

## Theater Appreciation



# Theater Appreciation

*NANCI LOVE, BAY COLLEGE*



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PART I

# FACULTY RESOURCES



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PART II

WEEK 1: WELCOME TO  
CLASS, WEEK 2:  
INTRODUCTION TO  
THEATER





# 3. Part One: Creating a World, Chapter 1 “Mapping Reality: An Introduction to Theater”

This content can be found in its entirety with images by [clicking here for the pdf](#).

## Mapping Reality: An Introduction to Theatre

Charlie Mitchell and Michelle Hayford

Nothing has as much potential as a stage. In all of its incarnations, it is a world of imagination, limitless possibilities, and the site of passionate labor. Consider the following moments repeated countless times from antiquity to today. An audience has assembled, full of anticipation, to witness a performance. The appointed time draws near. Perhaps these patrons are seeing this work for the first time. Maybe they have heard or read the opinions of others. It is possible that they have seen another version of the show created by other hands. Nevertheless, it is a certainty that this experience will be unique; every performance has a singular, organic nature—no two can be the same. Among the crowd, perhaps a playwright nervously sits, anxiously waiting to see what will become of his words. The director who shaped this production, once a powerful creative force, is now helplessness. Backstage, hidden from the curious eyes of the audience, actors fight with nerves. As they run their lines and movements in their heads, they adjust their costumes, or check on items they might use in the show. Some

may have preshow rituals such as physical and vocal warm-ups. Others may simply enter a psychological state of preparation. All the hours of preparation will now be put to the test. Will the audience celebrate or reject what has been created?

It is time to begin. The actors take their places. Suddenly a signal is given to the audience—the theatre darkens, music is heard, a curtain rises, or actors simply enter the performance space. This is the moment of creation. In the next moment, a new world will appear where none existed, crafted to say something about the nature of our existence. This world, in turn, is the product of many others, one of practitioners who have shared their creativity in the service of this experience. If they have done their best, an everlasting impression will be made and lives may be changed forever.

This book seeks to give insight into the people and processes that create theatre. Like any other world—be it horse racing, fashion, or politics—understanding its complexities helps you appreciate it on a deeper plane. The intent of this book is not to strip away the feeling of magic that can happen in the presence of theatre but to add an element of wonder for the artistry that makes it work. At the same time, you can better understand how theatre seeks to reveal truths about the human condition; explores issues of ethics, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and spirituality; and exists as a representation of the culture at large.

The benefits of studying theatre can be immense. Think of it as a structure that houses other domains of knowledge. It touches and has influenced disciplines such as languages and literature, psychology, music, science, law, journalism, and business. It enables you to cross cultural boundaries and bridge the distance that separates understanding. In the future, anthropologists will examine our contemporary theatre as a cultural artifact in order to help them understand who we were, how we saw ourselves, and what we aspired to be.

Studying theatre also adds a great deal to your overall cultural

literacy. Because it has had such a profound social presence in everyday life, understanding references to plays, playwrights, theatrical movements, and production practice helps you communicate with the past and present. For example, look at how the theatre has permeated our language. Against a “backdrop” of anticipation, some could be viewed as “acting out,” taking “center stage” or “standing in the limelight” while people “work behind the scenes.” You can be accused of being “melodramatic,” “upstaging” the work of others, or forcing them to “wait in the wings.” And with a nod to the high-stakes struggle found on stage, you can even engage in a “theatre of war.”

Of course, the best way to learn about and learn from theatre is to create it yourself; you do not have to pursue a professional career in the arts to gain its benefits. Employers have found that theatrical practice answers the need for enhanced cognitive ability in the workplace. Analysis of texts, the interpersonal and collaborative skills gained in production, and the development of the creative mind gives students an advantage in whatever field they pursue. Theatre is a training ground for successful thinkers and doers.

## Basic Elements

For all of the intricate ways that theatre produces meaning, its core elements are simple. Legendary British director Peter Brook puts it best in his book *The Empty Space* when he writes: “I can take any space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.” This space could be anything from a vintage Broadway theatre to a high school auditorium to a claimed space in a public park. All that is needed are boundaries, agreed upon by performer and audience.

A variety of artists and other members of the theatrical community dedicate their time and efforts to supporting the

creation of fully realized productions. However, nothing more is required than an actor, an audience, a space, and the intent to create a fictional world. The popularity of improvisational theatre reminds us that a script is not even mandatory. This type of performance also disproves the absolute need for a director, the person usually responsible for providing a single artistic vision for a production. That position, in its current incarnation, has been around for only a hundred years, a small span of time when you think about the lengthy history of the theatre. Prior to its creation, staging had been shared by actors, producers, and playwrights, usually with very little rehearsal by today's standards.

There are not even a requisite number of audience members for something to be called theatre. Take Ludwig II (1845–1886), the eccentric king of Bavaria, who took this idea to its logical extreme. Convinced he could not enjoy himself surrounded by others, he arranged more than two hundred private viewings of operas by composer Richard Wagner and others. Unfortunately, this chronic shyness was later used by his enemies as a symptom of mental illness, and he was ousted from his throne.

Today, you can still live like a king. Since 2009, the area known as Times Square, the epicenter of commercial theatre in the United States, has been the site of Theatre for One. A four-foot-by-eight-foot portable theatre booth is erected and for six days, only one person can enter at a time. Once a partition lifts, a five-to-ten-minute show is given by a single performer, a strange oasis from one of the most chaotic places on the planet.

## Fine Art and the Qualities of Theatre

Theatre, along with music and dance, has been labeled a fine art as well as a performing art; it can be found in performing arts centers and taught in colleges and departments of fine art. But these terms lead to larger issues. By the twentieth century, educational

programs had been broken down into classifications, all of which were historically tied to economic class. In many cultures of the ancient world, work was done by slaves. Consequently, physical labor was imagined to be degrading and associated with a lack of nobility. The Romans, for example, called any activity where money changed hands the vulgar arts (*vulgares artes*) or sordid arts (*sordidæ artes*), also translated as “dirty arts.” By the Middle Ages, the designation changed. The term mechanical arts was adopted to mean skilled activities accomplished by manual labor. In the seventeenth century, useful arts appeared, and with the arrival of the machine age in the nineteenth century, it was replaced with industrial arts, a term still in use today.

In the ancient world and beyond, proof of high status was having leisure time to pursue self-improvement of the mind or to serve the public good. Therefore, philosophy, history, languages, math, and science were given the term liberal arts (“arts befitting a freeman”). Now the term simply means subjects separate from science and technology and implies an education that is not particularly specialized. Therefore “liberal,” in this sense, is not a political term and is not meant to contrast any “conservative” mode of thought.

The third branch, separate from useful and liberal, was given the term fine arts. Coined in the eighteenth century, it was meant to include sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. Later, the performing arts were added along with disciplines such as printmaking, photography, and collage. “Fine” was not intended to suggest art that was “acceptable” or “delicate”—it was supposed to classify artistic endeavors that were beautiful for their own sake and not compromised by serving any practical function. In other words, a craftsman could make a stunningly beautiful cabinet, but once it stored clothes, it ceased to be art. An architect could design a building that was a pleasure to behold, but since it provided shelter, his work was considered only useful.

Clearly, the ex-change of money and the association with leisure time has been abandoned as a dividing line between fine and useful

art. However, the remaining concept of beauty for its own sake leaves us with a variety of conflicts, questions, and ambiguities. Many works communicate images or use material that we may not regard as beautiful. Still, we would not hesitate to label them as art. Theatre deals in conflict, sometimes using subject matter that can make some feel uncomfortable. Does it cease to be art when no pleasurable feeling is derived from it? Many would argue that even though the arts do not serve any domestic function, they can be extremely useful as a means of interpreting our world and spiritually nourishing our lives. Is that not useful? When does an object or performance stop being artistic and start being art? Are there rules that must be satisfied or is it simply in the eye of the beholder? Does the quality of something determine if it qualifies as art? To ask and engage with these sorts of questions is to practice aesthetics, a branch of philosophy that deals with beauty and taste.

A working definition of art that is elastic enough to bridge different mediums of expression has occupied us for centuries. The Greek philosopher Plato called it an imitation of nature but for that same reason, condemned it as artificial, a copy of a copy, and believed actors should be banned from what he saw as an ideal republic. Many have tried to adopt the poet William Wordsworth's definition of poetry for art in general—"the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" from "emotion recollected in tranquility." Novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote that experiencing art was "receiving an expression of feeling" from the artist.

Contemporary critics have also chimed in. Susanne Langer called art "the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling," and Ellen Dissanayake claimed that art is "a specialness" that "is tacitly or overtly acknowledged." The frustration in creating a unifying theory of art has led some to claim that even the attempt is self-defeating. Playwright Oscar Wilde once lectured, "We want to create it, not to define it."

So what separates theatre from the other arts? What are the qualities particular to theatre that, collectively, make it unique?

Theatre certainly deals in the imitation of human action. We can trace the origins of theatrical practice in the Western world to the citizens of the Greek city-state of Athens in the fifth century BCE. Theatre began with dithyrambs, a chorus of fifty men with a leader who told stories about a fertility god named Dionysus through song and dance. Eventually, innovations were made such as performers imitating individual characters. In addition, the chorus was greatly reduced and changed to represent the men or women of a city where a play took place. Presented at festivals, this form became what we know today as Greek tragedy.

Sitting in the audience was Aristotle. The student of the philosopher Plato, he could be called our first drama critic. His collected notes form the basis for a treatise called *Poetics* (dated between 335 and 322 BCE), which described what he thought were the components of a good tragedy. He began by defining his subject, calling it “the imitation of an action that is good and also complete in itself and of some magnitude.” This could be interpreted as requiring that drama artfully depict the actions of someone; have a beginning, middle, and end; and be of an appropriate length. Independently, an Indian critic named Bharata came to a similar conclusion in a text called the *Natyashastra*. Written sometime between 300 BCE and 300 CE in a now-dead language called Sanskrit, he defined drama as “an imitation of people’s demeanor, attitudes, conditions, and joys and sorrows.”

Here, both authors speak to a fundamental aspect of humanity. It is our nature to imitate the actions of others—psychological studies confirm that imitation is a major part of our social development. Mimicry strengthens the bond between parent and child. Newborns copy the facial movements of their parents. Toddlers learn to speak by imitating and sifting through the sounds they hear. When we observe an action, it has been shown that the neurons in our brain respond as if we were performing the same action. Our capacity for empathy is based on this hardwired ability. In acting classes, one of the most common exercises to get scene partners to connect

emotionally is called mirroring. Actors are paired, facing each other, and one performs all of the physical movements of the other until they are told to switch leaders. Duplicating actions is the fastest way to get two people to reach synchronicity.

Our skill in patterning behavior is also one of the reasons that actors—and the theatre in general—have often been greeted with suspicion throughout history. Even though psychologists have established that children as young as twelve months can recognize the concept of pretense, there has always been a belief that viewing or participating in fictional worlds can warp our moral core, regardless of age. In 1999, two teenagers entered Columbine High School in Colorado and killed twelve students and a teacher before ending their own lives. Soon after, many tried to tie their violent behavior to the playing of video games.

This type of role playing was seen as tantamount to being trained to point and shoot weapons. A lawsuit was brought against gaming companies, but in the end, a judge decided that “there is social utility in expressive and imaginative forms of entertainment, even if they contain violence.” When California tried to ban selling violent video games to children in 2011, the Supreme Court overturned the law, finding it a violation of free speech.

This leads us to how an imitation-based definition of theatre is lacking. Simply to watch the actions of others would brand too much of everyday life as theatre. However, imitation in the sense of representing a fictional or real person creates a better dividing line between performance and an action that is performative. In the brief but effective words of critic Eric Bentley, “A impersonates B while C looks on.” A sporting event or a fashion show has performers and an audience, but these “actors” are not pretending to be someone else. Theatre needs a pretense of self—a presentation of character. This is a useful definition to limit the scope of your study, but as you will see, many avant-garde and postmodern performers



have sought to challenge this idea by blurring the line between real life and fiction, audience and performer.

Potentially, a great many people can participate in the creation of this pretense. Unlike other solitary forms of art, theatre is often highly collaborative. Although the actor is its only requirement, theatre has developed numerous artistic and support personnel such as directors, designers, and stage managers who may contribute to the final product. This is one of the reasons that theatre studies are so valuable—they teach teamwork in the service of excellence.

Theatre has other qualities that, collectively, make it distinct from other art forms. The economics of producing plays is one reason theatre is no longer a mass medium. Film and television can reach greater audiences because their product can be broadcast and played simultaneously on millions of screens. Additionally, computers can now stream the same content on demand. Theatre can never be as profitable or match the scale of these mediums. However, its resistance to duplication is what makes it special. Live performance is immediate. When you read a novel or watch a recorded television program, you have total control over the experience by varying your tempo of reading or stopping and starting altogether. The theatrical experience, however, is relentless. It pushes your focus from place to place, forcing you to reflect on the events on the fly, during intermissions, or after the show. That is the reason it is ephemeral. Performances can have no true reproduction. Anyone who has participated in the creation of theatre can attest to the strange, emotional moment when the run of a show has ended, sets are removed, and nothing remains but an empty stage. In dressing rooms and backstage walls of many theatres, you will find lines from shows scribbled by actors, a poignant attempt to live beyond the temporary world of a production run. While it is true that performances can be captured on film or video, the true experience of live theatre cannot be truly duplicated. Once it is finished, it lives only in memory.

This transitory quality of theatre is due to the dynamic between the actor and the audience. There is a feedback loop—energy is exchanged. Each produces signals that are perceived by the other, which, in turn, can profoundly affect how the performance evolves. This is more difficult to perceive in serious drama but is especially evident in comedy, where laughter influences the delivery and timing of lines or the intensity of an individual performance. Actors complain of tough or dead audiences and celebrate the ones that seem to take an emotional journey with them, inspiring them to make bolder choices.

The idea of pretending that the audience is not present is a relatively new one. In many theatrical traditions, actors commonly spoke directly to their audiences. Readers of Shakespeare often ignore that his famous soliloquys, monologues in which a single character shares his or her innermost thoughts, are direct appeals to the audience. The audience members become characters in the play, confidants who can seemingly solve the problems they are being asked to hear.

This relationship between actors and audiences has changed over the centuries. In many theatrical traditions, the audience has been a much more influential “actor” in the performance. In eighteenth-century France and England, wealthy patrons could sit right on the stage in full view. As much as we complain about the annoyances of cell phone use and texting during performances today, to a nineteenth-century audience, our behavior would seem downright passive. It was common practice for people to vocalize their criticism by booing and hissing at villains during their entrances or heckling actors when it was thought a performance was subpar. Vocal reactions to onstage action built to such a crescendo that newspapers often complained of theatrical rowdyism.

## *How to See a Play*

The following observations were written by a German traveler to a theatre in the United States in 1833:

. . . freedom here degenerates into the rudest license and it is not uncommon, in the midst of the most affecting parts of a tragedy, or the most charming ‘cadenza’ of a singer, to hear some coarse expressions shouted from the gallery in a stentor voice. This is followed, according to the taste of the by-standers, either by loud laughter and approbation, or by the castigation and expulsion of the offender. . . . It is also no rarity for some one to throw the fragments of his ‘gouté’ [snack], which do not always consist of orange-peels alone, without the smallest ceremony, on the heads of the people in the pit or, or to shail them with singular dexterity into the boxes; while others hang their coats and waistcoats over the railing of the gallery and sit in shirt-sleeves.

We certainly have come a long way! Although politeness is a relative idea, it can be said that theatre-going today has some common rules of etiquette to follow so everyone can have an enjoyable experience. We list them here to save you any future embarrassment:

Arrive on time. Finding your seat in a dark theatre is disruptive to those in your wake.

- Do not talk during the show.
- Do not use your phone or smartphone. It is best to turn it off completely. Vibrating phones can be just as attention-getting as a ring tone.
- Do not eat or drink during the show.

- Do not open candies with loud wrappers.

Violating these rules breaks the reality the actors are trying so hard to create as well as greatly annoying patrons around you (although they may not say it). You do not want to be the person everyone complains about after the show.

If there is an intermission between the acts, some theatres will blink the lights or broadcast a tone to let you know it is time to take your seat. At the end of the show, applaud the actors for their efforts instead of darting for the door. It is the only way they know you enjoyed their work, and they appreciate it immensely. Standing ovations should be reserved for outstanding performances.

And now for backstage superstitions. Do not say “Good luck” to an actor before a show; it is considered bad luck to do so. “Break a leg” is the proper way to give your good wishes. It is also believed by some that it is bad luck to whistle in a theatre. This probably originated back when ex-sailors used to work in theatres to operate the ropes and pulleys that raised and lowered scenery. They communicated by whistling, so an errant one could cause pandemonium on stage. Today, however, all communications are done through intercoms. But these infractions are trivial compared to saying “Macbeth” in a theatre. Supposedly, disaster will befall any show if this word is spoken aloud. We have seen many a seemingly mature and levelheaded actor go into a histrionic tizzy at the mention of Shakespeare’s play. Calling it “the Scottish play” is imagined to be a harmless alternative. The fanciful legend connected to this irrational belief is that Shakespeare observed the rituals of a real witches’ coven

and included their spells in his play. Outraged, the witches placed a curse on the play. If its title is said by accident, actors have developed elaborate rituals to combat this “curse,” involving spinning, spitting, and/or circling the theatre a number of times.

Finally, many theatres claim to have a kindly ghost in residence. It is likely that an apparatus referred to as a “ghost light” contributes to this one. This bare lamp mounted on a pole is put on stage whenever the theatre is not in use and all the lights are shut off. It is a safety measure but also saves on electrical costs. Its eerie light has convinced many a green actor that a ghostly presence is nearby.

Other cultures have a more casual relationship between actor and audience. For example, in some puppet theatre traditions like the wayang kulit in Indonesia, shows are played from evening until dawn, and it is common practice for spectators to move about, talk, and feast during the show. Nevertheless, actors and audiences are ultimately partners. Theatre’s primary strength comes from the fact that it is a medium of imagination that depends on the suggestion of reality rather than slavish photorealism.

## How Theatre “Means”

How theatre generates meaning is both simplistic and highly complex. Think of the theatrical space as a machine that constantly generates meaning. A bare stage can become any location by using language or gesture—our minds fill in the blanks. Actions on stage

forge what we call a convention, an unspoken agreement between actor and audience concerning a fictional reality. As long as this covenant is unbroken, other fictions can be built upon it. A fun example of this concept comes from a play called *Black Comedy* by Peter Shaffer. The show opens in darkness but when the characters in the play experience a blackout caused by a short circuit, the stage suddenly becomes illuminated. As the actors grope around in the “dark,” we realize the convention. When the lights are on, the reality is that the characters are experiencing darkness. When the lights are out, the lights in the house have returned. Following this logic, if a match is struck or a flashlight is switched on, the stage lights dim.

Entire styles of performance can be created through conventions. In musical theatre, a performer interrupts a scene to break into song. In doing so, he has constructed a world where singing as a means of expression is an accepted reality. In poetic drama, characters speak in patterned language and as long as the other characters do the same, it establishes a norm.

Of course, the audience must be willing to participate in this enterprise. Back in 1817, Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the expression “the willing suspension of disbelief” to describe a reader’s encounter with supernatural poetry. The theatrical community has since adopted that phrase to describe the decision by an audience member to put aside any doubts about the narrative being presented. In other words, the audience chooses to believe as long as the actors hold up their end of the bargain and support the established reality.

At the outset, nothing on the stage has any inherent meaning. The symbolism that is generated is entirely based on context. Visualize a chair in a performance space. At its most basic, it represents a simple piece of furniture. However, if used as a throne, it becomes a sign of power. If physically toppled, for example, it can change into a symbol of the overthrow of monarchy. In many ways, a stage is no different from a painting— everything inside the frame is open for interpretation—but theatre can constantly morph to create

other meanings. In August Wilson's play *Fences*, a character named Troy builds a fence around his house at the insistence of his wife, Rose. On the surface, it seems to symbolize a barrier to protect the family from the threat of the outside world. However, as the play progresses and facts about his behavior outside the home come to light, the fence comes to symbolize a kind of emotional prison shared by both husband and wife or the emotional barriers that keep people apart.

Because theatre cannot help but generate meaning, it has a strong tendency to be allegorical. If a play depicts a single romantic relationship triumphing over adversity, a strong message that "love conquers all" might be communicated. If multiple couples are shown with different outcomes to their relationships, the result becomes more complex. This is why it is problematic to have a person of a particular background or ethnicity represented in a negative light when there is no positive counterpoint. Nevertheless, playwrights of color have struggled with this idea. Some believe the theatre is an opportunity for positive portrayals, while others bristle at the thought of being "ghettoized" and want to represent the human condition without being a spokesperson for their race or gender.

Of course, the reception of art does not begin and end at the theatre. The conclusions we reach about the onstage world we experience are greatly influenced by the personal and cultural baggage we bring with us. Our background—socioeconomic status, history of personal relationships, familiarity with the subject matter, and so on—all influence how we interpret the fictional lives and outcomes we see. One of the major strengths of the theatre is that it helps us transcend our own preconceptions by intimately exposing us to new ideas, cultures, and subcultures.

It should also be noted that stories that are deeply rooted in our own cultural traditions often have little or very different meaning to people from another one. An American anthropologist named Laura Bohannan discovered the fallacy of "universal understanding" in 1961 when she was living with a tribe called the Tiv in southeastern Nigeria. Pressed to tell a story by the elders of the village, she

attempted to recount the story of Hamlet. When she told them that the ghost of a dead king appeared to demand revenge, they rejected the idea. They insisted it must be an omen sent by a witch or a zombie and that Hamlet's father should have taken more wives. As she continued the story, it was determined, among other reinterpretations, that the only explanation for the behavior of Hamlet and Ophelia was bewitchment. "Tell us more stories in the future," said one of the elders, "and we will instruct you in their true meaning." Theatre practitioners forget their audience at their own peril.

