for its nurse’s sake.
As seasonable as snow in Summer.
Three may keep counsel if two be away.
Four pints of ale at a meal is three too many.

The Perfect Servant?

A trusty servant’s portrait you would see,
This emblematic figure we’ll survey.
The porker’s snout - not nice in diet shows;
The padlock’s shut - no secret he’ll disclose;
Patient the ass - his master’s wrath will bear;
Swiftness in errand - the stag’s feet will declare;
Alluded his left hand - apt to labour saith;
The vest - his neatness; open hand - his faith;
Girt with his sword, his shield upon his arm,
Himself and master he’ll protect from harm.

-- Graffiti on the kitchen wall at Winchester College, dated 1563
There is a famous passage on the concept of order, and the consequences which follow when it is disrupted, in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*. With inescapable Shakespearian irony, however, the statement is put into the mouth of the new politician, the crafty Ulysses who, while he is speaking of the ideal natural order, is planning stratagems based on the realities of power; what is more, the passage occurs in what is perhaps the darkest and most pessimistic of all Shakespeare’s plays.

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre [earth]
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture [constancy], course, proportion, season, form,
Office, and custom, in all line of order.
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
Amidst the other[s]; whose med’cinal eye
Corrects the influence of evil planets,
And posts, like the commandment of a king,
Sans [without] check, to good and bad. But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate [uproot]
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture? O, when degree is shaked,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in citises,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenity [rights of inheritance of the first born] and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility [weakness],
And the rude son should strike his father dead;
Force should be right, or rather right and wrong--
Between whose endless jar [battle] justice resides--
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything include itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself.

*(Troilus and Cressida 1. 3. 85-124)*
Steps, ladder, chain, scale

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...”
(\textit{Genesis} 1: 1).

The story of the creation could be seen as a logical progression from light, to the waters, to the earth, to planets, to animals, and finally to humans. In this image there is an orderly progression upwards. This sense of order, and its consequent fixed hierarchy, were convenient for the stability of both church and state.

![Image of steps, ladder, chain, scale](http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Library/SLT/ideas/chain.html)

The Music of the Spheres

When writers of the Renaissance speak of the harmony of ideal order and creation, they are not thinking of the terms just as a metaphor.

This illustration represents one way of ordering the heavens and earth in musical harmony: the mystic threes begin with God, whose hand is visible at the top, and descend in groups of three as “Diapasons” (harmonic scales) through the spheres to the earth.

Cosmic order was seen in both music and dance.

(1) Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens [tiles] of bright gold.
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But while this muddy vesture of decay [our bodies]
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
(\textit{The Merchant of Venice}, 5. 1. 58-65)

(2) Each scale or “mode” in medieval music was associated with a particular sphere or planet (seven scales, seven planets), and each had a characteristic meaning and mood (much as do the two common remaining scales today, major and minor).

Plainsong chants, simple and graceful in melody, were followed by the glorious church music of the high Renaissance (hear a mass by William Byrd), still written in the ancient modes.

(3) As the spheres moved in their stately dance to the music of the spheres, so humans could move in the motion of a dance, imitating the circles and figures of the cosmos. Thus dance was a way of celebrating order in society and nature. The court masque was an especially self-conscious expression of the ideal.

Order in the sexes

The concept of equality between the sexes would have seemed very foreign to most in Shakespeare’s day: Adam was created first, and Eve from his body; she was created specifically to give him comfort, and was to be subordinate to him, to obey him and to accept her lesser status. A dominant woman was unnatural, a symptom of disorder. The medieval church had inculcated a view of women that was split between the ideal of the Virgin Mary, and her fallible counterpart, Eve, or her anti-type, the Whore of Babylon. Unfortunately, the Virgin Mary was one of a kind, so there was often a general distrust of women; Renaissance and Medieval literature is often misogynistic. Queen Elizabeth cultivated the view that she was the ideal; Joan of Arc, on the other hand (at least in Shakespeare’s play Henry VI, Part One), was seen as a devil. (More on “disorderly” forms of sexuality in the Renaissance.)