## The Uses of Theatre

We certainly look to theatre for entertainment, but many believe that using it as a source of pleasure or escape is not its only purpose. A series of practices called drama therapy is described by its national association as when "participants are invited to rehearse desired behaviors, practice being in relationships, expand and find flexibility between life roles, and perform the change they wish to be and see in the world." It is a mix of theatre and clinical and psychological practice, and master's degrees in drama therapy are now offered nationally and internationally to train specialists to work with special populations such as troubled children and adolescents, the elderly, substance abusers, people with developmental disabilities, and those who have experienced traumatic events such as wars or natural disasters. Drama therapists might also work with dysfunctional families or individuals seeking help with life problems. One example is called playback theatre, in which an audience member tells a story about his life and then a troupe of actors recreates it through artistic improvisation. This allows the storyteller to actively and immediately reflect upon an event—choices and dynamics can be reexamined and insights can



be gained. At the same time, audiences can find parallels in their own lives.

Role play can even be valuable for the clinicians themselves. Today, prominent hospitals and medical schools commonly hire actors to portray the sick to help aspiring doctors learn to relate to patients. Encounters are recorded and reviewed by supervisors in order to improve students' bedside manner.

Although it can be argued that all plays teach by presenting an outlook that can be accepted or rejected by the spectator, numerous groups have sought to use theatre to educate throughout history. In the Christian world, for example, theatre was widely used to provide a moral education. During the Middle Ages in Europe, most people were illiterate and could not speak Latin, the language of the Bible and the Christian service. To share biblical stories and teach Catholic doctrine, priests oversaw the creation of plays that were performed by amateurs belonging to the local community. At first, plays were presented inside the church, but they were later moved outside to temporary stages. Each of these stages, called mansions, represented a specific location such as heaven or hell with an open space called a platea used for the playing space. The audience would then follow the action from set to set. It was not uncommon for these shows to have elaborate special effects such as flying machines to raise and lower actors (Jesus' ascension and flying demons), smoke and fire, and mirrored lighting to simulate a halo.

Today, churches continue to use theatre for instruction. Many use skits, with varying degrees of sophistication, to illustrate points made in sermons, and Easter plays continue to dramatize the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Other religious uses of theatre can be quite controversial. Since the 1990s, many evangelical Christian churches have presented Hell House, a yearly alternative to the traditional Halloween haunted house. Performed by teenagers and targeted to their age group, it follows the same structure and spirit as a medieval theatrical presentation. An actor

playing the devil or the devil's helper shepherds the audience from one graphic and disturbing scene to the next in an effort to frighten the audience away from behaviors it considers sinful. After depictions of gay lifestyles, drugs, suicide, occultism, drunk driving, or domestic violence, characters involved are dragged away by demons to eternal damnation. At the end of the tour, the crowd moves to some representation of heaven, then is invited to pray and possibly join the congregation.

Secular forces have also made full use of the theatre's persuasive possibilities. Public opinion has been swayed by plays designed to inform the public about important social issues. In the 1840s and 1850s, alcohol consumption was considered an enormous threat to the American family, so much so that a temperance movement was established in order to preach abstinence and pressure the government to restrict and/or abolish its use. One of their strongest weapons was a play called *The Drunkard* written by a former alcoholic actor with help from a Unitarian minister.

It portrays a good-natured landowner who is destroyed by liquor and abandons his wife and child only to be saved from a life of shame by a wealthy philanthropist. It became one of the most successful plays in American history and was one of more than one hundred plays dedicated to showing the evils of drink.

Equally influential were the many dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an anti-slavery book by Harriet Beecher Stowe, already one of the most popular books of the nineteenth century. Audiences throughout the country could watch the story of runaway slaves Eliza and George and their escape from cruel masters and slave traders along with the travails of Uncle Tom, a faithful slave rewarded only with misery. Because of a lack of copyright laws, some adaptations had a pro-slavery bent, but most questioned the immorality of the institution and humanized its sufferers.

Today, plays like *The Drunkard* might be called engaged theatre, drama that aspires to promote dialogue and social justice through performance. It can take many forms: community-based theatre,

theatre in education, health education, theatre for development, prison theatre, museum and memory theatre, and theatre for social change. Engaged theatre also answers to many names: applied theatre, civically/socially/ politically engaged theatre, ethnodrama, and documentary theatre, to name several. As currently practiced, it can trace its emergence to the early 1990s intersection of anthropological research into theatre and community-based performance. However, if we consider its ethos of democratic participation, we find that its origins are the same as Western theatre itself. Athenian theatre of the fifth century BCE relied on an engaged citizenry for its development. In addition to tragedies, playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote comedies for a demanding democratic public who judged the relevance and relative merits of their work by how it engaged the current political debate. The archetypal characters created on stage stood in for competing philosophies, and major political figures could be criticized for their excesses.

### *Documentary or Verbatim Theatre*

Some performers have sought to represent not only characters, but pivotal events as well. They do it by constructing plays using material directly from firsthand interviews as well as historical or contemporary documents. Unlike so-called reality television, which often asks us to negatively judge its subjects, these “verbatim plays” ask us to empathize and see multiple sides of a single issue. The following are some contemporary examples.

Actor Anna Deavere Smith’s work began in the 1970s when she traveled the country, interviewing interesting people with a tape recorder and then transforming this

material into a series of monologues in which she would play all of the parts. Her most famous plays are about race relations that have erupted into riots. *Fires in the Mirror* takes you to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in 1991. Tensions turned into violence in this African American and orthodox Jewish neighborhood after two shocking events: a black child was killed by a car transporting a rabbi, and a Hasidic man was stabbed by a group of black men. By portraying real people from both communities who experienced the riot, she brought both perspectives into sharp focus. Later, she performed *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, a piece she created after the violence following the acquittal of several white police officers who had been videotaped repeatedly beating Rodney King, a black man pulled over for drunk driving.

The Laramie Project (2000) was devised by members of the Tectonic Theater Project. They sought to understand the rural community of Laramie, Wyoming, where Matthew Shepard, a gay twentyone-year-old university student, was savagely assaulted and left to die by two local men. They spent fifteen months in the city conducting interviews with its inhabitants. Some were connected to Matthew Shepard and the events surrounding the murder, and others were simply dealing with its aftermath and what it meant to be a resident of Laramie. The result was a play with seventy-two characters played by eight actors. The Laramie Project has been produced worldwide and generated so much interest that a companion epilogue, created from follow-up interviews, was added ten years after Shepard's death.

The following two shows have dealt with the inequities of

our criminal justice system. *The Exonerated* (2002), by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, was constructed from interviews with six death row inmates who were freed when new evidence proved their innocence. *Doin' Time: Through the Visiting Glass* (2004) was developed by actor Ashley Lucas by interviewing prisoners in California, Texas, and New York; their families; and people connected to the prison system. She also added material from her own childhood dealing with an incarcerated father to help audiences gain perspective into prison life and its effect on families.

A perennial favorite in the theatre community is *The Vagina Monologues* (1996). Eve Ensler conducted interviews with two hundred women about a body part that she thought deserved celebration rather than shame or embarrassment and created an entire evening dedicated to it. Now performed on countless college campuses, this series of monologues is usually presented by a group of women instead of a single performer and has been used as a fund-raiser for charities that deal with violence against women.

Do these plays have a point of view, or does the fact that they are made out of the words of real people prove their objectivity? Keep in mind that although they are made from primary sources, they are still forms of artistic expression. Out of the sum total of material collected, points of view are chosen, others go unused, and the texts are arranged for some kind of overall effect. Regardless, they have the potential to create powerful theatre and are an indelible link to historical moments from which we can learn and initiate change. In the words of Anna Deavere Smith, “I

think when things fall apart— you can see more and you can even—be a part of indicating new ways that things can be put together.”

While we can see the embrace of democratic ideals of participation since the inception of Western theatre, more recent developments in engaged theatre have sought to extend these ideals to their logical conclusions—why not involve the community as creators of theatre instead of solely as observers? To subvert the notion of theatregoers as consumers, this kind of theatre empowers community members to produce their own art—a passive audience is not the goal. Even in work that does not have explicit audience/community participation in the creation or performance, the content will be relevant to the audience as it speaks to community social realities. So what does engaged theatre look like?

## Case Studies

Hallie Flanagan was an American experimental theatre director who used theatre to address the struggles of everyday people. She accepted a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1926 to study theatre abroad, and while in Russia, she attended “living newspapers,” performances that delivered the news and politics of the day through theatre. When Flanagan was called on to serve as the director of the U.S. Federal Theatre Project (FTP; 1935–1939), one of many stopgap programs to put people to work during the Great Depression, she accepted her post and instituted the same type of performances in the United States. She had already earned a reputation directing a script she had adapted in 1931 with Margaret Clifford titled *Can You Hear Their Voices?* It was based on a newspaper’s true account of

Arkansas farmers raiding a Red Cross station to get food during the Dust Bowl, a time when droughts and violent dust storms destroyed once-fertile land and left farmers destitute.

Flanagan's commitment to telling real stories that were vital to local and national communities was evident in the way she organized the Federal Theatre Project. The FTP produced many theatrical works and employed thousands of theatre artists to create children's theatre, community-specific ethnic theatre companies that embraced the nation's diversity, and productions that dealt with political issues of local and national concern. Plagued by accusations of socialist and communist designs, the FTP was halted shortly after Flanagan was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1938. In 2010, Flanagan's *Can You Hear Their Voices?* was revived by the Peculiar Works Project theatre in New York City.

Augusto Boal (1931–2009) was a Brazilian theatre director and founder of Theatre of the Oppressed. His early career was spent directing at Arena Theatre of São Paulo, where he laid the groundwork for the theatre's nationalist productions and directed classical work with an eye to making it relevant to Brazilians. In 1971, Boal was kidnapped, arrested, tortured, and exiled because of his cultural activism, which was perceived as a threat to the Brazilian military regime. During his exile, he wrote *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1973). In this book, Boal argues for the direct participation of the audience in theatre, rather than their traditional role as passive spectators, recasting the audience as "spect-actors." Upon his return to Brazil, his commitment to working for human rights and issues of citizenship resulted in his serving one term (1993–1997) as a city councilman for Rio de Janeiro and developing a new form named legislative theatre. Boal sought to transform voters into legislators by conducting performative town hall meetings that considered proposed laws.

El Teatro Campesino, located in San Juan Bautista, California, was

founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 at the Delano Grape Strike picket lines of Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union. In order to raise awareness of poor working conditions, farmworkers performed actos (short improvised skits) on flatbed trucks and in union halls. These shows toured and were later honored in 1969 with an Obie Award for "demonstrating the politics of survival" and with a Los Angeles Drama Critics Award in 1969 and 1972. More recently, El Teatro Campesino and Monterey Bay Aquarium partnered to create actos for children that deal with global warming and conservation issues, titled *Basta Basura* and *Watt a Waste*.

Reverend Billy and the Church of Earthalujah are a New York City-based performance group that is not affiliated with any religious organization. Through the guise of the Reverend Billy character, Bill Talen and his gospel choir bring their activist performance art to many fronts where he feels the need to take a stand against consumerism, corporate greed, and the degradation of the planet. Reverend Billy began performing in Times Square, where he preached to any who would listen to cease their thoughtless spending. His act has since grown to include a forty-person choir and a five-piece band. In 2011, Reverend Billy and the Church of Earthalujah completed an Occupy Tour, voicing their support of the 99 percent of Americans who are not the wealthiest 1 percent of the population.

Juliano Mer-Khamis was an actor, director, and activist who was murdered in 2011 because he created theatre that engaged his conflicted community. He said of his identity: "I am 100 percent Palestinian and 100 percent Jewish." His allegiance to intercultural peace and liberal views, including teaching theatre to Palestinian youth by integrating boys and girls together, was controversial to some in the community. His Freedom Theatre at the West Bank's Jenin Refugee Camp persisted in its difficult work of fostering Arab-Israeli peace since its founding in 2006. The theatre continues today in Mer-Khamis's name. At its heart, engaged theatre practice shares Mer-Khamis's commitment and passion for both art and



community. Most simply put, it is a creative representation that is produced out of intimate engagement with a community.

Living newspapers and groups such as El Teatro Campesino have been referred to as agitprop theatre, a blending of the words agitation and propaganda. Designed to provide new information and galvanize the public to act upon it, this type of political action is often practiced as street theatre. Humor has been an effective tool to spread the message of its creators. The following two groups have employed the same strategy—mocking conservative ideology and practices by acting ridiculously conservative themselves:

Ladies Against Women (LAW) began in the 1980s as a feminist reaction to Reagan-era politics and periodically surfaces to attack what it considers repressive attitudes toward women. Both sexes dress up as 1950s housewives and hold public “consciousness-lowering” events. With protest signs such as “Make America a Man Again” and “Abolish the Environment,” they have marched in parades and held bake sales for national defense, pretending to sell Twinkies with a million-dollar price tag. Here is an example of one of their songs:

(sung to the tune of “My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean”)

My body belongs to my husband  
Decisions do not concern me  
My thoughts must not stray from my housework  
So please make my choices for me  
Please make, please make  
Oh please make my choices for me  
My body belongs to our nation  
The judges know what’s best for me  
My ovum have more rights than I do So please make my choices  
for me.

Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) was another group that used irony as a form of protest. However, they used it to target corporate welfare and the influence of money on the political system. Creator Andrew Boyd writes:

*The Billionaires campaign was devised to educate the public about the twin evils of campaign finance corruption and economic inequality. With the pay gap between CEOs and workers at 475 to 1, both Democrats and Republicans renting themselves out to big money donors, and 97% of incumbents running for re-election being returned to Congress, these problems had reached crisis proportions by the 2000 presidential election. Our idea was to create a humorous, ironic media campaign that would spread like a virus via grassroots activists and the mainstream media.*

Their performances were often designed to coexist with serious events. The campaign kicked off with a “Million Billionaire March” where activists wearing tuxedos, top hats, and cocktail dresses arrived at the Democratic and Republican conventions waving fake money, holding signs such as “Corporations are people too!” and chanting slogans such as:

One, two, three, four, we just want to earn much more! Five, six, seven eight, don't you dare tax our estates!

Whose president? Our president! Whose money? Our money! Whose media? Our media!

Materials about starting your own chapter were made available on a Web site, and soon independent groups sprang up in different cities, tailoring performances to their own message. After Barack Obama was elected, the organization morphed into Billionaires for Wealthcare and has shown up at Republican fund-raising events pretending to oppose healthcare reform and to lobby for corporate loopholes so the wealthy can avoid providing healthcare to their employees.

A Serbian youth movement called Otpor! (“resistance”) used this same kind of humorous, nonviolent consciousness-raising to overthrow Slobodan Milošević, the president of Yugoslavia accused of war crimes and corruption. It began in 1998 when fifteen students at Belgrade University decided to protest repressive laws that attacked freedom of speech. By 2000, the organization had expanded to 20,000 members, but unlike traditional political

parties, Otpor! expressed dissent in unusual ways. For example, barrels with Milošević 's face were made available on the street and people walking by could hit one with a stick for one dinar. Theatre-like events became an important part of these protests. When arrests of activists became common, Otpor! arranged a parade of mock support for Milošević 'populated by a small herd of sheep carrying signs that said "We support the Socialist Party." Other movements have since adopted their methods and their symbol of a clenched fist.

### *Theatre and Propaganda*

Sometimes theatre has been used for abhorrent propaganda. Before World War II, the Nazi regime held elaborate outdoor pageants called thingspiele ("meeting or judgment plays") in specially built theatres called thingplätze such as this one near Heidelberg. With thousands of performers collected into huge choruses, these plays tried to conjure up a mythological German past in order to celebrate German fascism and Nordic supremacy. After a short period of success, the public lost interest in these spectacles and the program was scrapped. Of the two hundred theatres planned for construction, approximately forty-five were built. Today, the few theatres that survive are used for rock concerts and other events.

## *Show Business: An Interview with Broadway Producer*

**Ken Davenport**

Ken Davenport has produced such shows as the Tony Awardwinning musical *Kinky Boots*, *Godspell*, *Chinglish*, *Oleanna*, *Speedthe-Plow*, *Blithe Spirit*, and Will Ferrell's *You're Welcome America*.

### **How would you define the role of the producer?**

It's a difficult question to answer, but the analogy I often use is that the producer is very much like the CEO of any business or chairman of the board. We are responsible for all aspects of the business of putting a show together. We have to hire the management team. We have to find a product that we are going to sell—that would be the show. We have to find a location to sell that product. So it's similar to owning a hardware store or restaurant or anything else. In fact, especially nowadays, as I hear every politician on both sides of the dial screaming about how the future of this country is in small business, that's what we are: we are small businessmen and small businesswomen.

### **How much influence does the producer have over the finished product?**

We have a lot of control over the finished product. At the same time, theatre is one of the most collaborative art forms there is. You're counting on a producer, of course, and for a musical, you're counting on a book writer, a composer, a lyricist, a director, a choreographer. Obviously, we are bringing money to the table and the distribution of that product. To the inventor of that product, which is the

authors, we certainly have a big say in it. But at the same time, I don't hire artists that I don't trust and believe in. So often, we are just facilitating their voice, to make sure that it's heard. I often say that my goal as a producer is to make sure that my shows run as long as possible because the longer a show runs, the better chance my investors have of getting their money back. And the longer a show runs, the more people have a chance of hearing my author's voice and spreading whatever messages they want to spread. So I have a lot of control or influence over the finished product, but it's a collaborative effort.

**How do you find material worthy of producing?**

A number of ways. Many of the shows that I have produced I've developed myself, ideas that were born out of my head or something I was inspired by, something that I saw as a kid, or something I have always just been very passionate about. Or sometimes it's from writers, scripts . . . I have people that look for shows. Inspiration for a production can come anywhere. I just kind of live life with my eyes open, looking for something I believe can have an effect on an audience.

**Can you give me an example of something that leapt from your mind and found its way onto the stage?**

The very first show that I ever produced is a show called The Awesome 80s Prom, and it's an interactive show set at a high school prom in 1989. It's basically the dream, fantasy prom that I always wanted to have when I was in high school. And I'm also a big fan of the John Hughes movies, and that's what it is, a kind of a John Hughes movie live on stage, happening all around you. That's something I was

very passionate about, thought I could make a lot of fun, and it's still running eight years later.

### **How did you get started?**

I started as an actor. When I was about five years old, my parents dragged me to an audition for *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* and I was obsessed with it until I was about twelve or thirteen when I became too cool for it. I thought I was going to play for the Boston Celtics. I stopped growing, so that didn't work out so well. And then I was going to be a lawyer. I went to a small, private college prep school in central Massachusetts that churned out a lot of doctors and lawyers, and I said, "I'll be one of those lawyers." But I got re-bit by the bug my senior year of high school when I did the musical *Les Misérables* and saw the kind of effect it could have. I went to Johns Hopkins University for a year and ended up doing more theatre there than anything else so I transferred to Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, where I continued to act. And then I got a very fortunate position as a production assistant on a Broadway show, and that opened my eyes to all the other different roles that were available on a Broadway production including the producer and company manager, which is what I did for about ten years. And I learned the ins and outs of how to make a musical from the administrative side and the marketing side. Then I left and leapt out into producing about nine years ago now.

### **What is the most difficult part of being a producer?**

There are two parts. Finding product that you love is a very difficult thing to do, which is one of the reasons I started coming up with it on my own. Raising money is certainly a difficult part, but that being said, when you find

great product, money is very easy to raise. I do believe in the philosophy, “If you build it, they will come.” I think the hardest thing to do these days is marketing and advertising a show. We live in a very cluttered advertising world now and, especially in New York City, live entertainment is a cluttered sphere. So to make your show stand out in that group is very, very challenging.

**So what is a good quality for a producer to have?**

It’s passion. Theatre producers have to be unbelievably passionate about what they do, about the theatre and about their shows. With that kind of passion you can accomplish anything. Without it, they’ll never produce a show.

**How has technology/the Internet/social media changed what you do?**

We found another way to reach audiences, find audiences, and see who is talking about us. We’re still catching up with the rest of the world in terms of how we deal with it. The theatre industry is about twelve years behind, or ten years behind in terms of its use of technology, partly because our audience is about ten years behind. Remember, we cater to an older group. We are not the pop music world where they need to be on the cutting edge of technology because the kids that are downloading the top forty are already there. The average theatregoer is about forty-four years old and female, and the average age of a Facebook user is thirty-eight. They haven’t picked up as fast as some other demographics. But it’s a way for us to find new audiences, cultivate new audiences. It’s very important and certainly will be for the audience of tomorrow.

**How do you see the future of Broadway? How would you like to see it change?**

If you follow Broadway statistics, you'll see our gross has been going up every year. Like a telethon, we are very proud to say, "Hey, look! We did better than last year!" Which is fantastic. But if you look at the other statistic about how many people are coming to Broadway shows, you'll see that attendance is typically very flat. So we're grossing more money, but we're not putting any more butts in seats. That is not a sustainable business model. It means that we are raising ticket prices—same numbers, just paying higher prices. And at some point, that will cap out. I would like to see those graphs rise at the same proportion. I would like to see us adding dollars and putting more people in the seats, because that means we'll have a big audience for tomorrow.

## Origins of Theatre

So how did theatre come into being and why does it persist? It is commonly believed that Western theatre began with the ancient Greeks. But if we are to include the performance traditions of the rest of the world, images from unrecorded history remind us that this impulse to perform has always existed. In various parts of the world, records of artistic human expression have been found in the form of drawings on cave walls that are more than forty thousand years old. Even before written language, our need to record life



experience was so great that we represented ideas in symbols that could be understood by others. Looking at images such as people, bison, and horses on cave walls, it is hard to imagine that all of these images were merely decorative. Instead of mere imitation, it is far more likely that many represented a story, one important enough to live longer than its narrator. For all the technological trappings that come with today's theatre, we often forget that storytelling is still its primary concern. For all of our imagined sophistication, we still yearn to be emotionally involved in the lives of others and live vicariously through their struggles. The primary question we still ask of one who has witnessed a show is not of theme but of story. What is it about? It is no accident that all world religions teach through parables. Stories allow us to put ourselves into someone else's universe, feel their anticipation of the unknown, and learn from their actions. Theatre artists are not trained to be solely self-expressive—they are taught to tell stories better.

Our propensity to engage in ritual can also be considered a factor in the origin of theatre. Long before we singled out art as a distinctive experience from the rest of everyday existence, human beings have looked to influence uncertainties around us, organize our lives, and satisfy our psychological needs through formalized action. Although every culture has developed performative rituals to positively influence fortune, good weather, plentiful crops, fertility, and victory in war, when we learn about the formal rituals of non-Western cultures, we often make the mistake of viewing them in a paternal way. In other words, we see them as currently existing in a primitive state that eventually evolves into something similar to our own. However, if you look beyond religious observances that we readily acknowledge such as church services, weddings, and funerals, you will notice that we engage in a host of civic rituals that also establish landmarks and transition people from one state to the next (graduations, award ceremonies, and sorority/fraternity initiations, to name a few). Although we now tend to identify ourselves as members of nations and not tribes, we still create

and seek out ritual experiences that provide a fundamental need. Theatre can be seen as part of that impulse for collective experience and our need to be transformed by it.

Many historians look to Africa for the first example of impersonation performed as part of a ritual. Sometime between 1870 and 1831 BCE, there was a yearly festival in Abydos, Egypt, commemorating the death and rebirth of Osiris, a king who came to be worshipped as an important god. During this festival, there is evidence that a priest played Osiris' son, Horus, and told exciting parts of the story along with other priests and priestesses who played other major roles. Next, thousands of participants bloodlessly reenacted the combat between the forces of Osiris and Set, his brother. We can find the same type of commemorative performances today in the re-creations of famous battles from history such as the American Civil War or the English War of the Roses.

However, you cannot have impersonation without a natural impulse to play, a willingness to pretend. Today, this impulse is under siege. Since the 1970s, children have lost an average of nine hours of free playtime per week. Television, smartphone, and video game use are not the only culprits. Parents have increasingly structured the lives of their children or converted free time to adult-supervised activities. This is unfortunate because instead of being frivolous or unproductive, playing is an important part of our development. It increases imagination, allows us to explore ideas, improves problem solving and decision making, and helps us cope with stress. Theatre helps us tap into this important element of our psyche, as both participants and observers.

## How to Read a Play

Reading a play may be a new experience for those used to other forms of fiction. Keep in mind that theatre is not a literary form.

Plays are meant to be performed, so scripts should be looked at as blueprints for action (ones that are meant to be only read are called closet dramas). In this way, plays are inert and incomplete until brought to life by theatre artists. This is why play-going is the best complement to play reading. We can marvel at the transformation and discover meanings we did not know existed.

### *Theatre and Games*

Games can be seen as a formalized version of play. Like theatre, they have structure, rules, and an absolute outcome. Theorist James Carse defines two kinds of games—finite and infinite. In a finite game, you effect a kind of metaphorical death of the opposition by defeating him within the parameters of the agreed-upon rules. In an infinite game, the object is to prolong the game. The emphasis is on play itself and not the outcome. According to Carse, performance is more akin to infinite games. Everybody wins when a performance is aesthetically satisfying and artfully executed.

Although we associate games with children, we forget that adults expend an enormous amount of energy and resources on sports, which are merely games with a physical component. Worldwide, we spend between \$480 and \$620 billion a year on sports events. It would be difficult to even calculate how much money is spent adorning ourselves in the trappings of our favorite sports teams.

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Straus would describe sports as having a “disjunctive effect.” In other words, unlike ritual, which brings groups together, sports divides individuals or groups into winners and losers where there was originally some kind of equality.

Although theatre is a kind of ritual, it still provides us with the same basic element we seek out in sports—conflict. Because theatre is about people in extraordinary circumstances, it inevitably leads to clashes between powers. Actors are taught to discover what their character wants in a scene and find ways to fight other characters that stand in their way.

Although many specific elements of a play can be interpreted, the object of a production is usually to pursue the vision of the playwright and find the best means to showcase his or her ideas. This is one area where theatre and film diverge dramatically. A film script is a commodity and when it is sold, the screenwriter ceases to have any influence over the end product. Another writer or a team of writers can completely rewrite it. In addition, directors and star actors may decide that lines or scenes should be altered as well. In television, a room full of writers may get their hands on a script even though only one may end up being credited. In both cases, the result can be a polished gem, a hodgepodge of different points of view, or anything in between. In theatre, even though production teams may have radically different ideas about how to interpret a script, the playwright still holds an honored position. His favor is sought by directors and actors who seek to create a definitive live realization of his words. Playwrights or their estates have even

pulled the rights to perform a play because they felt a production diverged too radically from the original intent.

Play reading is an exercise in imagination. Some plays contain extensive notes as to how the work should be staged and how each line should be delivered. Others keep it spare to leave room for artistic interpretation. Look at the beginning of the play *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett:

(A country road. A tree. Evening. Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again.)

Which country? What kind of tree? Early evening? Late evening or early evening? What does Estragon look like? How old is he? Is the business with his boots a sad or a comic moment? As you read any play and imagine the details of the environment—how the actors should look, how the lines are delivered, and their physical actions—what you create in your head may be very different from the imaginings of your peers. But that is how it should be. That is the nature of art. And that is why there can be endlessly different productions of the same play.

Every play has what is called a protagonist. Identifying that character helps you understand the play overall. It is not necessarily the one with the most lines, nor does this character need to be noble or heroic. The protagonist carries the main theme of the play and usually goes through the greatest change. The concept of theme is tricky for some. Every play wants to tell you something about the way we live our lives, but theme is not the same as “the moral of the story.” Sometimes the best ones leave us with nothing but questions that we must answer for ourselves. Theme is the subject of thought, and there can be a variety in a single play. Since a protagonist struggles for something, there is often an antagonist who hinders the protagonist in his or her journey.

The “wright” in playwright means “maker.” It is useful to remember that plays are constructed; they have a shape that is chosen for a reason. Think of a play as a fictional universe consisting

of characters' lives, from birth to death, that intersect and conflict with each other. We call the place in this universe where the playwright picks up the story the point of attack. Presumably, he has chosen this point as the most effective way to tell this particular story. A late point of attack is one where the story begins in the midst of conflict and we find out important details about the past on the way to a much greater conflict. An early point of attack, or epic structure, takes us from the beginning of a story and allows us to experience each point of the timeline leading up to the main conflict. Plots with early points of attack tend to emphasize the past. Those with late points of attack seek to make us understand the dynamics that lead up to a conflict. One is not better than the other. It is simply two ways a playwright can attack a story.

The classic example of a late point of attack comes from the Greek tragedy *Oedipus the King*, by Sophocles, considered by many to be a masterpiece of plot construction. The story begins in the city-state of Thebes in front of the royal palace. A group of elders (or chorus) has gathered to beg King Oedipus to deliver them from a mysterious plague that has struck the city. He appears before them and listens to how disease has killed their loved ones, crops, and cattle. Oedipus tells them that he has already sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to the shrine of Apollo, god of truth, to find out how to save the city. This is the exposition or background of the play, which lays the groundwork for all of the play's action. Suddenly, Creon enters and gives his report from the oracle. We find out that the previous king, Laius, was killed by someone who remains in Thebes. It is this unsolved murder that has cursed the city with disease. Oedipus is eager to help and vows to find the killer. So begins the first murder mystery in theatrical history.

As the play progresses, we are reminded that Oedipus became king after the death of Laius, at a time when Thebes was being terrorized by a merciless creature called the Sphinx, a terrible monster with the head of a woman, the body of a lion, an eagle's wings, and a serpent's tail. At the entrance to the city, all who came upon it

were asked a riddle and then killed when they could not answer it. Bravely, Oedipus approached it and wisely solved the riddle, which caused the Sphinx to kill itself in frustration. In gratitude for freeing the city, he was made king and married Laius' widow, Jocasta, who bore him four children.

Tension builds in the play during the next phase, called rising action. The leader of the elders suggests that Tiresias, a blind fortune-teller, come forth and give details about the crime. Again, Oedipus has anticipated this request and Tiresias enters, led by a small boy. When first asked for information, he refuses. When pressured, Tiresias states that Oedipus is the murderer. Outraged, Oedipus accuses Creon of paying Tiresias to lie so Creon can become king. Creon denies the charge, but Oedipus threatens him with banishment and death. After much arguing, Oedipus' wife, Jocasta enters. She tries to put their minds at ease by stating that human beings cannot be prophets of the future. To prove it, she recounts an old prophecy made by a priest of Apollo that did not come true. It stated that the son of Laius and Jocasta would kill the king. In order to prevent it, Laius ordered their three-day-old son to be left on a mountain to die. Since Laius was killed by a traveler at a place where three roads met and not by their son, says Jocasta, prophecies are not to be believed.

Oedipus is shaken by the news. He questions Jocasta and finds out that the king's shepherd survived when he was killed on the road. She says this man begged to be sent out to the mountains when Oedipus was crowned. Oedipus orders the shepherd's return and then reveals a crucial moment from his past. When he lived in the city of Corinth, a drunken man claimed Oedipus was adopted and not the son of King Laius.

Reassured by his parents that it was not the case, he traveled to Delphi and consulted the oracle. There, he was told he would murder his father and share a bed with his mother. To avoid this monstrous outcome, he left Corinth. On the road, he was pushed aside by the driver of an old man's carriage. Oedipus retaliated, but

the old man was angered by this action and struck Oedipus as he passed by. Oedipus hit him back with his staff and killed him along with the rest of his men in the ensuing struggle.

Oedipus is now desperate for these pieces not to fit together. Jocasta tries to soothe his fears by reminding him of the rumor that it was a band of thieves who killed Laius, not one. Then, a messenger arrives with fortunate but sad news. His father is dead from old age and the people of Corinth wish Oedipus to return and become their king. But with this news comes a terrible revelation. The messenger confirms that Oedipus was adopted, given to the family by a shepherd. Grief-stricken, Jocasta runs into the palace. Now, the testimony of a lowly shepherd controls everybody's destiny. He enters and when he is questioned by Oedipus, he describes how he was ordered to murder the child but, unable to do so, gave it to a man who brought it to the king's palace in Corinth. In this horrifying moment, the truth is now undeniable. All predictions were true— he has unknowingly committed an unspeakable taboo. This moment of painful self-knowledge is the climax, the highest emotional point in the play. The next section is called the period of falling action, followed by the denouement. The denouement (meaning “untying” or “unraveling”) is when the all of the final loose ends of the plot are resolved.

Oedipus moves into the palace, but soon a servant emerges and describes the terrible scene he just witnessed. Oedipus had searched for Jocasta in a rage but found that she had hanged herself. After taking her down, he took her golden brooches from her dead body and plunged them into his eyes, blinding himself. Destroyed by the light of truth, Oedipus wishes only darkness. Creon enters and sees the pathetic Oedipus emerge bloody from the palace. Oedipus begs to be banished to the mountains. Creon agrees but insists the children stay behind. The elders tell the audience:

Men of Thebes: look upon Oedipus

This is the king who solved the famous riddle And towered up, most powerful of men.



No mortal eyes but looked on him with envy, Yet in the end ruin swept over him.

Let every man in mankind's frailty Consider his last day; and let none Presume on his good fortune until he find Life, at his death, a memory without pain. (trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald)

According to the play, fate is something we cannot escape no matter what our station. We seek knowledge but have to live with the answers. Oedipus has shown us the limits and frailty of human happiness. But if Oedipus is the protagonist, who is the antagonist? You might imagine Oedipus to be his own antagonist or name those who sought to stand in the way of revealing the truth about his life. Even fate could be called the culprit since it was believed in Sophocles' time that the destiny of men was supernaturally determined.

Finding the protagonist and antagonist and charting the dramatic action is not just an exercise in dramatic analysis. It helps theatre creators shape their production. Directors must be able to answer the question, "Whose play is it?" in order to emphasize the right character through action onstage. They must also guide performances so the climax is properly highlighted. Actors must also know the highest emotional point so they can adjust their performance accordingly. Plot is the engine that drives a production.

## *Theatre and Advertising*

Theatre companies are always looking for creative ways to attract new audiences using social media. However, Quebec's Théâtre du Nouveau Monde took a more creative step than a mere Facebook page. For their production of Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, a French comedy from

the seventeenth century, they created Twitter accounts for the play's fictional characters, allowing the public to follow and converse with them. As a result, the show sold out and they had to offer additional performances. Some theatres have even created so-called "tweet seats," a reserved seating section of the auditorium where patrons are allowed to use their phones or tablets to tweet about the performance as it is happening.

Courtesy of Théâtre du Nouveau Monde.

As theatres find ways to reach out to the marketplace, it is important to note that the marketplace has often used the theatre for its own purposes. Long before product placement was commonplace in films, leading stage actors would be paid by designers to wear their clothes, songwriters paid to have their tunes included in musical revues, and for a price, some producers would make sure everything from watches to Scotch whiskey would get verbal and visual plugs in their shows. Recently, self-described "guerrilla marketers" have even paid actors to go to public places and converse about products in the hopes that word of mouth will be more effective than traditional ads. However, the strangest union of theatre and advertising has to come from Papua New Guinea in the 1990s. An advertising company needed a way to sell products to a large portion of the population that could not be reached by television, radio, or print ads. Their solution, called Wokabout Marketing, used a theatre company to travel to isolated villages and present plays that praised consumer goods such as laundry soap, Coca-Cola, and toothpaste.





PART III

WEEK 3: GENRE



## 4. Part Three: Special Topics, Chapter 7 “Genre”

This content can be found in its entirety with images by [clicking here for the pdf](#).

### Genre

by Jim Davis

Western culture is obsessed with definitions. People wear T-shirts with slogans and put stickers on their cars to help others define their personalities. Ads explain that new television shows are “wacky comedies” or “exciting dramas.” Political candidates distill their ideas and policies down to short, easily digested catchphrases. We list our favorite musicians and athletes on our Facebook pages to help people understand who we are. The cultural need to define seems limitless. Of course, this desire appears in the arts as well. But since creative work is generally subjective and often difficult to describe, defining it can be problematic. Anybody who has ever read a music review that describes a song as “a cross between zydeco and electronica with polka and hip-hop influences” understands this dilemma.

So how do you define something like theatre—especially since a theatrical script is meant to be reinterpreted? We can easily call *Macbeth* a tragedy—but what if we do a production using puppetry? And add music? And change the characters from tenth-century Scottish royalty to professional wrestlers (all of which has been done)? Is it still Shakespeare’s infamous “Scottish play,” or have we invented a new type of theatre: sports entertainment/puppet

theatre/musical/tragedy? Frustratingly, both are correct. The point here is that defining theatre is a tricky business. Theatre artists love to break rules and make audiences think about scripts from new, unexpected perspectives.

In an effort to simplify, this chapter employs two approaches to define a production through generic criticism. The first is by the content of the production's script. The genre is defined by specific actions taking place in the script—if funny things happen, it is a comedy. If tragic things happen, it is a tragedy. However, a production can also be defined by being identified with a specific aesthetic or cultural movement, such as realism or feminism. When it is more appropriate to discuss a genre from its cultural context and not the script itself, we will discuss it from this perspective.

Also, just to complicate this approach even further, a production is rarely just one genre. For example, a production of a broad, Shakespearean comedy or a big, spectacular Broadway musical may both feature elements of realism despite the fact that neither is entirely realistic. Conversely, a realistic script can also contain elements of low comedy and feminist theatre.

Finally, in no way is the list of genres presented here exhaustive. There are many more types of theatre, defined both by the script's action and by the cultural movement with which it is affiliated. The purpose of the following is to provide you with the tools to define theatrical productions in specific ways. Does this seem subjective? It is. But when you are dealing with a topic as fluid as theatrical performance, subjectivity always comes into play.

## Classical and Historical Definitions

Genre is a French word that comes from the Latin *generis*, meaning “kind.” It is similar to *genus*, a term used in biology to classify living organisms and fossils. The Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first



to classify living things based on their similarities in his work *The History of Animals* (c. 350 BCE). Interestingly, he used this same strategy in *The Poetics* (c. 335–323 BCE), a later work about poetry, drama, and literature. In it, he had much to say about the mechanics and functions of drama. He also provided definitions of ancient Greece's two most prevalent forms of drama—tragedy and comedy.

Historians generally believe that tragedy was the most common type of theatre in classical Greece. Of all the full scripts from this era that we have, the overwhelming majority of them are tragedies, and this type of drama played a specific role in Greek democracy. Aristotle defined it as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself.” In other words, it is a play featuring specific actions that are sad (or serious) involving characters who were important or wellknown (“having magnitude”).

The final part is important, as Aristotle believed that in order for a play to be truly tragic, it had to feature a character who, while important and heroic, also possessed a “tragic flaw.” This mistake in judgment because of a lack of knowledge ultimately leads to their downfall and upsets the balance of the universe. Aristotle's belief was that the purpose of tragedy was to instill “pity and fear” in audiences, and it would eventually create a feeling of catharsis or emotional purgation that audiences would find pleasurable. Aristotle greatly admired the play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, considering it the “perfect tragedy,” which is not surprising as it fits his definition.

According to Aristotle, comedy is “an imitation of characters of a lower type [and features] some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive.” While tragedy focuses on earth-shattering actions performed by important people, comedy is about common people with common problems. There are numerous subsections of comedies—generally based on the style of humor or type of plot. Farce is a type of comedy that has absurdly complicated plots, broad characters who behave irrationally, and lots of physical comedy.

Examples include the appropriately titled *Bedroom Farce* by Alan Ayckbourn, Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*, and the Stephen Sondheim musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Romantic comedy is defined by its plot. This genre generally features two sympathetic characters who, because of a series of extenuating circumstances, cannot be together. Fortunately, the two overcome their obstacles and get to enjoy a happy ending. A. R. Gurney's *Sylvia* and Neil Simon's *Same Time Next Year* are examples of romantic comedy.

Of course, tragedy and comedy are not mutually exclusive; some scripts feature elements of both. Those scripts are called black comedy. Sometimes, like *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee, they are comic scripts with a serious ending—other times, like *Rhinoceros* by Eugène Ionesco or Noah Haidle's *Mr. Marmalade*, they are serious plays with happy endings. The hallmark of a black comedy is that it generally deals with dark characters and subjects that one would not generally consider funny. For example, Martin McDonagh's *A Behanding in Spokane* is about Carmichael, a man who has spent years traveling the United States in search of his severed hand. During the play, he encounters a pair of drug dealers who offer to sell him a hand they have stolen from a local museum. When Carmichael learns it is not his hand, he chains them to a radiator and threatens to light them on fire. This is not typical comic fare, but playwright McDonagh finds humor in the terror and absurdity of the situation.

Two other comic genres that are closely related are high and low comedy. Comic wordplay, humor based on mistaken identities and false assumptions, and characters who flout the conventions of an exceedingly mannered society are all elements of high comedy. Generally, the conflict and humor in high comedy comes from watching “upper-crust” characters try to satisfy their base desires (lust, greed and any other deadly sin you can think of . . .) while struggling to maintain their aristocratic standing. For example, in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Jack and Algernon,

two wealthy Englishmen, invent a secret identity (the titular “Ernest”) to woo women. The comedy happens when the women begin to realize the charade and the men are forced to go to great lengths to keep from being found out. Many plays by the French playwright Molière (1622–1673), such as *The Miser* and *Tartuffe*, also exemplify high comedy.

While high comedy focuses on characters who attempt to follow society’s rules, characters in low comedy set out to deliberately disrupt social norms. The humor in these plays comes from watching culturally accepted rules and behaviors disrupted by slapstick violence, exaggerated sexuality, and absurd and scatological behavior. The earliest examples of low comedy in Western theatre are the satyr plays from fifth-centuryBCE Greece that were bawdy retellings of well-known stories and myths. This tradition of broadly comic stories performed for popular audiences was also present in *commedia dell’arte*, which began in Italy in the sixteenth century. With roots in satyr plays and comic Roman theatre, *commedia dell’arte* featured broad stock characters, improvised jokes and stories, and a great deal of physical comedy. There are also elements of low comedy in Shakespeare (such as Sir Toby Belch’s misadventures in *Twelfth Night*) and the puppet theatre tradition of Punch and Judy. More recently, plays like *The Nerd* by Larry Shue and *One Man, Two Guvnors* by Richard Bean (and adapted from the eighteenth-century play *Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni) feature socially awkward protagonists who upset the status quo.

One of the most influential Western genres was melodrama. With their roots in the popular English theatre of the nineteenth century, melodramas were formulaic performances that emphasized plot and action over any character development. In fact, one of the hallmarks of melodrama was simply drawn, one-dimensional characters. These characters were defined by their moral alignment—good characters were entirely good and evil characters were entirely evil. But this moral rigidity allowed a clarity of action

that appealed to popular audiences. For example, the villain never had to waste time explaining his actions—he was doing them simply because he was evil. This lack of character development allowed simple plots that focused on action with little time for discussion, as well as happy endings where good triumphed over evil. The popularity of melodrama lay in its adherence to a formula that was simple to follow, was pleasurable to watch, and provided a satisfying, morally redemptive climax.

Poster for the popular 1890 melodrama *Blue Jeans*. In a sawmill, the villain ties the hero to a board, where an approaching buzz saw promises certain death. Suddenly his girlfriend, previously locked in the office, breaks free and rescues him. A later silent film ensured that this moment would become a long-standing plot cliché.