The courtly poet Sir Thomas Wyatt dramatized a debate between two pastoral figures on the opposing views of women as ideal and fallible.

The accepted hierarchy of the sexes was so much taken for granted that it influenced even the literature of farming.

(1) The textbook of witch-hunters, the Malleus Maleficarum, includes this passage in explaining why more women than men are witches:

Some learned men propound this reason; that there are three things in nature, the tongue, an ecclesiastic, and a woman, which know no moderation in goodness or vice; and when they exceed the bounds of their condition they reach the greatest heights and the lowest depths of goodness and vice. When they are governed by a good spirit, they are most excellent in virtue; but when they are governed by an evil spirit, they indulge the worst possible vices.

(2) Devil or angel?

Jealous men in Shakespeare's plays have difficulty seeing women as something between these two extremes: if they are not perfect they must be whores: thus the abrupt swing between love and hate in such characters as Claudio (Much Ado About Nothing), Othello, Posthumus (Cymbeline), and Leontes (The Winter's Tale). Hamlet has similar problems with his mother, and advises Ophelia to get to a nunnery to avoid the evils of the world altogether.

(3) Most of the documents from the period concerning sexual behaviour that was considered improper deal with adultery and fornication, activities that were dealt with in the ecclesiastical courts. There is little information about other kinds of sexual behaviour. Male homosexual acts were the subject of severe laws, but these laws seem to have been seldom enforced; they were used more as a kind of propaganda to discredit the male priesthood of the dissolved Catholic Church than as a serious method of enforcing the moral norm of heterosexuality. Lesbianism was neither written about nor legislated against. Despite the laws against homosexual acts, it is probably misleading to think of homosexuals in the period as oppressed, simply because those with different sexual preferences would not have seen themselves as a group, or as having rights. It is nonetheless true that both Marlowe and James I were rumoured to have been involved in homosexual relationships. Then of course there is the puzzle of Shakespeare's sonnets, and the literary tradition--based on a combination of classical philosophy and Christian misogyny--that put male friendship above any other form of human love. And the ambiguities generated by the presence of boy actors in the theatre.

Classical examples

Plato, followed by Plutarch (whom Shakespeare certainly read), both proclaim that the act of loving boys is superior to loving women because it is less subject to the kind of passion that subdues reason.
A lesson on domestic order

In The Taming of the Shrew, Kate, tamed, gives a famous (or infamous, or ironical) lesson to the other women on the “natural” domestic order. The imagery makes clear the correspondence between the family and the nation:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign . . .
Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband,
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest* will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple [foolish]
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.
(5.2.148-66)

Disorder

“May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?” “Thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers. . . when thou gav'st them the rod, and put'st down thy own breeches.” So the Fool in King Lear tells his master of the error he has made in yielding his authority to his children*.

Shakespeare was very much of his time in the fear of disorder that is expressed in many of his plays. In his mature work, however, he increasingly recognises the impossibility of achieving ideal order in human affairs. One of the great statements of the disastrous effects of disorder is found in a dark and disturbing play, Troilus and Cressida.

Titania speaks of disorder

The ploughman [hath] lost his sweat, and the green corn* Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard;
The fold stands empty in the drown'd field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion* flock;
The nine men's morris* is filled up with mud;
And the quaint* mazes in the wanton green,
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable.
The human mortals want their winter cheer . . .
And thorough this distemperature* we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems'* thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet* of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The childing* autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries*; and the [a]maz'd world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which.
(A Midsummer Night's Dream, 2.1.94-114)
Life in Elizabethan England: Language

This is not grammar you are taught in school, but simply the ordinary way people talk.

Say:

“How art thou”, not “how are thee”
What wouldst thou have of me?
   I like thy face.
       I will go with thee.
           Thou art a rogue.