While melodrama has fallen out of favor as a theatrical genre, its impact on film and television is undeniable. Many action movies and TV procedurals follow a formulaic plot and feature simplistic, morally absolute characters. While their stories may not be complex, their appeal lies in watching characters—either good or evil—take action and eventually get what they deserve.

## The Rise of “Isms”

Theatre always reflects the values and ideas of the culture that produces it. Informed audience members can usually guess when and where a script was written by looking for a few telling cultural clues. With that in mind, the genres discussed next are inextricably linked to a specific cultural or aesthetic movement. Sometimes they are a product of a new cultural idea or a reaction to an artistic idea, but they are always linked to what is going on in the world around them.

The most prevalent and well known of these “isms” in Western theatre is realism. The roots of realism are found in the cultural

and technological shifts of the nineteenth century. Scientists and political figures such as Auguste Comte, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin looked at the world objectively and based theories and ideas on empirical evidence as opposed to ephemeral beliefs based in mythology or spirituality. This shift toward the empirical created a theatre of realism that was used as an objective laboratory to observe human behavior.

The theatre artists of the time responded to this movement by creating work with a high degree of verisimilitude featuring detailed, authentic-looking designs; characters who behaved in a logical fashion; and stories dealing with issues and actions similar to those faced by most people. Shakespeare's playfulness and poetry and the classical values espoused by Sophocles were replaced by plays about poverty, social inequity, and dysfunctional families—a move that outraged some audiences and critics. However, the shift toward a more realistic theatre that portrayed life objectively was unstoppable.

Two of the most influential practitioners of realism are playwright Anton Chekhov and acting teacher/director Konstantine Stanislavsky, who adapted and modified many of the ideas of realism with their company the Moscow Art Theatre. Chekhov wrote scripts like *The Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya* for the MAT that depicted the trials and tribulations of the Russian landowning class while Stanislavsky created *The System*, a method of training that encouraged actors to create characters that behaved in a true-to-life, convincing manner. The style and training practiced by the MAT has informed nearly every major theatre artist of the last century. Realism has infused nearly every aspect of theatrical practice—some scripts that exemplify this movement are *night*, *Mother* by Marsha Norman, *Glengarry Glen Ross* by David Mamet, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* by Jane Chambers, and *the Shape of Things* by Neil LaBute.

# Naturalism

Despite its rapid rise to ubiquity, there was still some resistance to realism. William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), the Irish poet who also wrote elegiac, abstract plays, believed that realism was too limiting and that it removed the “joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless” elements that were vital to theatre. While Yeats considered realism too realistic, some theatre artists did not think it was realistic enough. Whereas realists wanted to reflect reality on stage, naturalists wanted to do away with all the theatrical trappings and actually place reality on stage. Naturalists rejected traditional plots and characters to create work that unfolded over real time and consciously avoided dramatic action and climactic moments. For example, there was no traditional intermission in August Strindberg’s naturalist script *Miss Julie*. In its place was a folk dance performed by local peasant characters to occupy the time while the main characters were off stage.

One of the most outspoken advocates of naturalism was Andre Antoine (1858–1943), the primary director of Théâtre Libre (or “Free Theatre”) in Paris. Antoine produced scripts featuring colloquial dialogue; plots that unfolded in an unhurried, organic manner; and settings that were extremely authentic and detailed—in an 1888 production of *The Butchers*, he hung actual sides of beef onstage. These practices went against the conservative idea of theatre that existed in France at the time. However, as the Théâtre Libre audience was made up of subscribers, it was able to circumvent restrictive government policies. Antoine was with Théâtre Libre for less than a decade, but in that time he produced Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts* and Leo Tolstoy’s *The Power of Darkness* in a manner that featured the heightened reality and verisimilitude of naturalism.

Another advocate of naturalism was American producer and playwright David Belasco (1854–1931), who pioneered the use of technology to bring greater realism to the stage. During a

production of *Madame Butterfly*, he designed a twelve-minute sequence illustrating a sunset using stage lights colored with gelatin slides. Belasco's most famous attempt at naturalism came about during a 1912 production of *The Governor's Lady* featuring a scene in a Childs Diner, an early American chain restaurant. Not content to simply replicate the restaurant, Belasco bought the actual furniture and fixtures and set up a working diner stocked with food from the Childs chain prior to each night's performance.

## Anti-Realism and Absurdism

While the naturalists reacted by trying to be more real than realism, plenty of theatre artists reacted by moving in the opposite direction, too. Following World War I and influenced by existentialism, the French absurdists sought to challenge the preconceived notions of conservative European culture. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), best known as a novelist and philosopher, wrote plays featuring characters forced to reassess their personal values when faced with extreme circumstance. For example, in *Dirty Hands*, an allegory about post-World War II Europe, characters are forced to choose between two unpleasant choices in an effort to resuscitate their failing nation.

Perhaps the best-known absurdist playwright was Samuel Beckett (1906–1989). Born in Ireland, Beckett moved to France just prior to World War II. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is arguably the most wellknown example of absurdist drama. The script concerns Estragon and Vladimir, who wait for the arrival of the mythical Godot, who never appears. As they wait, the pair discuss their bleak surroundings, whether they should eat a turnip or a radish, and swap hats. While this may seem ridiculous, critics have been seeking the “meaning” of the script since it was first produced in 1953. The popular consensus is that Beckett consciously rejected nearly all

forms of Western character development and plot structure in an effort to portray the existential/absurdist belief that the life has no inherent meaning, but with a play as inscrutable as *Godot*, it is impossible to reach a conclusive interpretation. And that may be Beckett's point.

Perhaps the most radical reaction to realism was theatre of cruelty, a term devised by Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), a French actor, playwright, and theorist. In his book *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud called for a shift away from realistic, text-based theatre to create “spectacles” that were primal and poetic that used a “unique language half-way between gesture and thought” to assault the senses of the audience. Artaud also wanted to do away with the physical separation between performers and audiences, arguing that a “spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it.”

While Artaud's theories were compelling—and his work influenced major theatre artists such as director Peter Brook and playwrights Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet (as well as rock musicians Patti Smith and Jim Morrison) the scripts he wrote to illustrate his theories were difficult to stage. For example, his script *The Spurt of Blood* contains the following stage direction:

. . . two Stars are seen colliding and from them fall a series of legs of living flesh with feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticos, temples, alembics, falling more and more slowly, as if falling in a vacuum: then three scorpions one after another and finally a frog and a beetle which come to rest with desperate slowness, nauseating slowness.

While this is certainly a rejection of realism, it is difficult to see how this could be staged in a practical, theatrical style. Nevertheless, Artaud's rejection of the dominant aesthetic style and call for a more visceral, spectacular theatre made him one of the most influential theoreticians of the twentieth century.



## Feminist Theatre

Another group of artists rejected realism but wanted to do it in a way that was engaging and accessible while maintaining a critical and (sometimes) satirical edge. With its roots in the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the 1960s, feminist theatre addressed the underrepresentation of women in the American theatre. Feminist critics and artists argued that traditional theatre practice—specifically that which was derived from Aristotle's ideas—focused on stories, characters, and linear plot structures that were customarily considered “masculine” and failed to provide an arena for women's voices. Playwrights like Maria Irene Fornés, Paula Vogel, and Wendy Wasserstein wrote scripts that addressed the issues confronted by women on a daily basis. Some of the scripts, like Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles*, employed traditional dramaturgy (i.e., a linear plotline, individual protagonist, and realistic characters) to tell the story of a woman's personal and political growth over a twenty-year period. Others, like Fornés's *Fefu and Her Friends*, which was influenced by the women's collective theatre movement of the 1970s, deal with a community of women's treatment within a patriarchal society using a nonlinear narrative structure.

Another important element of feminist theatre is how it deals with mimesis or imitation. While Aristotle said that theatre (tragedy specifically) should be an “imitation of an action,” feminist critics believed that mimesis was limiting and oppressive, arguing that theatre and performance should be more abstract to fully illustrate the female experience. An example of this style of theatre is Holly Hughes's *The Well of Horniness*, which uses the style of a 1940s radio drama for a campy, comic, and decidedly nonrealistic exploration of female sexuality.

A vital element of feminist theatre is directly addressing gender inequities in a direct manner. One example is *The Guerrilla Girls*, artists and activists whose performances address issues of sexism

in theatre and the visual arts. And they do it while wearing gorilla masks.

A famous quote states that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture.” While that may seem like an absurd statement at first, it succinctly frames the issue that defining and criticizing art is a subjective undertaking. Combine this problem with the inherent fact that theatre is all about reinterpretation, and you have a daunting proposition. Generic criticism is an art, not a science. It is fluid and based on numerous variables, such as style, script, and the intent of the artists that produce it. Even so, understanding genres and how they function helps us understand both scripts and productions from multiple perspectives.

### *Sidebar: Shakespeare—One Genre Cannot Contain Him*

It is rare for the work of an individual artist to be considered a genre unto itself. However, one playwright is so important and influential, his work covers three distinct genres all his own. Of course, we are talking about William Shakespeare. His scripts can generally be broken down into three genres, but as discussed elsewhere, it is never that simple.

The first Shakespearean genre is tragedy. In Shakespeare's case, tragedy means a serious play with an unhappy ending featuring a protagonist who suffers exceptional calamity and loss. Usually there's a single protagonist (Macbeth, Othello, Titus Andronicus), but occasionally the calamities happen to two people (Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra). The trademark of

Shakespearean tragedy is a stage littered with dead bodies at the play's end.

Shakespeare's histories generally deal with the War of the Roses, a fifteenth-century English civil war. These scripts provide fictionalized accounts of the exploits of actual historical figures (Richard III, Henry V ) and deal with the English sense of destiny and identity. Some scholars talk about the crossover between the tragedies and histories—for example, *Julius Caesar* is generally considered a tragedy, but it is about an actual historic figure.

Finally—and most convolutedly—Shakespeare wrote three types of comedies—farcical comedies, romantic comedies, and (most strangely) serious comedies. Shakespeare's farcical comedies are the most recognizable to twenty-first-century audiences as comedy. Scripts like *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Comedy of Errors* use slapstick humor and are usually based on mistaken identity. Despite the name, Shakespeare's romantic comedies have little to do with Jennifer Aniston's latest movie. These scripts, like *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are set in unrealistic worlds and feature characters with supernatural powers.

Despite its seemingly oxymoronic name, the last type of Shakespeare's scripts is the serious comedy. This type is a sort of catch-all for the plays that do not fit any of the other definitions. For instance, they are serious, but unlike the tragedies, end happily. Some examples of serious comedies are *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*.



PART IV

# WEEKS 4 AND 5: OEDIPUS REX & ANTIGONE



# 5. Oedipus Rex (Text)

## Oedipus the King

### CHARACTERS

Oedipus the King Sophocles

*Translated by David Grene*

**OEDIPUS**, King of Thebes

His Wife

**CREON**, His Brother-in-Law

**TEIRESIAS**, an Old Blind Prophet

**THEBES**

**PRIEST**

**FIRST MESSENGER JOCASTA**,

**SECOND MESSENGER**

**A HERDSMAN**

**A CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF**

### PART I:

**Scene:** *In front of the palace of Oedipus at Thebes. To the Right of the stage near the altar stands the PRIEST with a crowd of children.*

*OEDIPUS emerges from the central door.*

**OEDIPUS:** Children, young sons and daughters of old Cadmus,<sup>1</sup>  
why do you sit here with your suppliant crowns?<sup>2</sup>  
the town is heavy with a mingled burden  
of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense;  
5 I did not think it fit that I should hear  
of this from messengers but came myself, -I Oedipus whom all  
men call the Great.

[*He returns to the PRIEST.*]

You're old and they are young; come, speak for them.

What do you fear or want, that you sit here 10 suppliant? Indeed I'm willing to give all that you may need; I would be very hard should I not pity suppliants like these.

**PRIEST:** O ruler of my country, Oedipus, You see our company around the altar;

15 you see our ages; some of us, like these, who cannot yet fly far, and some of us

heavy with age; these children are the chosen among the young, and I the priest of Zeus.

Within the market place sit others crowned

20 with suppliant garlands<sup>3</sup>, at the double shrine of Pallas<sup>4</sup> and the temple where Ismenus

gives oracles by fire<sup>5</sup>. King, you yourself

have seen our city reeling like a wreck

1 **Cadmus** *n.* mythical founder and first king of Thebes, a city in central Greece where the play takes place

2 **suppliant crowns** wreaths worn by people who ask favors of the gods.

3 **suppliant garlands** branches wound in wool, which were placed on the altar and left there until the suppliant's request was granted.

4 **double shrine of Pallas** the two temples of Athena.

5 **temple where Ismenus gives oracles by fire** Temple of Apollo, located by Ismenus, the Theban river, where the priests studied patterns in the ashes of sacrificial victims to foretell the future.

already; it can scarcely lift its prow

25 out of the depths, out of the bloody surf. A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth. A blight is on the cattle in the fields,

a blight is on our women that no children are born to them; a God that carries fire, 30 a deadly pestilence, is on our town,



strikes us and spears us not, and the house of Cadmus is emptied  
of its people while black Death

grows rich in groaning and in lamentation.<sup>6</sup>

We have not come as suppliants to this altar <sup>35</sup> because we  
thought of you as a God,

but rather judging you the first of men in all the chances of this  
life and when

we mortals have to do with more than man. You came and by your  
coming saved our city,

<sup>40</sup> freed us from the tribute which we paid of old to the  
Sphinx,<sup>7</sup> cruel singer. This you did

in virtue of no knowledge we could give you, in virtue of no  
teaching; it was God

that aided you, men say, and you are held

<sup>45</sup> with God's assistance to have saved our lives.

Now Oedipus, Greatest in all men's eyes, here falling at your feet  
we all entreat you, find us some strength for rescue.

Perhaps you'll hear a wise word from some God. <sup>50</sup> perhaps you  
will learn something from a man (for I have seen that for the skilled  
of the practice the outcome of their counsels live the most).

Noblest of men, go, and raise up our city,

go, -and give heed. For now this land of ours <sup>55</sup> calls you its savior  
since you saved it once.

So, let us never speak about your reign as of a time when first our  
feet were set secure on high, but later fell to ruin.

Raise up our city, save it and raise it up.

**6 lamentation** *n.* expression of deep sorrow

**7 Sphinx** winged female monster at Thebes that ate men who  
could not answer her riddle: "what is it that walks on four legs

at dawn, two legs at midday, and three legs in the evening, and has  
only one voice; when it walks on most feet, is it weakest?" Creon,  
appointed ruler of Thebes, offered the kingdom and the hand of  
his sister, Jocasta, to anyone who could answer the riddle. Oedipus

saved Thebes by answering correctly, “Man, who crawls in infancy, walks upright in his prime, and leans on a cane in old age.” Outraged, the Sphinx destroyed herself, and Oedipus became King of Thebes

60 Once you have brought us luck with happy omen; be no less now in fortune.

If you will rule this land, as now you rule it, better to rule it full of men than empty.

For neither tower nor ship is anything

65 when empty, and none live in it together.

**OEDIPUS:** I pity you, children. You have come full of longing, but I have known the story before you told it only too well. I know you are all sick,

yet there is not one of you, sick though you are, 70 that is as sick as myself.

Your several sorrows each have single scope and touch but one of you. My spirit groans for city and myself and you at once.

You have not roused me like a man from sleep; 75 know that I have given many tears to this, gone many ways wandering in thoughts,

but as I thought I found only one remedy and that I took. I sent Menoeceus' son Creon, Jocasta's brother, to Apollo,

80 to his Pythian temple,<sup>8</sup>

that he might learn there by what act or word I could save this city. As I count the days,

it vexes me what ails him; he is gone

far longer than he needed for the journey.

85 But when he comes, than may I prove a villain, if I shall not do all the God commands.

**PRIEST:** Thanks for your gracious words. Your servants here signal that Creon is this moment coming.

**OEDIPUS:** His face is bright. O holy Lord Apollo, 90 grant that his news too may be bright for us and bring us safety.

**PRIEST:** It is happy news,  
I think, for else his head would not be crowned with sprigs of fruitful laurel.<sup>9</sup>

**OEDIPUS:** We will know soon,  
96 he's within hail. Lord Creon, my good brother,  
what is the word you bring us from the God? [*CREON enters.*]  
**CREON:** A good word, –for things hard to bear themselves if in the final issue all is well  
100 I count complete good fortune.

**OEDIPUS:** What do you mean?  
What have you said so far

8 **Pythian temple** shrine of Apollo at Delphi, below Mount Parnassus in central Greece  
9 **sprigs of fruitful laurel** Laurel symbolized triumph; a crown of laurel signified good news.  
leaves me uncertain whether to trust or fear.

**CREON:** If you will hear my news before these others 105 I am ready to speak, or else to go within.

**OEDIPUS:** Speak it to all;  
the grief I bear, I bear it more for these than for my own hear.

**CREON:** I will tell you, then,  
110 what I heard from the God.  
King Phoebus<sup>10</sup> in plain words commanded us to drive out a pollution from our land, pollution grown ingrained within the land; drive it out, said the God, not cherish it,  
115 till it's past cure.

**OEDIPUS:** What is the rite  
of purification? How shall it be done?

**CREON:** By banishing a man, or expiation<sup>11</sup> of blood by blood,  
since it is murder guilt  
120 which holds our city in this destroying storm.

**OESIPUS:** Who is this man whose fate the God pronounces?

**CREON:** My lord, before you piloted the state we had a king called  
Laius.

**OEDIPUS:** I know of him by hearsay. I have not seen him.

**CREON:** The God commanded clearly: let some one  
126 punish with force this dead man's murderers.

**OEDIPUS:** Where are they in the world? Where would a trace of  
this old crime be found? It would be hard  
to guess where.

**CREON:** The clue is in this land; 131 that which is sought is found;  
the unheeded thing escapes:  
so said the God.

**OEDIPUS:** Was it at home,  
or in the country that death came upon him, 135 or in another  
country travelling?

**CREON:** He went, he said himself, upon an embassy,<sup>12</sup> but never  
returned when he set out from home.

**OEDIPUS:** Was there no messenger, no fellow traveler who knew  
what happened? Such a one might tell

10 **King Phoebus Apollo, god of the sun.**

11 **expiation** n. The act of making amends for wrongdoing.

12 **embassy** n. important mission or errand

140 something of use.

**CREON:** They were all killed save one. He fled in terror and he  
could tell us nothing in clear terms  
of what he knew, nothing, but one thing only.

**OEDIPUS:** What was it?

145 If we could even find a slim beginning in which to hope, we  
might discover much.

**CREON:** This man said the robbers they encountered were many  
and the hands that did the murder  
were many; it was no man's single power.

**OEDIPUS:** How could a robber date a deed like this 151 Were he  
not helped with money from the city, Money and treachery?

**CREON:** That indeed was thought.

But Laius was dead and in our trouble There was none to help.

**OEDIPUS:** What trouble was so great to hinder you 157 inquiring  
out the murder of your king?

**CREON:** The riddling Sphinx induced us to neglect mysterious  
crimes and rather seek solution  
160 of troubles at our feet.

**OEDIPUS:** I will bring this to light again. King Phoebus fittingly  
took this care about the dead,

and you to fittingly.  
And justly you will see in me an ally,  
165 a champion of my country and the God. For when I drive  
pollution from the land  
I will not serve a distant friend's advantage,

but act in my own interest. Whoever he was that killed the king  
may readily

170 wish to dispatch me with his murderous hand; so helping the  
dead king I help myself.

Come, children, take your suppliant boughs and go; up from the  
altars now. Call the assembly  
and let it meet upon the understanding  
175 that I'll do everything. God will decide  
whether we prosper or remain in sorrow.

**PRIEST:** Rise, children—it was this we came to seek, which of  
himself the king now offers us.

May Phoebus who gave us the oracle  
180 come to our rescue and stay the plague. [*Exit all but the*  
CHORUS.]

CHORUS:*Strophe*

What is the sweet spoken word of God from the shrine of Pytho  
rich in gold

that has come to glorious Thebes?

I am stretched on the rack of doubt, and terror and trembling hold  
my heart, O Delian Healer,<sup>13</sup> and I worship full of fears

185 for what doom you will bring to pass, new or renewed in the  
revolving years.

Speak to me, immortal voice, child of golden Hope.

*Antistrophe*

First I call on you, Athene, deathless daughter of Zeus, and  
Artemis, Earth Upholder,

190 who sits in the midst of the market place in the throne which men call Fame,

and Phoebus, the Far Shooter, three averters of Fate, come to us now, if ever before, when ruin rushed upon the state, you drove destruction's flame away out of our land.

### *Strophe*

195 Our sorrows defy number;  
all the ship's timbers are rotten;  
taking of thought is no spear for the driving away of the plague  
There are no growing children in this famous land; there are no women bearing the pangs of childbirth.

200 You may see them one with another, like birds swift on the wing,  
quicker than fire unmastered,  
speeding away to the coast of the Western God.<sup>14</sup>

### *Antistrophe*

In the unnumbered death of its people the city dies;  
205 those children that are born lie dead on the naked earth  
unpitied, spreading contagion of death; and gray-haired mothers and wives

everywhere stand at the altar's edge, suppliant, moaning; the hymn to the healing God<sup>15</sup> rings out but with it the wailing voices are blended.

From these our sufferings grant us, O golden Daughter of Zeus,<sup>16</sup>  
210 glad-faced deliverance.

### *Strophe*

There is no clash of brazen<sup>17</sup> shields but our fight is with the War God,<sup>18</sup>

13 **Delian Healer** Born on the island of Delos, Apollo's title was "healer"; he caused and averted plagues.

14 **Western God** Since the sun sets in the west, this is the god of night, or Death.

15 **healing God** Apollo.

16 **golden Daughter of Zeus** Athena.