Say:

I did see him go with thee.
not “I didst see him...”
The “-st” ending is only for “thou” (2nd person singular): “Thou didst ...”

However, the familiar and formal forms (thou and you) get mixed in a sentence even in Shakespeare. But only downward or to an equal, never up. That is, you might address your servant using both thou and you together, but he wouldn’t do that to you.
Anger and strong feeling, of course, cancel other conventions.

Also:

• When we refer to ‘corn’, we are referring, mainly, to barley. If not barley, then it is whatever the major grain crop in the region is (rye is common). It is never corn-on-the-cob or maize.

• Englishmen speak of living in a particular street instead of on it. Shakespeare lived for a time in a house in Silver Street, or one knows a tailor with a shop in the High Street.

• A village is more likely to be built around a village green and may not have a street at all. If traffic actually runs through it, you might say that children were playing in the lane or the road.

http://www.renaissance.dm.net/compendium/8.html
Useful expressions

Antique language isn’t necessarily “big words” or curious sentence structure. Try these.
(Note that “an” means “if”.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of…</th>
<th>say…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okay</td>
<td>Very well, ‘tis done, As you will, Marry shall I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wow!</td>
<td>Fie me! Marry! ‘Zounds (God’s wounds, pron: ZOONDS) I'faith! Hey-ho! God’s Death! What ho!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me</td>
<td>Forgive me, Pray pardon, I crave your forgiveness, By your leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>Prithee (I pray thee), If you please, An thou likest, An it please you, By your leave, An thou wilt, An you will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Gramercy, I thank thee, My thanks, God reward thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesundheit!</td>
<td>God Save You!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air head</td>
<td>Lightminded, Airling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom line</td>
<td>In the end, At bottom, In the main, Finally, In the final analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom</td>
<td>Privy, Jakes, Ajax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainly!</td>
<td>Certes! (SIR-tees)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strange but True:
“Hello” is not actually a period greeting but an exclamation of surprise.
You can say instead:

Good day.
Good morrow.
God save you, sweet mistress.
How now, Sir Toby Belch.

Some more vocabulary:

“Wherefore” means “Why.”

“Stay” means “to wait”.
If you mean to say that someone is waiting for you, and you are late (or whatever), say: “I am stayed for.”

“Ta’en” is short for “taken”.
Use “ta’en” for to mean “mistaken for”. As in:

I fear thou hast ta’en me for someone else.
My brother is oft ta’en for me and I for him.

“Sweeting” is a popular pet name both for lovers and for children.
Translate Shakespeare’s language into modern English

[*] Prithee, let us repair post-haste to yonder tavern for a pot of sack and some capon.
[*] Yon wench seems in a choler. Her humour hath been thus sith days of yore.
[*] Ifaith, the caitiff hath been justly punished for cozening divers townsfolk.
[*] Yon jade hath not the worth of a groat.
[*] Con this page for divers conceits concerning husbandry.

Translate modern English into Shakespeare’s language

[*] Honestly, I think your face has the look of a worn-out horse.
[*] Go away! I’ve had enough of this quarrelling between you two.
[*] Honestly, I cannot drink this unpleasant wine.
[*] Let’s make our way to the pub and have a talk about this terrible business immediately.
[*] I suspect you’ve got some terrible burden on your mind.
[*] That wretched coward has cheated you. I would be inclined to testify how he has treated you in a harmful manner.

Glossary

avaunt - go away!
avouch - testify, prove
betimes - soon
caitiff - cowardly wretch
capon - chicken
choler - irritable temper
con - study
conceit - idea
cozen - cheat
divers - various
drab - an immoral person
etreat - beg, plead
e’re - before
enow - enough
fain - inclined to
fardel - burden
fell - terrible
forsooth - truly, honestly
groat - a small coin
humour - mood
husbandry - maintenance
ifaith - honestly
jade - worn out horse
jakes - lavatory
lest - unless
lief - (I had as lief) prefer
methinks - I think
naught - nothing
noisome - harmful
o’er - over
parley - talk
pate - head
prithee - I beg you
quaff - drink
repair - make your way to
riggish - playful
rude - rough
sack - wine
sith - since or because
taper - candle
varlet - low-class rogue
visage - face
yore - ago or time gone
zounds! - God’s wounds!
Life in Elizabethan England: Mary Queen of Scots

She is/was Mary Stuart (originally Stewart), daughter of James V of Scotland and Marie de Guise, daughter of the duke of Lorraine. She was Queen of Scots from the time she was six days old. She was a staunch Catholic until she died.

She is not “Bloody Mary.” That charming title belongs to Elizabeth’s sister, Mary Tudor, who created a lot of Protestant martyrs.

Mary Stuart’s grandmother was Henry VIII’s sister Margaret. Henry’s will and the Act of Succession excluded this branch from the English succession, but since Elizabeth is officially a bastard and heretic (according to the Pope) Mary feels she is the rightful Queen of England. A lot of people (mainly foreigners and English Catholics) agree with her.

She became Queen of France and Scotland by marrying the French heir, Francis II. She was widowed in 1560 at the age of 18, and returned to Scotland the following year.

In 1565 she married Henry Stuart Lord Darnley, son of the Countess of Lennox, a granddaughter of Henry VII. Their son James was born in July 1566. Her husband, who had all the morals of an ape, was a jerk and conspired against her.

While Darnley was convalescing in ’68 (of a “shameful illness”), he was killed when the basement of the house he was staying in exploded. However, he was not killed in the explosion. His body was found in the garden, stabbed and strangled. Many people accused Mary of arranging it.

In May of 1568, after a variety of military actions and her third marriage (to the earl of Bothwell, possibly by force) she left Scotland to throw herself on England’s mercy. Various Stuart, Tudor, and deGuise ancestors proceeded to roll over in their graves.

She spent 19 years in England, with various jailers at various houses. Elizabeth wouldn’t agree to see her until Mary had been cleared of the accusation of murdering her husband, but Mary claimed (rightfully) that a foreign court had no right to try her, a sovereign queen. Several investigations produced a number of damning letters (probably forged) but nothing was ever resolved.

In captivity, she eventually signed papers officially abdicating in favor of her son. During this time, her special emissaries to Elizabeth were Sir James Melville and John Leslie, Bishop of Ross.

A number of serious plots revolved around her, the main ones being the Ridolfi Plot (to marry her to Norfolk and place them both on the English throne, with Spanish help) and the Babington Plot (to kill Elizabeth, rescue Mary, and put her on the throne, possibly with French help). The latter plot is covered nicely in part 5 of the BBC’s Elizabeth R.

In 1586, Mary was tried in England by a panel of peers and justices, and condemned. Elizabeth put off signing the death warrant as long as she could, but Mary was executed at last on 7 February 1587, at Fotheringhay Castle.

A Few Questions, Mr. Shakespeare

The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington fielded nearly 1,500 inquiries last year from high school students, teachers and interested readers. The library’s newsletter, Folger News, contains the column “Ask a Librarian,” in which the reference staff shares some of these questions and answers. Below are some of her favorites.

Q. I recently saw the movie adaptation of “Titus Andronicus” and was shocked by the level of violence. How do I explain Shakespeare’s seeming “bloody-mindedness” to my nieces and nephews?

A. The incidence of violence in Shakespeare’s plays may seem high to modern audiences, but it was not that unusual within the context of his time. If anything, Shakespeare was more moderate than many dramatists of the early 17th century. Keep in mind, too, that when the good citizens of London weren’t attending plays at the Globe, they might well be watching bear baiting, cock fighting or public executions. Those who consider today’s society too violent would doubtless cringe at the idea of spending an entertaining afternoon at a hanging or a beheading (at least, we hope they would!).


Do Othello and Desdemona ever consummate their marriage? They seem to be interrupted by other matters on their wedding night.