17 **brazen** *adj.* of brass or like brass in color

18 **War God** Ares

a War God ringed with the cries of men, a savage God who burns us;  
grant that he turn in racing course backwards out of our  
country's bounds

to the great palace of Amphitrite<sup>19</sup> or where the waves of the  
Thracian sea

215 deny the stranger safe anchorage.

Whatsoever escapes the night at last the light of day revisits;

so smite the War God, Father Zeus, beneath your thunderbolt,

220 for you are the Lord of the lightning, the lightning that carries  
fire.

*Antistrophe*

And your unconquered arrow shafts, winged by the golden corded  
bow,

Lycean King<sup>20</sup>, I beg to be at our side for help;

and the gleaming torches of Artemis with which she scours the  
Lycean hills,

and I call on the God with the turban of gold<sup>21</sup>, who gave his name  
to this country of ours.

225 the Bacchic God with the wind flushed face<sup>22</sup>,

Evian One,<sup>23</sup> who travel with the Maenad company,<sup>24</sup>

combat the God that burns us with your torch of pine;

230 for the God that is our enemy is a God unhonored among the  
Gods

[OEDIPUS *returns.*]



**OEDIPUS:** For what you ask me—if you will hear my words,  
and hearing welcome them and fight the plague, you will find  
strength and lightening of your load. Hark to me; what I say to you,  
I say

235 as one that is a stranger to the story as stranger to the deed.  
For I would not be far upon the track if I alone  
were tracing it without a clue. But now, since after all was  
finished, I became 240 a citizen among you, citizens—  
now I proclaim to all the men of Thebes:

19 **Amphitrite** sea goddess who was the wife of Poseidon, god of  
the sea.

20 **Lycean King** Apollo, whose title *Lykios* means “god of light.”

21 **God with turban of gold** Dionysus, god of wine, who was born  
of Zeus and a woman of Thebes, the first Greek city to  
honor him. He wears an oriental turban because he has come  
from the East.

22 **Bacchic God with the wind flushed face** refers to Dionysus,  
who had a youthful, rosy complexion; Bacchus means “riotous  
god”

23 **Evian One** Dionysus, called Evios because his followers  
addressed him with the ritual cry “evoi”

24 **Maenad company** female followers of Dionysus.  
who so among you knows the murderer by whose hand Laius, son  
of Labdacus, died—I command him to tell everything  
245 to me, -yes, though he fears himself to take the blame  
on his own head; for bitter punishment  
he shall have none, but leave this land unharmed. Or if he knows  
the murderer, another,  
a foreigner, still let him speak the truth. 250 For I will pay him and  
be grateful, too.

But if you shall keep silence, if perhaps some one of you, to shield  
a guilty friend, some one of you, to shield reject my words – hear  
what I shall do then:

255 I forbid that man, whoever he be, my land, my land where I  
hold sovereignty<sup>25</sup> and throne; and I forbid any to welcome him  
or cry him greeting or make him a sharer in sacrifice or offering  
to the Gods,

260 or give him water for his hands to wash. I command all to  
drive him from their homes, since he is our pollution, as the oracle  
of Pytho's God<sup>26</sup> proclaimed him now to me. So I stand forth a  
champion of the God

265 and of the man who died.

Upon the murderer I invoke this curse— whether he is one man  
and all unknown, or one of many—may he wear out his life in misery  
to miserable doom!

270 If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth I pray that I myself  
may feel my curse.

On you I lay my charge to fulfill all this  
for me, for the God, and for this land of ours destroyed and  
blighted, by the God forsaken. 275 Even were this no matter of God's  
ordinance it would not fit you so to leave it lie,

unpurified, since a good man is dead and one that was a king.  
Search it out. Since I am now the holder of his office,

280 And have his bed and wife that once was his, and had his line  
not been unfortunate

we would have common children—(fortune leaped upon his  
head)—because of all these things,

I fight in his defense as for my father,

285 and I shall try all means to take the murderer of Laius the son  
of Labdacus

the son of Polydorus and before him of Cadmus and before him of  
Agenor.

Those who do not obey me, may the Gods

290 grant no crops springing from the ground they plow  
nor children to their women! May a fate

like this, or one still worse than this consume them! For you whom  
these words please, the other Thebans,

25 **sovereignty** *n.* supreme authority

26 **Pytho's God** Apollo

may Justice as your ally and all the Gods

295 live with you, blessing you now and for ever!

**CHORUS:** As you have held me to my oath, I speak:

I neither killed the king nor can declare the killer; but since Phoebus set the quest it is his part to tell who the man is.

**OEDIPUS:** Right; but to put compulsion<sup>27</sup> on the Gods <sup>301</sup> against their will—no man can do that

**CHORUS:** May I then say what I think second best? **OEDIPUS:** If there's a third best, too, spare not to tell it **CHORUS:** I know that what the Lord Teiresias

<sup>305</sup> sees, is most often what the Lord Apollo

sees. If you should inquire of this from him you might find out most clearly.

**OEDIPUS:** Even in this my actions have not been sluggish<sup>28</sup>

On Creon's word I have sent two messengers <sup>310</sup> and why the prophet is not here already I have been wondering.

**CHORUS:** His skill apart

there is besides only an old faint story.

**OEDIPUS:** What is it?

<sup>315</sup> I look at every story.

**CHORUS:** It was said

that he was killed by certain wayfarers.

**OEDIPUS:** I heard that, too, but no one saw the killer.

**CHORUS:** Yet if he has a share of fear at all,  
320 his courage will not stand firm, hearing your curse.

**OEDIPUS:** The man who in the doing did not shrink will fear no word.

**CHORUS:** Here comes his prosecutor:  
led by your men the godly prophet comes  
325 in whom alone of mankind truth is native. [*Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a little boy*]

**OEDIPUS:** Teiresias, you are versed in everything, things teachable and things not to be spoken, things of the heaven and earth-creeping things.

You have no eyes but in your mind you know 330 with what a plague our city is afflicted.

My lord, in you alone we find a champion,

27 **compulsion** *n.* driving force; coercion.

28 **sluggard** *adj.* lazy or idle

in you alone on that can rescue us.

Perhaps you have not heard the messengers,  
but Phoebus sent in answer to our sending 335 an oracle declaring that our freedom

from this disease would only come when we  
should learn the names of those who killed King Laius, and kill them or expel them from our country.

Do not begrudge us oracle from birds, 340 or any other way of prophecy

within your skill; save yourself and the city, save me; redeem the debt of our pollution that lies on us because of this dead man.

We are in your hands; pains are most nobly taken 345 to help another when you have means and power.

**TEIRESIAS:** Alas, how terrible is wisdom when

it brings no profit to the man that's wise! This I knew well, but had forgotten it, else I would not have come here.

**OEDIPUS:** What is this?

351 How sad you are now you have come!

**TEIRESIAS:** Let me

go home, It will be easiest for us both to bear our several destinies to the end 355 if you will follow my advice.

**OEDIPUS:** You'd rob us

of this your gift of prophecy? You talkas one who had no care for law nor love

for Thebes who reared you.

**TEIRESIAS:** Yes, but I see that even your own words 361 miss the mark; therefore I must fear for mine.

**OEDIPUS:** For God's sake if you know of anything,

do not turn from us; all of us kneel to you, all of us here, your suppliants.

**TEIRESIAS:** All of you here know nothing. I will not 366 bring to light of day my troubles, mine—  
rather than call them yours.

**OEDIPUS:** What do you mean?

You know of something but refuse to speak. Would you betray us and destroy the city?

**TEIRESIAS:** I will not bring this pain upon us both, 371 neither on you nor on myself. Why is it  
you question me and waste your labor? I will tell you nothing.

**OEDIPUS:** You would provoke a stone! Tell us, you villain,

375 tell us, and do not stand there quietly

unmoved and balking<sup>29</sup> at the issue.

**TEIRESIAS:** You blame my temper but you do not see your own  
that lives within you; it is me  
you chide.<sup>30</sup>

**OEDIPUS:** Who would not feel this temper rise  
381 at words like these with which you shame our city?

**TEIRESIAS:** Of themselves things will come, although I hide them  
and breathe no word of them.

**OEDIPUS:** Since they will come 386 tell them to me.

**TEIRESIAS:** I will say nothing further.  
Against this answer let your temper rage as wildly as you will.

**OEDIPUS:** Indeed I am  
391 so angry I shall not hold back a jot  
of what I think. For I would have you know I think you were  
complotter<sup>31</sup> of the deed and doer of the deed save in so far  
395 as for the actual killing. Had you had eyes I would have said  
alone you murdered him.

**TEIRESIAS:** Yes? Then I warn you faithfully to keep the letter of  
your proclamation and  
from this day forth to speak no word of greeting  
400 to these nor me; you are the land's pollution.

**OEDIPUS:** How shamelessly you started up this taunt!  
How do you think you will escape?

**TEIRESIAS:** I have.

I have escaped; the truth is what I cherish

405 and that's my strength.

**OEDIPUS:** And who has taught you truth? Not your profession surely!

**TEIRESIAS:** You have taught me,  
for you have made me speak against my will.

**OEDIPUS:** Speak what? Tell me again that I may learn it better.

**TEIRESIAS:** Did you not understand before or would you  
412 provoke me into speaking?

**OEDIPUS:** I did not grasp it.

29 **balking** *v.* obstinately refusing to act.

30 **chide** *v.* scold.

31 **complotter** *n.* person who plots against another person.  
not so to call it known. Say it again.

**TEIRESIAS:** I say you are the murderer of the king 416 whose  
murderer you seek.

**OEDIPUS:** Not twice you shall  
say calumnies<sup>32</sup> like this and stay unpunished.

**TEIRESIAS:** Shall I say more to tempt your anger more?

**OEDIPUS:** As much as you desire; it will be said 21 in vain

**TEIRESIAS:** I say with those you love best you live in foulest  
shame unconsciously and do not see where you are in calamity.<sup>33</sup>

**OEDIPUS:** Do you imagine you can always talk 426 like this, and live to laugh at it hereafter?

**TEIRESIAS:** Yes, if the truth has anything of strength.

**OEDIPUS:** It has, but not for you; it has no strength for you because you are blind in mind and ears 430 as well as in your eyes.

**TEIRESIAS:** You are a poor wretch  
to taunt me with the very insults which every one soon will heap upon yourself.

**OEDIPUS:** Your life is one long night so that you cannot 435 hurt me or any other who sees the light.

**TEIRESIAS:** It is not fate that I should be your ruin,  
Apollo is enough; it is his care to work this out.

**OEDIPUS:** Was this your own design  
440 or Creon's?

**TEIRESIAS:** Creon is no hurt to you, but you are yourself.

**OEDIPUS:** Wealth, sovereignty and skill outmatching skill  
for the contrivance<sup>32</sup> of an envied life!  
445 Great store of jealousy fill your treasury chests, if my friend Creon, friend from this and loyal,  
thus secretly attacks me, secretly desires to drive me out and secretly  
suborns<sup>33</sup> this juggling trick devising quack, 450 this wily beggar who has only eyes

<sup>32</sup> **calumnies** *n.* false and malicious statements; slander.

<sup>33</sup> **calamity** *n.* extreme misfortune that leads to disaster.



34 **contrivance** *n.* act of devising or scheming.

35 **suborns** *v.* instigates a person to commit perjury.

for his own gains, but blindness in his skill.

For, tell me, where have you seen clear, Teiresias, with your prophetic eyes? When the dark singer, the sphinx, was in your country, did you speak 455 word of deliverance to its citizens?

And yet the riddle's answer was not the province  
of a chance comer. It was a prophet's task and plainly you had no such gift of prophecy from birds nor otherwise from any God

460 to glean a word of knowledge. But I came, Oedipus, who knew nothing, and I stopped her. I solved the riddle by my own wit alone.

Mine was no knowledge got from birds. And now you would expel me,

465 because you think that you will find a place by Creon's throne. I think you will be sorry, both you and your accomplice, for your plot to drive me out. And did I not regard you  
as an old man, some suffering would have taught you 470 that what was in your heart was treason.

**CHORUS:** We look at this man's words and yours, my king, and we find both have spoken them in anger.  
We need no angry words but only thought  
how we may best hit the God's meaning for us.

**TEIRESIAS:** If you are king, at least I have the right 476 no less to speak in my defense against you.

Of that much I am master. I am no slave of yours, but Loxias', and so I shall not enroll myself with Creon for my patron.

480 Since you have taunted me with being blind, here is my word for you.

You have your eyes but see not where you are  
in sin, nor where you live, nor whom you live with. Do you know

who your parents are? Unknowing 485 you are an enemy to kith and kin

in death, beneath the earth, and in this life. A deadly footed, double striking curse,

from father and mother both, shall drive you forth out of this land, with darkness on your eyes,

490 that now have such straight vision. Shall there be a place will not be harbor to your cries, 36

a corner of Cithaeron 37 will not ring in echo to your cries, soon, soon, –

when you shall learn the secret of your marriage, 495 which steered you to a haven in this house, – haven no haven, after lucky voyage?

And of the multitude of other evils establishing a grim equality

between you and your children, you know nothing. 500 So, muddied with contempt my words and Creon's! Misery shall grind no man as it will you.

36 **Shall. . . cries** is there any place that won't be full of your cries?

37 **Cithaeron** *n.* mountain near Thebes on which Oedipus was abandoned as an infant.

**OEDIPUS:** Is it endurable that I should hear

such words from him? Go and a curse go with you! Quick, home with you! Out of my house at once!

**TEIRESIAS:** I would not have come either had you not call me.

**OEDIPUS:** I did not know then you would talk like a fool –

507 or it would have been long before I called you.

**TEIRESIAS:** I am a fool then, as it seems to you – but to the parents who have bred you, wise.

**OEDIPUS:** What parents? Stop! Who are they of all the world?

**TEIRESIAS:** This day will show your birth and will destroy you.

**OEDIPUS:** How needlessly your riddles darken everything.

**TEIRESIAS:** But it's in riddle answering you are strongest.

**OEDIPUS:** Yes. Taunt me where you will find me great.

**TEIRESIAS:** It is this very luck that has destroyed you. **OEDIPUS:** I do not care, if it has saved this city.

**TEIRESIAS:** Well, I will go. Come, boy, lead me away.

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, lead him off. So long as you are here,  
you'll be a stumbling block and a vexation;  
520 once gone, you will not trouble me again.

**TEIRESIAS:** I have said  
what I came here to say not fearing your countenance; there is no  
way you can hurt me. I tell you, king, this man, this murderer  
525 (whom you have long declared you are in search  
of,  
indicting him in threatening proclamation as murderer of  
Laius)—he is here.

In name he is a stranger among citizens But soon he will be shown  
to be a citizen

530 true native Theban, and he'll have no joy.  
of the discovery: blindness for sight and beggary for riches his  
exchange,

he shall go journeying to a foreign country tapping his way before  
him with a stick.

535 He shall be proved father and brother both to his own  
children in his own house; to her that gave him birth, a son and  
husband both;

a fellow sower in his father's bed

with that same father that he murdered.

540 Go within, reckon that out, and if you find me mistaken, say I  
have no skill in prophecy

[*exit separately TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS*]

CHORUS:*Strophe*

who is the man proclaimed  
by Delphi's prophetic rock  
as the bloody handed murderer,  
545 the doer of deeds that none dare name?  
Now is the time for him to run with a stronger foot  
than Pegasus<sup>38</sup>  
for the child of Zeus leaps in arms upon him 550 with fire and the  
lightning bolt,  
and terribly close on his heels are the Fates that never miss.

*Antistrophe*

Lately from snowy Parnassus clearly the voice flashed forth,  
555 bidding each Theban track him down, the unknown murderer.  
In the savage forests he lurks and in the caverns like  
the mountain bull  
560 He is sad and lonely, his feet  
that carry him far from the navel of earth;<sup>39</sup> but its prophecies,  
ever living,  
flutter around his head.

*Strophe*

The augur<sup>40</sup> has spread confusion, 565 terrible confusion;  
I do not approve what was said nor can I deny it.  
I do not know what to say;  
I am in a flutter of foreboding; 570 I never heard in the present  
nor past of a quarrel between

the sons of Labdacus and Polybus, that I might bring as proof  
in attacking the popular fame 575 of Oedipus, seeking  
to take vengeance for undiscovered death in the line of Labdacus.

*Antistrophe*

Truly Zeus and Apollo are wise and in human things all knowing;

38 **Pegasus** mythical winged horse.

39 **navel of earth** fissure, or crack, on Mount Parnassus from  
which mysterious vapors arose to inspire Pythia, priestess of the  
Oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

40 **augur** *n.* fortuneteller or prophet; refers here to Teiresias  
580 but amongst men there is no  
distinct judgment, between the prophet and me—which of us is  
right.

One man may pass another in wisdom but I would never agree  
585 with those that find fault with the king till I should see the  
word

proved right beyond doubt. For once in visible form the Sphinx  
came on him and all of us

590 saw his wisdom and in that test

he saved the city. So he will not be condemned by my mind.

[Enter CREON.]

**CREON:** Citizens, I have come because I heard deadly words  
spread about me, that the king accuses me. I cannot take that from  
him.

595 If he believes that in these present troubles

he has been wronged by me in word or deed I do not want to live  
on with the burden

of such a scandal on me. The report injures me doubly and most  
vitality— 600 for I'll be called a traitor to my city and traitor also to  
my friends and you.

**CHORUS:** Perhaps it was a sudden gust of anger that forced that insult from him, and no judgment.

**CREON:** But did he say that it was a compliances  
605 with schemes of mine that the seer told him lies?

**CHORUS:** Yes, he said that, but why, I do not know. **CREON:** Were his eyes straight in his head? Was his mind right  
when he accused me in this fashion?

**CHORUS:** I do not know; I have no eyes to see  
610 what princes do. Here comes the king himself. [Enter OEDIPUS]

**OEDIPUS:** You, sir, how is it you come here? Have you so much brazen faced daring that you venture in  
my house although you are proved manifestly<sup>41</sup> the murderer of that man, and though you tried, 615 openly, highway robbery of my crown?

For God's sake, tell me what you saw in me, what cowardice or what stupidity,

that made you lay a plot like this against me? Did you imagine I should not observe

620 the crafty scheme that stole upon me or seeing it, take no means to counter it?

41 **proved manifestly** clearly proved with evidence.

Was it not stupid of you to make the attempt, to try to hunt down royal power without

the people at your back or friends? For only 625 with the people at your back or money can the hunt end in the capture of a crown.

**CREON:** Do you know what you're doing? Will you listen  
to words to answer yours, and then pass judgment?

**OEDIPUS:** You're quick to speak, but I am slow to grasp  
you,  
630 for I have found you dangerous,—and my foe.

**CREON:** First of all hear what I shall say to that.

**OEDIPUS:** At least don't tell me that you are not guilt.

**CREON:** If you think obstinacy<sup>42</sup> without wisdom a valuable possession, you are wrong.

**OEDIPUS:** And you are wrong if you believe that one, 636 a criminal, will not be punished only  
because he is my kinsman.

**CREON:** This is but just –  
but tell me, then, of what offense I'm guilty?

**OEDIPUS:** Did you or did you not urge me to send 641 to this prophetic numbler?

**CREON:** I did indeed,  
and I shall stand by what I told you.

**OEDIPUS:** How long ago is it since Laius. . . . **CREON:** What about Laius? I don't understand. **OEDIPUS:** Vanished—died—was murdered?

**CREON:** It is long,  
648 a long, long time to reckon.

**OEDIPUS:** Was this prophet 650 in the profession then?

**CREON:** He was, and honored as highly as he is today.

**OEDIPUS:** At that time did he say a word about me?

**CREON:** Never, at least not when I was near him.

42 **obstinacy** *n.* stubbornness; state of being unyielding to reason.  
Creon means that Oedipus cannot see—or refuses to see—the facts

**OEDIPUS:** You never made a search for the dead man?

**CREON:** We searched, indeed, but never learned of anything.

**OEDIPUS:** Why did our wise old friend not say this then?

**CREON:** I don't know; and when I know nothing, I  
659 usually hold my tongue.

**OEDIPUS:** You know this much,  
661 and can declare this much if you are loyal.

**CREON:** What is it? If I know, I'll not deny it.

**OEDIPUS:** That he would not have said that I killed Laius  
had he not met you first.

**CREON:** You know yourself  
666 whether he said this, but I demand that I should hear as much  
from you as you from me.

**OEDIPUS:** Then hear, — I'll not be proved a murderer.

**CREON:** Well, then. You're married to my sister.



**OEDIPUS:** Yes,  
671 that I am not disposed to deny.

**CREON:** You rule  
this country giving her an equal share in the government?

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, everything she wants 676 she has from me.

**CREON:** And I, as thirdsman to you, am rated as the equal of you  
two?

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, and it's there you've proved yourself  
false friend.

**CREON:** Not if you will reflect on it as I do. 681 Consider, first, if  
you think any one would choose to rule and fear rather than rule  
and sleep untroubled by a feat if power  
were equal in both cases. I, at least,  
685 I was not born with such a frantic yearning to be a king—but  
to do what kings do.

And so it is with every one who has learned wisdom and self-  
control. As it stands now, the prizes are all mine—and without fear.  
690 But if I were the king myself, I must

do much that went against the grain. How should despotic<sup>43</sup> rule  
seem sweeter to me

than painless power and an assured authority? I am not so  
besotted<sup>44</sup> yet that I

695 want other honors than those that come with profit. Now  
every man's my pleasure; every man greets me; now those who are  
your suitors fawn on me, —

success for them depends upon my favor. Why should I let all this  
go to win that?

700 My mind would not be traitor if it's wise;  
I am no treason lover, of my nature, nor would I ever dare to join  
a plot.

Prove what I say. Go to the oracle  
at Pytho and inquire about the answers, 705 if they are as I told  
you. For the rest,

if you discover that I laid any plot together with the seer, kill me,  
I say,

not only by your vote but by my own. But do not charge me on  
obscure opinion

710 without some proof to back it. It's not just  
lightly to count your knaves as honest men, nor with honest  
men as knaves. To throw away

an honest friend is, as it were, to throw your life away, which a  
man loves the best.

715 In the time you will know all with certainty;  
time is the only test of honest men, one day is space enough to  
know a rogue.

**CHORUS:** His words are wise, king, if one fears to fall.

Those who are quick of temper are not safe.

**OEDIPUS:** When he that plots against me secretly 721 moves  
quickly, I must quickly counterplot.

If I wait taking no decisive measure  
his business will be done, and mine be spoiled.

**CREON:** What do you want to do then? Banish me? **OEDIPUS:** No,  
certainly; kill you, not banish you. **CREON:** I do not think you've your  
wits about you.

**OEDIPUS:** For my own interests, yes.

**CREON:** But for mine, too,  
729 you should think equally.

**OEDIPUS:** You are a rogue.

**CREON:** Suppose you do not understand?

**OEDIPUS:** But yet  
I must be ruler.

**CREON:** Not if you rule badly.

**OEDIPUS:** O, city, city!

**CREON:** I too have some share  
737 in the city; it is not yours alone.

**CHORUS:** Stop, my lords! Here—and in the nick of time I see  
Jocasta coming from the house;

740 with her help lay the quarrel that now stirs you. [Enter  
JOCASTA.]

**JOCASTA:** For shame! Why have you raised this foolish  
squabbling

brawl? Are you not ashamed to air your private griefs when the  
country's sick? Go in, you, Oedipus, and you, too, Creon, into the  
house. Don't magnify 745 your nothing troubles.

**CREON:** Sister, Oedipus,  
your husband, thinks he has the right to do terrible wrongs—he  
has but to choose between two terrors: banishing or killing me.

**OEDIPUS:** He's right, Jocasta; for I find him plotting  
751 with knavish<sup>45</sup> tricks against my person.

**CREON:** That God may never bless me! May I die accursed, if I  
have been guilty of  
one tittle<sup>46</sup> of the charge you bring against me!

**JOCASTA:** I beg you, Oedipus, trust him in this, 756 spare him for

the sake of this his oath to God, for my sake, and the sake of those who stand here.

**CHORUS:** Be gracious, be merciful, we beg you.

**OEDIPUS:** In what would you have me yield?

**CHORUS:** He has been no silly child in the past.  
762 he is strong in his oath now. Spare him.

**OEDIPUS:** Do you know what you ask?

**CHORUS:** Yes.

**OEDIPUS:** Tell me then.

**CHORUS:** He has been your friend before all men's eyes;  
do not cast  
him away dishonored on an obscure conjecture.

43 **despotic** *adj.* absolute; unlimited; tyrannical.

44 **besotted** *v.* stupefied; foolish.

45 **knavish** *adj.* deceitful.

46 **tittle** *n.* a very small particle.

**OEDIPUS:** I would have you know that this request of yours  
really requests my death or banishment.

**CHORUS:** May the Sun God,<sup>47</sup> king of Gods, forbid! May I die  
772 without God's blessing, without friends' help, if I  
had any such  
thought. But my spirit is broken by my unhappiness for my  
wasting country; and this would but add troubles 775 amongst  
ourselves to the other troubles.

**OEDIPUS:** Well, let him go then—if I must die ten times for it,  
or be sent out dishonored into exile.  
It is your lips that prayed for him pitied, not his; wherever he is, I  
shall hate him.

**CREON:** I see you sulk in yielding and you're dangerous  
781 when you are out of temper; natures like yours are justly  
heaviest for themselves to bear.

**OEDIPUS:** Leave me alone! Take yourself off, I tell you.

**CREON:** I'll go you have not known me, but they have,  
785 and they have known my innocence.

*[Exit.]*

**CHORUS:** Won't you take him inside, lady?

**JOCASTA:** Yes, when I've found out what was the  
matter.

**CHORUS:** There was some misconceived suspicion of a story, and  
on the other side the sting of injustice.

**JOCASTA:** So, on both sides?

**CHORUS:** Yes.

**JOCASTA:** What was the story?

**CHORUS:** I think it best, in the interests of the country, to leave it  
794 where it ended.

**OEDIPUS:** You see where you have ended, straight of judgment  
796 although you are, by softening my anger.

**CHORUS:** Sir, I have said before and I say again— be sure that I

47 **Sun God Apollo**  
would have been proved a madman, bankrupt in sane council, if I  
should put you away, you who steered the country I love safely  
800 when she was crazed with troubles. God grant that now, too,  
you  
may prove a fortunate guide for us.

**JOCASTA:** Tell me, my lord, I beg of you, what was it that roused  
your anger so?

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, I will tell you.  
805 I honor you more than I honor them.  
It was Creon and the plots he laid against me.

**JOCASTA:** Tell me—if you can clearly tell the quarrel—

**OEDIPUS:** Creon says  
that I'm the murder of Laius.

**JOCASTA:** Of his own knowledge or on information?

**OEDIPUS:** He sent this rascal prophet to me, since he keeps his  
own mouth clean of any guilt.

**JOCASTA:** Do not concern yourself about this matter; listen to me  
and learn that human beings

815 have no part in the craft of prophecy.

Of that I'll show you a short proof.

There was an oracle once that came to Laius, —

I will not say that it was Phoebus' own,

but it was from his servants— and it told him 820 that it was fate  
that he should die a victim at the hands of his own son, a son to be  
born of Laius and me. But, see now, he,

the king, was killed by foreign highway robbers

at a place where three roads meet—so goes the story; 825 and  
for the son—before three days were out after his birth King Laius  
pierced his ankles

and by the hands of others cast him forth upon a pathless hillside.  
So Apollo failed to fulfill his oracle to the son,

830 that he should kill his father, and to Laius also proved false  
in that the thing he feared, death at his son's hands, never came to  
pass. So clear in this case were the oracles,

so clear and false. Give them no heed, I say; 835 what God  
discovers need of, easily

he shows to us himself.

**OEDIPUS:** O dear Jocasta,

as I hear this from you, there comes upon me a wandering of the  
soul—I could run mad.

**JOCASTA:** What trouble is it, that you turn again 841 and speak  
like this?

**OEDIPUS:** I thought I heard you say that Laius was killed at a  
crossroads.

**JOCASTA:** Yes, that was how the story went and still 845 that  
word goes round.

**OEDIPUS:** Where is this place, Jocasta, where he was murdered?

**JOCASTA:** Phocis is the country  
and the road splits there, one of two roads from Delphi, 850  
another comes from Daulia.

**OEDIPUS:** How long ago is this?

**JOCASTA:** The news came to the city just before you became king  
and all men's eyes looked to you. 854 What is it, Oedipus, that's in  
your mind?

**OEDIPUS:** What have you designed, O Zeus, to do with me?

**JOCASTA:** What is the thought that troubles your heart?

**OEDIPUS:** Don't ask me yet—tell me of Laius— How did he look?  
How old or young was he?

**JOCASTA:** He was a tall man and his hair was grizzled 860  
already—nearly white—and in his form  
not unlike you.

**OEDIPUS:** O God, I think I have  
called curses upon myself in ignorance.

**JOCASTA:** What do you mean? I am terrified 865 when I look at  
you.

**OEDIPUS:** I have a deadly fear  
that the old seer had eyes. You'll show me more  
if you can tell me one more thing.

**JOCASTA:** I will.



870 I'm frightened, —but if I can understand,  
I'll tell you all you ask.

**OEDIPUS:** How was his company?

Had he few with him when he went this journey, or many servants,  
as would suit a prince?

**JOCASTA:** In all there were but five, and among them 876 a  
herald;48 and one carriage for the king.

**OEDIPUS:** It's plain—it's plain—who was it told you this?

48 **herald** *n.* person who makes proclamations and carries  
messages.

**JOCASTA:** The only servant that escaped safe home.

**OEDIPUS:** Is he at home now?

**JOCASTA:** No, when he came home again 881 and saw you king  
and Laius was dead,

he came to me and touched my had and begged that I should send  
him to the fields to be

my shepherd and so he might see the city 885 as far off as he  
might. So I

sent him away. He was an honest man, as slaves go, and was  
worthy of far more that what he asked of me.

**OEDIPUS:** O, how I wish that he could come back quickly!

**JOCASTA:** He can. Why is your hear so set on this?

**OEDIPUS:** O dear Jocasta, I am full of fears

892 that I have spoken far too much; and therefore I wish to see  
this shepherd.

**JOCASTA:** He will come;  
895 but, Oedipus, I think I'm worthy too  
to know what it is that disquiets you.

**OEDIPUS:** It shall not be kept from you, since my mind has gone  
so far with its forebodings. Whom

should I confide in rather than you, who is there 900 of more  
importance to me who have passed through such a fortune?

Polybus was my father, king of Corinth,<sup>49</sup> and Merope, the  
Dorian,<sup>50</sup> my mother.

I was held greatest of the citizens

905 in Corinth till a curious chance befell me as I shall tell  
you—curious, indeed,

but hardly worth the store set upon it. There was a dinner and at  
it a man,

a drunken man, accused me in his drink 910 of being bastard. I was  
furious

but held my temper under for that day.

Next day I went and taxed<sup>51</sup> my parents with it; they took the  
insult very ill from him,

the drunken fellow who had uttered it. 915 So I was comforted for  
their part, but

still this thing rankled<sup>52</sup> always, for the story crept about widely.  
And I went at last

to Pytho, though my parents did not know. But Phoebus sent me  
home again unhonored

49 **Corinth** city at the western end of the isthmus (Greece) that  
joins the Peloponnesus to Boeotia

50 **Dorian** n. one of the main branches of the Hellenes; the  
Dorians invaded the Peloponnesus.

51 **taxed** v. imposed a burden on; put a strain on.

52 **rankled** v. caused to have long-lasting anger and resentment.

920 in what I came to learn, but he foretold other and desperate horrors to befall me, that I was fated to lie with my mother,

and show to daylight an accursed breed

which men would not endure, and I was doomed 925 to be murdered of the father that begot me.

When I heard this I fled, and in the days that followed I would measure from the stars the whereabouts of Corinth—yes, I fled

to somewhere where I should not see fulfilled 930 the infamies<sup>53</sup> told in that dreadful oracle.

And as I journeyed I came to the place

where, as you say, this king met with his death. Jocasta, I will tell you the whole truth.

When I was near the branching of the crossroads, 935 going on foot, I was encountered by

a herald and a carriage with a man in it, just as you tell me. He that led the way

and the old man himself wanted to thrust me out of the road by force. I became angry

940 and struck the coachman who was pushing me. When the old man saw this he watched his moment, and as I passed he struck me from his carriage,

full on the head with his two pointed goad.<sup>54</sup> But he was pain in full and presently

945 my stick had struck him backwards from the car and he rolled out of it. And then I killed them

all. If it happened there was any tie of kinship twixt this man and Laius,

who is then now more miserable than I,

950 what man on earth so hated by the Gods, since neither citizen nor foreigner

may welcome me at home or even greet me, but drive me out of doors? And it is I,

I and no other have so cursed myself. 955 And I pollute the bed of him I killed

by the hands that killed him. Was I not born evil?

Am I not utterly unclean? I had to fly and in my banishment not even see

my kindred not set foot in my own country, 960 or otherwise my fate was to be yoked

in marriage with my mother and kill my father, Polybus who begot me and had reared me.

Would not one rightly judge and say that on me these things were sent by some malignant God? 965 O no, no, no—O holy majesty

of God on high, may I not see that day! May I be gone out of men's sight before I see the deadly taint of this disaster come upon me.

**CHORUS:** Sir, we too fear these things. But until you see this man 971 face to face and hear his story, hope.

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, I have just this much hope—to wait until the herdsman comes.

**JOCASTA:** And when he comes, what do you want with him?

**OEDIPUS:** I'll tell you; if I find that his story is the same as yours, I 975 at least will be clear of this guilt.

**JOCASTA:** Why what so particularly did you learn from my story?

**OEDIPUS:** You said that he spoke of highway *robbers* who killed Laius. Now if he uses the same number, it was not I who killed him. One man cannot 980 be the same as many. But if he speaks of a man travelling alone, then clearly the burden of the guilt inclines toward me.

**JOCASTA:** Be sure, at least, that this was how he told the story. He cannot unsay it now, for every 985 one in the city heard it—not I alone. But, Oedipus, even if he diverges from what he said then,

he shall never prove that the murder of Laius squares rightly with the prophecy—for Loxias declared that the king should be killed by his own 990 son. And that poor creature did not kill him surely, —for he died himself first. So as far as prophecy goes, henceforward I shall not look to the right hand or the left.

**OEDIPUS:** Right. But yet, send some one for the peasant to bring 995 him here; do not neglect it.

**JOCASTA:** I will send quickly. Now let me go indoors. I will do nothing except what pleases you.

[Exit. ]

CHORUS:*Strophe*

May destiny ever find me pious in word and deed  
995 prescribed by the laws that live on high: laws begotten in the  
clear air of heaven, whose only father is Olympus;  
no mortal nature brought them to birth, no forgetfulness shall lull  
them to sleep;  
1000 for God is great in them and grows not old.

*Antistrophe*

Insolence<sup>55</sup> breeds the tyrant, insolence

53 **infamies** *n.* items of notorious disgrace and dishonor.

54 **goad** *n.* sharp, pointed stick used to drive animals.

55 **insolence** *n.* arrogance; bold disrespectfulness.

if it is gluttoned with a surfeit,<sup>56</sup> unseasonable, unprofitable,  
climbs to the roof-top and plunges sheer down to the ruin that  
must be, 1005 and there its feet are no service.

But I pray that the God may never  
abolish the eager ambition that profits the state.  
For I shall never cease to hold the God as our protector.

*Strophe*

If a man walks with haughtiness  
1010 of hand or word and gives no heed to Justice and the shrines  
of Gods despises—may an evil doom  
smite him for his ill-starred pride of heart! —

if he reaps gains without justice 1015 and will not hold from  
impiety

and his fingers itch for untouchable things.

When such things are done, what man shall contrive to shield his  
soul from the shafts of the God?

When such deeds are held in honor,  
1020 why should I honor the Gods in the dance?

PART II:

**JOCASTA:** Princes of the land, I have had the thought to go  
my prayer: grant us escape free of the curse. 1045 Now when we  
look to him we are all afraid;  
he's pilot of our ship and he is frightened.

[Enter MESSENGER.]

**MESSENGER:** Might I learn from you, sirs, where is the house of  
Oedipus? Or best  
of all, if you know, where is the king himself?

**CHORUS:** This is his house and he is within doors. This lady is his wife and mother  
1050 of his children.

**MESSENGER:** God bless you, lady, and God bless your household!  
God bless  
Oedipus' noble wife!

**JOCASTA:** God bless you, sir, for your kind greeting!  
What do you  
want of us that you have come here? What have you to tell us?

**MESSENGER:** Good news, lady. Good for your house and for your  
1056 husband.

**JOCASTA:** What is your news? Who sent you to us?

**MESSENGER:** I come from Corinth and the news I bring will give you pleasure. Perhaps a little pain too.

**JOCASTA:** What is this news of double meaning? **MESSENGER:**  
The people of the Isthmus will choose Oedipus to be  
1062 their king. That is the rumor there.

**JOCASTA:** But isn't their king still old Polybus?

**MESSENGER:** No. He is in his grave. Death has got him.

to the Gods' temples, bringing in my hand 1035 garlands and gifts of incense, as you see.

For Oedipus excites himself too much  
at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing,<sup>57</sup>  
like a man of sense, what will e from what was,

but he is always at speaker's mercy, 1040 when he speaks terrors.  
I can do no good

by my advice, and so I came as suppliant to you, Lycaean Apollo,  
who are nearest.

These are the symbols of my prayer and this

56 **surfeit** *n.* excessive supply

57 **conjecturing** *v.* inferring or prediction from incomplete  
evidence.

**JOCASTA:** Is that the truth? Is Oedipus' father dead?

**MESSENGER:** May I die myself if it be otherwise!

**JOCASTA:** [*to a SERVANT*]: Be quick and run to the King with the  
news! O oracles of the Gods, where are you now? It was from  
this man Oedipus fled, lest he should be his murderer!  
And

1070 now he is dead, in the course of nature, and not killed by  
Oedipus.

[*Enter OEDIPUS.*]

**OEDIPUS:** Dearest Jocasta, why have you sent for me?

**JOCASTA:** Listen to this man and when you hear reflect what is  
the  
outcome of the holy oracles of the Gods.

**OEDIPUS:** Who is he? What is his message for me?

**JOCASTA:** He is from Corinth and he tells us that 1076 your father  
Polybus is dead and gone.



**OEDIPUS:** What's this you say, sir? Tell me yourself.

**MESSENGER:** Since this is the first matter you want clearly told: Polybus has gone down to death. You may be sure of it.

**OEDIPUS:** By treachery or sickness?

**MESSENGER:** A small thing will put old bodies asleep.

**OEDIPUS:** So he died of sickness, it seems, —poor old man!

**MESSENGER:** Yes, and of age—the long years he had 1085 measured.

**OEDIPUS:** Ha! Ha! O dear Jocasta, why should one look to the Pythian hearth?<sup>58</sup> Why should one look to

the birds screaming overhead? They prophesied that I should kill my father! But he's dead, 1090 and hidden deep in earth, and I stand here

who never laid a hand on a spear against him,— unless perhaps he died of longing for me,

and thus I am his murderer. But they,  
the oracles, as they stand—he's taken them  
1095 away with him, they're dead as he himself is,  
and worthless.

**JOCASTA:** That I told you before now.

**OEDIPUS:** You did, but I was misled by my fear.

**JOCASTA:** But surely I must fear my mother's bed?

**OEDIPUS:** Why should man fear since chance is all in all 1101 for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing?

Best to live lightly, as one can, unthinkingly. As to  
your mother's marriage bed, —don't fear it.

1105 Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles, many a man has  
lain with his own mother.

But he to whom such things are nothing bears his life most easily.

58 **Pythian hearth** *n.* the Delphic oracle that prophesied  
Oedipus' crime.

**OEDIPUS:** All that you say would be said perfectly 1110 if she were  
dead; but since she lives I must still fear, although you talk so well,  
Jocasta:

**JOCASTA:** Still in your father's death there's light of  
comfort?

**OEDIPUS:** Great light of comfort; but I fear the living.

**MESSENGER:** Who is the woman that makes you afraid?

**OEDIPUS:** Merope, old man, Polybus' wife.

**MESSENGER:** What about her frightens the queen and you?

**OEDIPUS:** A terrible oracle, stranger, from the Gods.

**MESSENGER:** Can it be told? Or does the sacred law 1120 forbid  
another to have knowledge of it?

**OEDIPUS:** O no! Once on a time Loxias said that I should lie with  
my own mother and take on my hands the blood of my own father.  
And so for these long years I've lived away  
1125 from Corinth; it has been to my great happiness;  
but yet it's sweet to see the face of parents.

**MESSENGER:** This was the fear which drove you out of Corinth?

**OEDIPUS:** Old man, I did not wish to kill my father.

**MESSENGER:** Why should I not free you from this fear, sir.  
1130 since I have come to you in all goodwill?

**OEDIPUS:** You would not find me thankless if you did.

**MESSENGER:** Why, it was just for this I brought the news, —  
to earn your thanks when you had come safe home.

**OEDIPUS:** No, I will never come near my parents.

**MESSENGER:** Son,  
1136 it's very plain you don't know what you're doing.

**OEDIPUS:** What do you mean, old man? For God's sake,  
tell me.

**MESSENGER:** If your homecoming is checked by fears like these.

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, I'm afraid that Phoebus may prove right.

**MESSENGER:** The murder and the incest?

**OEDIPUS:** Yes, old man;  
1142 that is my constant terror.

**MESSENGER:** Do you know that all your fears are empty?

**OEDIPUS:** How is that,  
1146 if they are father and mother and I their son?

**MESSENGER:** Because Polybus was no kin to you in blood.

**OEDIPUS:** What, was not Polybus my father?

**MESSENGER:** No more than I but just so much.

**OEDIPUS:** How can

1151 my father be my father as much as one  
that's nothing to me?

**OEDIPUS:** Why do you speak of that old pain?

**MESSENGER:** I loosed you;

1175 the tendons of your feet were pierced and fettered, —

**OEDIPUS:** My swaddling<sup>60</sup> clothes brought me a rare disgrace.

**MESSENGER:** So that from this you're called your  
present name. <sup>61</sup>

**OEDIPUS:** Was this my father's doing or my mother's?  
For God's sake, tell me.

**MESSENGER:** I don't know, but he

1181 who gave you to me has more knowledge than I.

**OEDIPUS:** You yourself did not find me then? You took me

**MESSENGER:** Neither he nor I begat you.

**OEDIPUS:** Why then did he call me son?

**MESSENGER:** A gift he took you from these hands of mine.

**OEDIPUS:** Did he love so much what he took from another's hand?

**MESSENGER:** His childlessness before persuaded him.

**OEDIPUS:** Was I a child you bought or found when I 1159 was given to him?

**MESSENGER:** On Cithaeron's slopes  
in the twisting thickets you were found.

**OEDIPUS:** And why  
were you a traveler in those parts?

**MESSENGER:** I was in charge of mountain flocks.

**OEDIPUS:** You were a shepherd?  
1167 a hireling vagrant?59

**MESSENGER:** Yes, but at least at that time the man that saved your life, son.

**OEDIPUS:** What ailed me when you took me in your arms?  
from someone else?

**MESSENGER:** Yes, from another shepherd.

**OEDIPUS:** Who was he? Do you know him well enough to tell?

**MESSENGER:** He was called Laius' man.

**OEDIPUS:** You mean the king who reigned here in the old days?

**MESSENGER:** Yes, he was that man's shepherd.

**OEDIPUS:** Is he alive  
1190 still, so that I could see him?

**MESSENGER:** You who live here would know best.

**OEDIPUS:** Do any of you here  
know of this shepherd whom he speaks about 1195 in town or in  
the fields? Tell me. It's time that this was found out once for all.