These kinds of questions are always difficult. Why didn’t Hamlet just take over after his father’s death? Are Hamlet and Ophelia ever lovers? Part of the problem is that — even though we know we’re not supposed to — we assume a full life for Shakespeare’s characters outside their plays. They become that real to us. As far as Othello and Desdemona are concerned, the short answer is that we don’t know. The play never makes it clear, which is why Shakespearean scholars have come down on both sides of the issue. The editor of the recent new Arden edition, E. A. J. Honigmann, believes that they did. He bases his assumption on a scene in Act II where, prior to exiting with Desdemona, Othello says, “Come, my dear love,/ The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue:/ That profit’s yet to come ‘tween me and you.” Honigmann believes that the consummation then takes place offstage. Other critics have disagreed, referring to what they call Othello’s “unconsummated marriage” and his “idolatrous love.” The Folger’s own head of reference, Georgianna Ziegler, sides with the consummation camp. “I think that Shakespeare leads us up to their bedding and we are to assume they consummate when they go offstage in Act II,” she says. “Perhaps after they are interrupted by Cassio’s fight with Iago and go back to bed.”

What words and phrases did Shakespeare coin?

From the “spectacled” “pedant” to the “schoolboy,” all “gentlefolk” recognize Shakespeare as a “fathomless” “fount” of coinages. The “honey-tongued” Bard had no “rival,” nor could he “sate” his “never-ending” “addiction” to “madcap,” “flowery” (or “foul-mouthed!”) neologisms. Even “time-honored” “exposure” cannot “besmirch” our “amazement” at the “countless” and “useful” words that lend “radiance” to our “lackluster” lives. All in a “day’s work!”

In “Brush Up Your Shakespeare!” the author, Michael Macrone, confesses that it’s not always easy to determine who first coined a word, but notes that the Oxford English Dictionary attributes all of the [quoted] words above (and some 500 more) to Shakespeare.

How did men cover up their beards if they played women’s roles in Shakespeare’s theater?

Usually boys played women’s parts onstage, so there was no problem about beards. In fact, Hamlet jokes with one of the actors who visit the court in Denmark: “Why, thy face is valanced since I saw thee last,” meaning that the boy has reached puberty and started to grow a beard. Since his voice would change about the same time (Hamlet says, “Pray God your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring”), that would signal the end of female roles for him. Older men probably played female roles from time to time, such as comic figures like Juliet’s Nurse. In that case, they would probably shave off any beard.

What was the name of the youngest actor to perform Shakespeare?

At the age of 13, William Henry West Betty (1791-1874) took the London theater world by storm. Excitement ran so high that the military had to be called out to maintain order in the streets outside the theater on his opening night. Master Betty, the “Young Roscius,” was the brightest star of the London stage during the 1804-
1805 season, playing roles like Hamlet and Romeo. Prints, engravings, medals and other memorabilia struck in his likeness filled all the shops. After his brief but hectic London success, audiences just as quickly turned against him, and he was hissed off the stage. His attempted comeback, years later, was virtually ignored. Ellen Terry, however, beat out Master Betty. She performed Mamillius in “The Winter’s Tale” at the age of 8, in 1856.

**How many words did Shakespeare write?**
This is a popular question and may be answered by looking at Marvin Spevack’s concordances to Shakespeare’s works. The complete works consist of 884,647 words and 118,406 lines.

**What did Shakespeare’s son die of?**
We don’t really know how Shakespeare’s young son, Hamnet, died. He had a twin sister named Judith, who lived to adulthood and married, but Hamnet died at the age of 11 1/2. Child mortality was high in the 16th century as there were no antibiotics and many childhood diseases might therefore prove fatal — diseases like scarlet fever, whooping cough, diphtheria and even measles. He was buried on Aug. 11, 1596.

**What are the shortest and longest plays?**
The shortest play: “Comedy of Errors” with 1,787 lines and 14,369 words. The longest play: “Hamlet” with 4,042 lines and 29,551 words.