**CHORUS:** I think he is none other than the peasant whom you  
have sought to see already; but Jocasta here can tell us best of that.

**OEDIPUS:** Jocasta, do you know about this man  
1201 whom we have sent for? Is he the man he mentions?

**MESSENGER:** In that your ankles should be witnesses.  
60 **swaddling clothes** long, narrow bands of cloth wrapped

59 **hireling vagrant** person who wanders from place to place and  
works at odd jobs.

around infants in ancient times.

61 **your present name** *Oedipus* means "swollen foot"

**JOCASTA:** Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it  
heed;  
nor try to keep in mind what has been said. It will be wasted labor.

**OEDIPUS:** With such clues  
1206 I could not fail to bring my birth to light.

**JOCASTA:** I beg you—do not hunt this out—I beg you, if you have any care for your own life.

What I am suffering is enough.

**OEDIPUS:** Keep up

1211 your heart, Jocasta. Though I'm proved a slave, thrice slave, and though my mother is thrice slave, you'll not be shown to be of lowly lineage.

**JOCASTA:** O be persuaded by me, I entreat you; 1215 do not do this.

**OEDIPUS:** I will not be persuaded to let be the chance of finding out the whole thing clearly.

**JOCASTA:** It is because I wish you well that I give you this counsel—and it's the best counsel.

**OEDIPUS:** Then the best counsel vexes me, and has 1221 for some while since.

**JOCASTA:** O Oedipus, God help you!  
God keep you from the knowledge of who you are!

**OEDIPUS:** Here, some one, go and fetch the shepherd for me; 1225 and let her find her joy in her rich family!

**JOCASTA:** O Oedipus, unhappy Oedipus! that is all I can call you, and the last thing that I shall ever call you.

[Exit.]

**CHORUS:** Why has the queen gone, Oedipus, in wild 1230 grief

rushing from us? I am afraid that trouble will break out of this silence.

**OEDIPUS:** Break out what will! I at least shall be willing to see my ancestry, though humble.

Perhaps she is ashamed of my low birth,  
1235 for she has all a woman's high-flown pride. But I account myself a child of Fortune,<sup>62</sup> beneficent Fortune, and I shall not be  
1240 and now again as mighty. Such is my breeding, and I shall never prove so false to it,  
as not to find the secret of my birth.

CHORUS:*Strophe*

If I am a prophet and wise of heart you shall not fail, Cithaeron,  
1245 by the limitless sky, you shall not!— to know at tomorrow's full moon  
that Oedipus honors you,  
as native to him and mother and nurse at once;  
and that you are honored in dancing by us, as finding favor in sight of our king.  
1250 Apollo, to whom we cry, find these things pleasing!

*Antistrophe*

Who was it bore you, child? One of  
the long-lived nymphs<sup>63</sup> who lay with Pan<sup>64</sup>— the father who treads the hills?  
Or was she a bride of Loxias, your mother? The grassy slopes  
1255 are all of them dear to him. Or perhaps Cyllene's king<sup>65</sup>  
or the Bacchaants' God that lives on the tops  
of the hills received you a gift from some  
one of the Helicon Nymphs, with whom he mostly plays?

{*Enter an OLD MAN, lead by OEDIPUS' SERVANTS.*}



**OEDIPUS:** If some one like myself who never met him 1260 may  
make a guess, —I think this is the herdsman, whom we were seeking.  
His old age is consonant

with the other. And besides, the men who bring him I recognize  
as my own servants. You  
perhaps may better me in knowledge since  
1265 you've seen the man before.

**CHORUS:** You can be sure  
I recognize him. For if Laius  
had ever an honest shepherd, this was he.

**OEDIPUS:** You, sir, from Corinth, I must ask you first, 1270 is this  
the man you spoke of?

**MESSENGER:** This is he before your eyes.

**OEDIPUS:** Old man, look here at me  
and tell me what I ask you. Were you ever

dishonored. She's the mother from whom I spring;

the months, my brothers, marked me, now as small

62 **child of Fortune** Since Fortune, or good luck, saved him from  
death, Oedipus refuses to feel shame at being illegitimate or of  
humble origins.

63 **nymphs** *n.* minor female divinities with youthful, beautiful,  
and amorous qualities; “nymph” means young woman.

64 **Pan** Arcadian shepherd god who lived in the mountains,  
danced and sang with the nymphs, and played his pipes.

65 **Cyllene's King** Hermes, the messenger god.

1275 a servant of King Laius?

**HERDSMAN:** I was, —  
no slave he bought but reared in his own house.

**OEDIPUS:** What did you do as work? How did you live?

**HERDSMAN:** Most of my life was spent among the flocks.

**OEDIPUS:** In what part of the country did you live?

**HERDSMAN:** Cithaeron and the places near to it.

**OEDIPUS:** And somewhere there perhaps you knew this man?

**HERDSMAN:** What was his occupation? Who?

**OEDIPUS:** This man here,  
1285 have you had any dealings with him?

**HERDSMAN:** No—  
not such that I can quickly call to mind.

**MESSENGER:** That is no wonder, master. But I'll make  
him remember  
what he does not know. For I know, that he well knows the  
country of  
1290 Cithaeron, how he with two flocks, I with one kept company  
for three  
years—each year half a year—from spring till autumn time and  
then  
when winter came I drove my flocks to our fold home again and  
he to

Laius' steadings. Well—am I right or not in what I said we did?

**HERDSMAN:** You're right—although it's a long time ago.

**MESSENGER:** Do you remember giving me a child 1296 to bring up as my foster child?

**HERDSMAN:** What's this?  
Why do you ask the question?

**MESSENGER:** Look old man,  
1300 here he is—here's the man who was that child!

**HERDSMAN:** Death take you! Won't you hold your tongue?

**OEDIPUS:** No, no,  
do not find fault with him, old man. Your words are more at fault than his.

**HERDSMAN:** O best of masters, 1306 how do I give offense?

**OEDIPUS:** When you refuse  
to speak about the child of whom he asks you.

**HERDSMAN:** He speaks out of his ignorance, without meaning.

**OEDIPUS:** If you'll not talk to gratify me, you  
1311 will talk with pain to urge you.

**HERDSMAN:** O please, sir,  
don't hurt an old man, sir.

**OEDIPUS** [*to the SERVANTS*]: Here, one of you, 1315 twist his hands behind him.

**HERDSMAN:** Why, God help me, why?  
What do you want to know?

**OEDIPUS:** You gave a child  
to him, —the child he asked you of?

**HERDSMAN:** I did.  
1321 I wish I'd died the day I did.

**OEDIPUS:** You will unless you tell me truly.

**HERDSMAN:** And I'll die  
1325 far worse if I should tell you.

**OEDIPUS:** This fellow  
is bent on more delays, as it would seem.

**HERDSMAN:** O no, no! I have told you that I gave it.

**OEDIPUS:** Where did you get this child from? Was 1330 it your  
own or did you get it from another?

**HERDSMAN:** Not  
my own at all; I had it from some one.

**OEDIPUS:** One of these citizens? or from what house?

**HERDSMAN:** O master, please—I beg you, master, please  
1335 don't ask me more.

**OEDIPUS:** You're a dead man if I  
ask you again.

**HERDSMAN:** It was one of the children of Laius.

**OEDIPUS:** A slave? Or born in wedlock?

**HERDSMAN:** O God, I am on the brink of frightful speech.

**OEDIPUS:** And I of frightful hearing. But I must hear.

**HERDSMAN:** The child was called his child; but she within,  
1344 your wife would tell you best how all this was.

**OEDIPUS:** *She gave it to you?* **HERDSMAN:** Yes, she did, my lord.

**OEDIPUS:** To do what with?

**HERDSMAN:** Make away with it.

**OEDIPUS:** She was so hard—its mother?

**HERDSMAN:** Aye through fear 1351 of evil oracles.

**OEDIPUS:** Which?

**HERDSMAN:** They said that he should kill his parents. **OEDIPUS:**  
How was it that you gave it to this old man? **HERDSMAN:** O master,  
I pitied it, and thought that I could send it off to another country  
and this man

1360 was from another country. But he saved it for the most  
terrible troubles. If you are  
the man he says you are, you're bred to misery.

**OEDIPUS:** O, O, O, they will all come,  
all come out clearly! Light of the sun, let me 1365 look upon you  
no more after today!

I who first saw the light bred of a match accursed and accursed in  
my living

with them I lived with, cursed in my killing. [*Exit all but the*  
CHORUS.]

CHORUS:*Strophe*

O generations of men, how I

1370 count you as equal with those who live not at all!

What man, What man on earth wins more of happiness than a  
seeming

and after that turning away?

1375 Oedipus, you are my pattern of this, Oedipus, you and your  
fate!

Luckless Oedipus, whom of all men I envy not at all.

*Antistrophe*

In as much as he shot his bolt

1380 beyond the others and won the prize

of happiness complete—

O Zeus—and killed and reduced to nought

the hooked taloned maid of the riddling speech,<sup>66</sup> standing a  
tower against death for my land;

1385 hence he was called my king and hence was honored the  
highest of all

honors; and hence he ruled in the great city of Thebes.

*Strophe*

But now whose tale is more miserable? 1390 Who is there lives  
with a savager fate? Whose troubles so reverse his life as his?

O Oedipus, the famous prince for whom a great have

the same both as a father and son 1395 sufficed for generation,

how, O how, have the furrows plowed

by your father endured to bear you, poor wretch, and hold  
their peace so long?

*Antistrophe*

Time who sees all has found you out

1400 against your will; judges your marriage accursed, begetter  
and begot at one in it.

O child of Laius,

would I had never seen you. I weep for you and cry 1405 a dirge of lamentation.

To speak directly, I drew my breath from you at the first and so now I lull my mouth to sleep with your name.

[Enter a SECOND MESSENGER]

**SECOND MESSENGER:** O Princes always honored by our country, 1410 what deeds you'll hear of and what horrors see, what grief you'll feel, if you as true born Thebans, care for the house of Labdacus's sons.

Phasts nor Ister<sup>67</sup> cannot purge<sup>68</sup> this house, I think, with all their streams, such things

1415 it hides, such evils shortly will bring forth into the light, whether they will or not;

and troubles hurt the most when they prove self-inflicted.

**CHORUS:** What we had known before did not fall short 1420 of bitter groaning's worth; what's more to tell?

**SECOND MESSENGER:** Shortest to hear and tell—our glorious queen Jocasta's dead.

66 **the hooked taloned maid of the riddling speech** the Sphinx; talons are claws.

67 **Phasis nor Ister** rivers that flow to the Black Sea.

68 **purge** v. cleanse of guilt or sin.

**CHORUS:** Unhappy woman! How?

**SECOND MESSENGER:** By her own hand. The worst of what was done

1425 you cannot know. You did not see the sight.  
Yet in so far as I remember it  
you'll hear the end of our unlucky queen. When she came raging  
into the house she went straight to her marriage bed, tearing her  
hair

1430 with both her hands, and crying upon Laius long dead—Do  
you remember, Laius,

that night long past which bred a child for us to send you to your  
death and leave

a mother making children with her son?

1435 And then she groaned and cursed the bed in which  
she brought forth husband by her husband, children by her own  
child, an infamous double bond.

How after that she died I do not know, —  
for Oedipus distracted us from seeing.

1440 He burst upon us shouting and we looked to him as he paced  
frantically around,

begging us always: Give me a sword, I say, to find this wife no wife,  
this mother's womb, this field of double sowing whence I sprang

1445 and where I sowed my children! As he raved some god  
showed him the way—none of us there.

Bellowing terribly and led by some  
invisible guide he rushed on the two doors, —  
wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets,

1450 he charged inside. There, there, we saw his wife hanging, the  
twisted rope around her neck.

When he saw her, he cried out fearfully  
and cut the dangling noose. Then as she lay,  
poor woman, on the ground, what happened after. 1455 was  
terrible to see. He tore the brooches— the gold chased brooches  
fastening her robe— away from her and lifting them up high

dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out such things as:  
they will never see the crime 1460 I have committed or had done  
upon me!



Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on forbidden faces, do not recognize those

whom you long for—with such imprecations<sup>69</sup> he struck his eyes again and yet again

1465 with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs gushed

and stained his beard—no sluggish oozing drops

but a black rain and bloody hail poured down.

So it has broken—and not on one head

but troubles mixed for husband and for wife. 1470 The fortune of the days gone was true good fortune—but today groans and destruction and death and shame—of all ills can be named not one is missing.

**69 imprecations** *n.* acts of cursing and invoking evil.

**CHORUS:** Is he now in any ease from pain?

**SECOND MESSENGER:** He shouts

1476 for some one to unbar the doors and show him to all the men of Thebes, his father's killer,

his mother's—no I cannot say the word, it is unholy—for he'll cast himself,

1480 out of the land, he says, and not remain to bring a curse upon his house, the curse

he called upon it in his proclamation. But

he wants for strength, aye, and some one to guide him; his sickness is too great to bear. You, too,

1485 will be shown that. The bolts are opening.

Soon you will see a sight to waken pity even in the horror of it.

[*Enter the blinded Oedipus.*]

**CHORUS:** This is a terrible sight for men to see!

I never found a worse!

1490 Poor wretch, what madness came upon you!

What evil spirit leaped upon your life

to your ill-luck—a leap beyond man's strength!  
Indeed I pity you, but I cannot  
look at you, though there's much I want to ask  
1495 and much to learn and much to see. I shudder at the sight of  
you.

**OEDIPUS:** O,O,  
where am I going? Where is my voice borne on the wind to and  
fro?  
1500 Spirit, how far have you sprung?

**CHORUS:** To a terrible place whereof men's ears  
may not hear, nor their eyes behold it.

**OEDIPUS:** Darkness!  
Horror of darkness enfolding, resistless unspeakable visitant sped  
by an ill wind in haste!  
1505 madness and stabbing pain and memory of evil deeds I have  
done!

**CHORUS:** In such misfortunes it's no wonder  
if double weighs the burden of your grief.

**OEDIPUS:** My friend,  
1510 you are the only steadfast, the one that attends on me;  
you still stay nursing the blind man.  
Your care is not unnoticed. I can know  
your voice, although this darkness is my world.

**CHORUS:** Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you dare 1515 so far to  
do despite to your own eyes?  
What spirit urged you to it?

**OEDIPUS:** It was Apollo, friends, Apollo,

that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion.

But the hand that struck me 1520 was none but my own.

Why should I see

whose vision shoed me nothing sweet to see?

**CHORUS:** These things are as you say.

**OEDIPUS:** What can I see to love?

1525 What greeting can touch my ears with joy?

Take me away, and haste—to the place out of the way! Take me  
away, my friends, the greatly miserable,

the most accursed, whom God too hates above all men on earth!

**CHORUS:** Unhappy in your mind and your misfortune, 1531 would  
I had never known you!

**OEDIPUS:** Curse on the man who took

the cruel bonds from off my legs, as I lay in the field. He stole me  
from death and saved me,

1535 no kindly service. Had I died then

I would not be so burdensome to friends.

**CHORUS:** I, too, could have wished it had been so.

**OEDIPUS:** Then I would not have come

1540 to kill my father and marry my mother infamously.

Now I am godless and child of impurity,

begetter in the same seed that created my wretched self. If there  
is any ill worse than ill,

that is the lot of Oedipus.

**CHORUS:** I cannot say your remedy was good;

1546 you would be better dead than blind and living.

**OEDIPUS:** What I have done here was best done—don't tell me otherwise, do not give me further counsel. I do not know with what eyes I could look 1550 upon my father when I die and go

under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother— those two to whom I have done things deserving worse punishment than hanging. Would the sight of children bred as mine are, gladden me?

1555 No, not these eyes, never. And my city, its towers and sacred places of the Gods,

of these I robbed my miserable self when I commanded all to drive *him* out, the criminal since proved by God impure 1560 and of the race of Laius.

To this guilt I bore witness against myself— with what eyes shall I look upon my people? No. If there were a means to choke the fountain

of hearing I would not have stayed my hand 1565 from locking up my miserable carcass,<sup>70</sup> seeing and hearing nothing; it is sweet

to keep your thoughts out of the range of hurt. Cithaeron, why did you receive me? why having received me did you not kill me straight?

1570 And so I had not shown to men my birth. O Polybus and Corinth and the house,

the old house that I used to call my father's—

what fairness you were nurse to, and what foulness festered beneath! Now I am found to be

1575 a sinner and a son of sinners. Crossroads, and hidden glade, oak and the narrow way

at the crossroads, that drank my father's blood offered you by my hands, do you remember still what I did as you looked on, and what

1580 I did when I came here? O marriage, marriage! you bred me and again when you had

bred children of your child and showed to men brides, wives and mothers and the foulest deeds that can be in this world of ours.

1585 Come—it's unfit to say what is unfit

to do. —I beg of you in God's name hide me somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me, or throw me into the sea, to be forever

out of your sight. Approach and deign to touch me 1590 for all my wretchedness, and do not fear.

No man but I can bear my evil doom.

**CHORUS:** Here Creon comes in fit time to perform or give advice in what you ask of us.

Creon is left as sole ruler in your stead.

**OEDIPUS:** Creon! Creon! What shall I say to him? 1596 How can I justly hope that he will trust me? In what is past I have been proved towards him an utter liar.

[Enter CREON.]

**CREON:** Oedipus, I've come

1600 not so that I might laugh at you nor taunt you with evil of the past. But if you still

are without shame before the face of men reverence at least the flame that gives all life, our Lord the Sun, and do not show unveiled 1605 to him pollution such that neither land nor holy rain nor light of day can welcome.

[To a SERVANT.]

Be quick and take him in. It is most decent that only kin should see and hear the troubles of kin.

70 **carcass** *n.* dead body of an animal; here, scornful references to Oedipus' own body.

**OEDIPUS:** I beg you, since you've torn me from 1611 my dreadful expectations and have come in a most noble spirit to a man that has used you vilely<sup>71</sup>—do a thing for me.

I shall speak for your own good, not for my own.

**CREON:** What do you need that you would ask of me?

**OEDIPUS:** Drive me from here with all the speed you can  
to where I may not hear a human voice.

**CREON:** Be sure, I would have done this had not I wished first of  
all to learn from the God the course 1620 of action I should follow.

**OEDIPUS:** But his word  
has been quite clear to let the parricide, 72 the sinner, die.

**CREON:** Yes, that indeed was said.

1625 But in the present need we have best discover what we  
should do.

**OEDIPUS:** And will you ask about a man so wretched?

**CREON:** Now even you will trust 1630 the God.

**OEDIPUS:** So. I command you—and will beseech you— to her that  
lies inside that house give burial

as you would have it; she is yours and rightly you will perform the  
rites for her. For me— 1635 never let this my father's city have me  
living a dweller in it. Leave me live

in the mountains where Cithaeron is, that's called

my mountain, which my mother and father

while they were living would have made my tomb. 1640 So I may  
die by their decree who sought indeed to kill me. Yet I know this  
much:

no sickness and no other thing will kill me.

I would not have been saved from death if not For some  
strange evil fate. Well, let my fate

1645 go where it will.

Creon, you need not care

about my sons; they're men and so wherever  
they are, they will not lack a livelihood. But my two girls—so sad  
and pitiful—

150 whose table never stood apart from mine, and everything I  
touched they always shared— O Creon, have a thought for them!  
And most

I wish that you might suffer me to touch them and sorrow with  
them.

[Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE, OEDIPUS' two  
daughters.]

1655 O my lord! O true noble Creon! Can I really be touching them,  
as when I saw?

What shall I say?

Yes, I can hear them sobbing—my two darlings! and Creon has had  
pity and has sent me

1660 what I loved most? Am I right?

**CREON:** You're right: it was I gave you this  
because I knew from old days how you loved them as I see now.

**OEDIPUS:** God bless you for it, Creon,  
1666 and may God guard you better on your road than he did me!  
O children,  
where are you? Come here, come to my hands,  
1670 a brother's hands which turned your father's eyes,  
those bright eyes you knew once, to what you see, a father seeing  
nothing, knowing nothing, begetting you from his own source of life.

I weep for you—I cannot see your faces— 1675 I weep when I think  
of the bitterness there will be in your lives, how you must live before  
the world. At what assemblages

gay company will you go and not come home 1680 in tears instead  
of sharing in the holiday? And when you're ripe for marriage,  
who will he be the man who'll risk to take such infamy  
as shall cling to my children, to bring hurt  
on them and those that marry with them? What

1685 curse is not there? —Your father killed his father  
and sowed the seed where he had sprung himself and begot you  
out of the womb that held him.†

These insults you will hear. Then who will marry you? No one, my  
children; clearly you are doomed

1690 to waste away in barrenness unmarried. Son of  
Menoceus,<sup>73</sup> since you are all the father left these two girls, and  
we, their parents, both are dread to them—do not allow them  
wander like beggars, poor and husbandless.

1695 They are of your own blood.

And do not make them equal with myself in wretchedness; for you  
can see them now so young, so utterly alone, save you only. Touch  
my hand, noble Creon, and say yes. 1700 If you were older, children,  
and wiser,

there's much advice I'd give you. But as it is, let this be what you  
pray: give me a life wherever there is opportunity  
to live, and better than was my father's.

**CREON:** Your tears have had enough of scope; no go within the  
house.

71 **vilely** *adv.* wickedly.

72 **parricide** *n.* one who murders one's father.

73 **Son of Menoeceus** Creon.

**OEDIPUS:** I must obey, though bitter of heart.

**CREON:** In season, all is good.



**OEDIPUS:** Do you know on what conditions I obey?

**CREON:** You tell me them,  
1710 and I shall know them when I hear.

**OEDIPUS:** That you shall send me out to live away from Thebes.

**CREON:** That gift you must ask of the God. **OEDIPUS:** But I'm  
now hated by the Gods. **CREON:** So quickly you'll obtain your prayer.

**OEDIPUS:** You consent then?

**CREON:** What I do not mean, I do not use to say.

**OEDIPUS:** Now lead me away from here. **CREON:** Let go the  
children, then, and come. **OEDIPUS:** Do not take them from me.

**CREON:** Do not seek to be master in everything,  
1722 for the things you mastered did not follow you throughout  
your life.

[As CREON and OEDIPUS go out.]

**CHORUS:** You that live in my  
ancestral Thebes, behold this Oedipus, —  
Him who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful;  
1725 not a citizen who did not look with envy on his lot—  
see him now and see the breakers of misfortune swallow him!  
Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till he has  
passed the final limit of his life secure from pain.

## 6. Oedipus Rex (Audiobook)

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## 7. Oedipus Rex (Stage)



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# 8. Seven Tragedies of Sophocles: Antigone

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## **Seven Tragedies of Sophocles Antigone**

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**Antigone**

**(Dramatis Personae) Antigone Ismene**

**Chorus of Theban Elders Creon**

**Guard Haimon Teiresias Messenger Eurydice**

**Second Messenger**

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**Antigone** Dear sister, Ismene, my love and my life,  
do you know of any ill that Zeus has not  
inflicted on us in our brief lives, because of Oedipus?  
For I have witnessed pain and madness, indeed,  
and shame and dishonour yes, all of these 5  
have been a part of our fate and disaster.  
And even now men speak of a new decree  
the general has pronounced to all the city folk.  
Have you heard of this, or you unaware of still  
more hostile cruelty urged upon the ones we love? 10

**Ismene** No word has come to me, Antigone, about  
our loved ones, neither fair nor foul, since we  
were robbed of our dear brothers both,  
in mutual slaughter on that dread and single day.  
And since the Argive army left in the night 15  
just past, I have had no further news  
to bring me either grief or happiness.

**An.** Just as I thought and so I have called you here,  
alone outside the gates to hear the news from me.

<b>Is.</b>	What then? You would uncover some dark threat?	20
<b>An.</b>		
	Lord Creon has honoured only one of our	
	two brothers with a grave, dishonouring his twin.	
	Men say he has interred Eteocles beneath	
	the earth with all due rites and ceremony,	
	to rest in honour with the dead below,	25
	while poor dead Polyneices' corpse, men say,	
	he has decreed to all the citizens that they	
	must neither give it burial, nor cries of grief,	
	but leave the corpse unburied and unwept,	
	to give a welcome larder to sharp-eyed birds.	30
	Such orders, men say, the noble Creon has also	
	enjoined on you and me, on me, I say, on me...	
	and now he is coming even here to announce	
	his news to those as yet in ignorance, a thing	
	of some importance too, since he will condemn	35
	all those who disobey to public stoning in the streets.	
	That is the situation, and you will soon reveal	
	if you are noble born, or will betray your line.	

**Is.** You always were impetuous... but if things are  
as you say, what can I do to hinder him, or help? 40

**An.** Perhaps you can share an enterprise with me.

**Is.** What enterprise? Just what is in your mind?

**An.** Will you join hands with me to bury him.

**Is.** You think to bury him, a thing forbidden to all?

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**An.** Yes! Bury my brother and yours, like it or not! 45

For I shall not be blamed for betraying him!

**Is.** Rash fool you are, when the king forbids!

**An.** It is not his right to keep me from my own.

**Is.** Oh, no! Consider our father, sister, how

he died, an object of hatred, all honour gone, 50

a man who took it on himself, with his

own hands, to gouge, destroy his eyes;

and then his wife and mother, ours as well,

she throttled out her life in the woven noose;

and third and last, our brothers, on the self- 55

same day, in rashness, both fulfilled their fate,

and brought about their deaths with mutual hands.

Consider again how we, the sole surviving kin,

how we shall both be ruined, yes, in misery, if we

run counter to the vote and power of a king. 60

We must remember this – we are mere women both,

and so we cannot hope to combat men. And so,

since we are ruled by those who are more powerful,



we must obey them, and suffer even worse, if needs  
must be. And so I shall beg of those beneath the earth 65  
to pardon me for what I am compelled to do,  
and I shall obey the men who walk in power.

It makes no sense to flout due moderation here.

**An.** I would not pressure you to work with me, not even if  
you wanted to, and gladly changed your mind... 70

Be just what you choose yourself to be, while I myself  
shall bury him – and if I die, then well and good.

For I shall lie in love beside my best beloved, when I  
have done this crime of piety: the time to please the dead  
below is longer far than that required to satisfy the world 75  
above.

For I shall rest there evermore... but you, so be your will,  
be guilty of dishonouring the practice honoured by the gods!

**Is.** I shall not be guilty of dishonouring the laws of god,  
but I am not empowered to flout by force the people's will.

**An.** Excuses are easy to make – but I shall make my way 80  
and heap the earth on my dear brother's tomb.

**Is.** My dear misguided darling, how I fear for you...

**An.** Fear not for me, guide rather your own course aright.

**Is.** At least you must not advertise your plan to anybody else,

but keep it closely hid and I will also keep it so...

85

**An.** Proclaim it rather! Your silence will win my hatred more,

unless you broadcast, shout my crime aloud to all.

**Is.** Your blood runs hot in the face of chilling threats.

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**An.** I know I shall find most favour where most I ought.

**Is.** If you succeed perhaps, but what you strive for is impossible.

90

**An.** So then I'll fail, but only when my strength fails me... **Is.** It is not right to hunt in vain in a hopeless quest... **An.** To say such things will earn my hate, and you

will be hated too, and justly, by our brother dead.

Allow me, please, to suffer the dread results

of foolishness... for at least I shall not suffer then the thing I hate the most, a shameful death.

**Is.** If that is your decision, go, but be assured of this, despite the folly of your quest, your loved ones love you still.

### **Chorus**

Sunlight, fairer yet than all str.

the former days to shine 101

on seven-gated Thebes,

you have shone at last, bright eye of this golden day, have come

across the streams of Dirke, 105

have put to flight the men who came from Argos, white their shields, in total panoply,

and fled far swifter than they came.

This host it came against our land, 110

the reason – Polyneices' fretful claim, and screaming shrill it  
stooped

upon our land, an eagle plumed on wings of snow, all white,  
allied with full array of arms 115  
and horse-haired helmet crests.

He stood outside our walls, ant. his a ring of spears agape  
with bloodied teeth, a threat  
to the sevenfold mouths 120  
of Thebes... but he was gone before his jaws were glutted on our  
blood, or pine fed flame engulfed our crown of towers.

The clatter of war rose thick about him, 125  
indomitable the dragon born battle cry.

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For Zeus he loathes boasts made  
 by an arrogant tongue, and so when he saw them, a river in  
 spate, and filled 130  
 with the clangour of gold-clad disdain,

that man he hurled down with thunder and fire,  
 as he strove at the peak  
 of endeavour, advancing victory's cry.

And he fell, hurled, twisting down to the earth, his torch clasped **str.**  
 still in his hand, who had then in his madness breathed 1  
 35

hatred most bitter against us.  
 Dashed, disappointed  
 his hopes, and mighty Ares, god 140  
 of war, allotted each their different fate, rude help and harnessed  
 strength.

Seven captains, each marshalled to match matching champions,  
 each at the sevenfold gates, abandoned their gear, all of bronze, a  
 trophy 145  
 for Zeus, save for two, ill fated this pair, twins born  
 of one mother, one sire, spear shafts set against each the other's  
 they stood, to the fate

of a mutual death both condemned.

And victory has come, fair of fame, to Thebes, a city that loves its **ant.**  
 wealth of chariots, and the wars 1  
 are all done and behind us now, 50

so let us forget, and dance  
 through the night to the homes  
 of the gods in our dance, Dionysus our guide, as his feet beat the  
 earth.

But here is the king of this land, lord Creon, the son of Menoeceus,  
 new come to the throne, the most recent chance brought by the 155  
 gods: what fresh plan does he urge that he comes, and has 1  
 summoned this council of elders 60

to meet in assembly,  
 brought by a common command.

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**Creon** My friends, our ship of state, storm-tossed by the gods, has been set once more by them upon a safe and even keel;

and I have summoned you by messenger, from all the citizens

especially, to come, because I know, and well, that you 165

did ever honour loyally the rule of Laius in the house –

and so too after him, when Oedipus was ruler of the state... and when he... died... why still you remained a bastion

of common and supportive sense for their successive heirs.

When those two men did perish on the self same day, 170

struck down by a mutual fate and by each other's hand, and they did share the guilt and shame of fratricide,

I then assumed the throne and all the cares of royal power by dint of my closest kinship with the brothers dead.

It is impossible to know and understand the heart 175

and soul and intellect of any man, until he is revealed, submitting to the daily test of government and rule.

For if a man, entrusted with the total guidance of the state, will take no heed of counsel from the best of men,

but keeps a lock upon his tongue through some anxiety, 180

why him I judge, have always judged the worst of men; and if any man considers that a friend weighs more in his affections than the state, why him I count as nothing worth. For I – Zeus be my witness, who forever sees all things –

would never hold my peace were I to see disaster speed 185

against the citizens so as to ruin our security, nor yet could I befriend a man, at any time, who posed a threat to the state, because I know and know it well that she, our city, is our bulwark and our strength, in whose

safe care we sail and prosper and find proper friends. 190

With principles like these I shall enhance our city's fame. Accordingly, I have publicly pronounced my policy regarding these two brothers, the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who died a hero's death, his spear in hand,

in defence of this city, a hero I say, he shall be buried 195

in a tomb, with all the offerings that are sent below to accompany

the very best and noblest of the dead; but that man's brother, yes,  
Polyneices I mean, who, though he was an exile, descended on  
his native land and gods, intent on sack and fire 200  
and pillage, intent on drinking kindred blood, on leading others  
of his kin in slavery, of him it is decreed that none shall gratify his  
corpse  
with proper burial rites, nor yet lament for him,  
but men must leave his body all exposed, a feast 205

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	for carrion birds and dogs, gross spectacle of shame. My mind is thus made up, and never shall the men of shame outstrip the just, so long as I hold sway; whoever, though, has served this city well, alive or dead, that man I shall both honour and respect.	210
<b>Ch.</b>	It is your pleasure then, Menoeceus' son, to deal in contrary fashion with the traitor and the patriot.	
<b>Cr.</b>	Employ the law's full force upon the dead, therefore, and on as many of us as yet do live. This is your right. You will, of course, ensure my will is done...	215
<b>Ch.</b>	That task were entrusted better to a younger man.	
<b>Cr.</b>	I have posted eager guards to oversee the corpse. What else then would you still enjoin on us?	220
<b>Cr.</b>	You must not sympathise with those who may transgress. No man is quite so foolish that he wants to die.	
<b>Cr.</b>	That would be the penalty, be sure... but oftentimes a man has been corrupted by the hope of gain.	
<b>Guard</b>	My lord, I shall not speak as one who has come, quite out of breath from haste, nor as one fleet of foot, since many times my anxious and whirling thoughts	225
	delayed my progress here, and brought me to a stop. For my inner voice would speak, and that at length, 'You fool! You know what pay awaits you there!' 'You clown, yet more delay?' 'If Creon learns of this from someone else...then yours will be the sorry ass!'	230
	Such consternation checked my tardy progress here, and so a meagre path becomes a marathon... At last, however, my resolve to come to you, it won the day...and I will tell my tale, such as it is, mere bagatelle... and anyway I guess one thing alone is certain sure,	235
<b>Cr.</b>	I cannot suffer anything outside my share of destiny. What is this tale that causes such distress?	
<b>Gu.</b>	I want to tell you first my role in this – I didn't have one, actually, nor did I see the man who did... do this thing – and so by rights I shouldn't pay the penalty...	240

**Cr.** You shrewdly aim to fence this thing around, blockade  
yourself from blame... You clearly have a novel tale to  
**Gu.** tell. Yes, dangerous news will urge long-windedness upon  
a man...

**Cr.** Then spit it out and then be off with you!  
**Gu.** I'm telling you... Someone just now has gone 245

**Cr.** and done a burial, has sprinkled thirsty dust  
upon the flesh, performed the necessary rites... What's  
that? What man would dare that crime?

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**Gu.** I do not know. For there was no mark of shovel there,  
no clods dug up by a hoe. The earth was packed 250  
and barren dry, unbroken even by the ruts  
of wagon wheels – the perpetrator left no trace.  
And when the early morning watchman showed  
us this, all felt a dreadful clutch of fear.  
For the corpse had vanished, not buried fully yet – 255  
a scanty covering of dust sufficient to placate the dead.  
No hint at all there was that predator or dogs  
had come, no sign of any rending of the flesh.  
Recriminations then flew thick and fast, with guard  
accusing guard, until it would have come at last 260  
to blows – and no one there to check the brawl.  
For each and every one of us could have done this thing...  
and yet there was no proof, and all denied their guilt.  
Prepared we were to grasp hot iron in our hands, to walk  
on fire and call the gods to witness we were innocent, 265  
were not involved, knew nothing of the crime,  
were not complicit in the planning or the act.

At length, when nothing further came from our  
 enquiries, a comment was made which had us all  
 in fear survey our boots. For we could think of no 270  
 reply nor plan of action that was not fraught  
 with peril. For it was said the crime should be  
 referred to you, that there should be no cover up.  
 This counsel won the day and the lot selected me,  
 poor foolish wretch that I am, to win this privilege. 275  
 So I am come against my will and yours, I know.  
 For no man likes to be the bearer of bad news.

**Ch.** My lord, I have long been nurturing the thought  
 that this act may have been driven by the gods.

**Cr.** Enough, before your words fill me with rage, and you 280  
 are found to be as senile as your age suggests,  
 since what you say cannot be borne, declaring that  
 the gods have any care about that wretched corpse.  
 Would they have buried him and honoured him  
 as if he were a gallant hero when he came in fact 285  
 to torch their colonnades and temples, overthrow

their images, lay waste their land, destroy their laws?

Can you conceive of the gods respecting evil men?

Not so! For from the first some citizens begrudged

my will and muttered secretly against me, shook 290

their heads, refused to bear in cheerfulness my yoke

and my dominion, as right and justice demand.

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These are the men, I am convinced, that have bribed  
the guards, and have suborned them into wickedness.  
For nothing ever took root so evil among men 295  
as pieces of silver. Cash brings destruction on the state,  
drives men to betray their homes and their native land,  
perverts the consciousness and turns the noble minds  
of men so they can countenance all acts of shame.  
Corruption teaches men the varied kinds of villainy, 300  
highlights the potential sleaze in every enterprise.  
But as many as have profited by this crime have but  
ensured that they in time will pay due recompense.  
And so – as still I hold lord Zeus in high regard –  
be well assured – and hear my solemn oath on this, – 305  
unless you find the guilty man who did this burial,  
and then deliver him to me before my very eyes,  
then death alone will not suffice for you, until,  
hung out in torment, you inform upon this violation,  
so you may learn in future whence to snatch your gain, 310  
and also learn the lesson that you should not be blind

in your love affair with each and every source of coin.

For you will see that more men are destroyed

by ill-gotten gains than are made secure by them.

**Gu.** You grant me leave to speak, or should I turn and go? 315

**Cr.** You do not understand how tiresome is your talk?

**Gu.** Do I tire your ears alone, or your thoughts as well?

**Cr.** But why define the seat of irritation?

**Gu.** The criminal pains your heart, I but your ears...

**Cr.** Good gods, what a natural clown you are! 320

**Gu.** Not such a clown as to have done this thing.

**Cr.** On the contrary, and you sold your soul for cash!

**Gu.** Ye gods!

It is terrible when the judge can get it wrong!

**Cr.** Philosophise, so be your wish – but if you do not

produce for me the men who did this thing, you shall 325

aver that criminal gain brings sorrows in its wake.

**Gu.** Why, I wish then he be found... but whether he

be caught or not – and fortune be the judge of that –

be sure you will not see me coming here again.

And now, beyond all hope and expectation safe, 330

I owe the gods a monster debt of gratitude.

**Chorus**

Many things dread and wonderful, str.

none though more dread than mankind –

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voyaging across the white sea's waste, he makes his way, storm tossed from the south,	335
closed in by overarching, tumbling waves he sails the valleys between, and of the gods, oldest born, Mother Earth, everlasting, unwearied he constantly turns, year in and out criss- crossing the plough,	340
working the mule and the land.	
Light-hearted tribes of the birds, he ensnares, taking joy in the hunt, and the clans of wild beasts, salt sea fish scoured from the deep,	ant. 3 45
trapped in the coils of the well woven nets, masterful man...conquering too with his traps high country beasts, their delight the wild and the space, breaks in the wild mane of the horse	350
that submits to the yoke, and the unflagging bull from the hills.	
Speech too and thought swift as the wind he devised and the impulse creative of statecraft he learned,	str. 3 56
houses to ward off the frost's inhospitable sharpness of sky, rain's lancing shafts, an answer for every demand that exists or may threaten him,	360
yet to come. Only grave death admits no escape... Deadly diseases yield now to cure.	
Wisdom he has beyond dreams of invention, now bringing him ill and now yet again to salvation, should he follow the law, and honour sworn justice of gods: the city stands proud, but provides	ant. 366 3 70
no safe home for the rash, fixed on a life of crime. Let no such man share in my hearth, nor in my sentiments, the man who acts so!	375

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An omen sent by the gods!

How can it be? but how deny the certainty this is indeed the child  
Antigone?

Poor wretched child

of wretched Oedipus, 380

whatever does this mean? It cannot be

they lead you as a criminal, transgressing Creon's law,  
caught in an act of foolishness?



- 
- Gu.** Here is the girl that committed the crime -we caught  
her in the act of burial. But Creon, where is he? 385
- Ch.** He returns from the house to answer our need.
- Cr.** What is it here that makes my entrance opportune?
- Gu.** My lord, a man should never swear that he won't do  
a thing in case hindsight should make him out a liar, since  
I swore I wouldn't come back here in a hurry again, 390  
by reason of the threats with which you pelted me;  
but unexpected joys which come quite unforeseen  
are likely to outstrip by far all other happiness,  
and so I come, although I swore I never would,  
and bring this girl who was found in the act 395  
of tidying the tomb. No need this time to cast  
the lots, but I seized this opportunity for myself.  
And now, my lord, take her yourself and test  
her, put her to the question, as you like – while I  
shall rightly gain complete acquittal in this case. 400
- Cr.** Just how and where did you apprehend this girl?
- Gu.** She was in the act of burial, no more, no less!

**Cr.** You are aware then of the import of your words?

**Gu.** I saw her in the act of burying the corpse the which  
you had forbidden I assume that's plain and clear enough? 405

**Cr.** How is it she was seen and captured in the act?

**Gu.** Well, it was like this, you see... we went back  
to our post, all mindful of your dreadful threats,  
and swept away the shroud of dust which cloaked  
the body, laying the clammy corpse completely bare. 410

We sat ourselves down upon a ridge, upwind,  
to escape the stench that might assail us there,  
and each kept the others alert with floods of abuse,  
ensuring none grew careless in their task.

And that was how it was for quite a while until 415  
the sun's bright disk was at its zenith overhead  
and the heat grew stifling and all at once a blast

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of wind kicked up a dust storm from the ground,  
a nuisance of a thing which filled the plain, tore leaves  
and branches from the trees, and all the sky's great dome      420  
was choked with it, while we, eyes shut, endured  
god's plague, but when this storm at last abated,  
the child was spotted there, who cried aloud a cry  
as sharp in bitterness as that of any bird, as when  
it sees the empty nest stripped bare of fledgling young;      425  
and just so she on seeing the body there exposed  
screamed cries of grief and imprecations dire  
upon the men who had undone her work. At once  
she lifted up the dust dry earth in her cupped hands  
and lifted too a well shaped urn of bronze and crowned      430  
the corpse three times with threefold offerings of drink.  
And when we saw her there, we rushed her then  
to hunt her down, but she did not seem at all upset.  
We questioned her about her past and present crimes,  
and there she stood, did not deny a single thing.      435  
And so I am at once both happy and distressed...

To escape from danger oneself is very sweet indeed,  
but to do so at the cost of driving a friend into harm  
brings pain. All things, though, pale into insignificance,  
I think, and naturally so, compared with one's own reprieve. 440

**Cr.** You there, yes you, with your head cast down to the ground,  
do you confess, or deny that you have done these things.

**An.** I do declare I did these things, do not deny the fact.

**Cr.** Then you can take yourself off where you will,  
absolved of any grievous charge or guilt. 445  
You, though, answer me... and keep it brief.

Were you aware that I had publicly forbidden such an act?

**An.** I was aware of it, of course I was... You made it crystal clear.

**Cr.** And still you dared to contravene these laws?

**An.** I did, since Zeus had not pronounced these laws, 450  
nor yet does Justice, dweller with the gods below,  
prescribe such laws among the ranks of mortal men.  
I did not think that your decrees were of such weight  
that they could countermand the laws unfailing and  
unwritten of the gods, and you a mortal only and a man. 455

The laws divine are not for the now, nor yet for yesterday,  
but live forever and their origins are mysteries to men.

There was no way that I would wish to pay a penalty  
to gods for contravening them, and all because I feared

a tyrant's temper. I know that I must die of course – 460

quite irrespective of your will... and if, then, I must die

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before my time, I reckon that to my advantage – since who  
would choose to live, all set about with troubles such as mine,  
would not consider that to die would bring advantages?

And so the pain that might accrue for me in death 465

is but a trifle, although I would be hurt indeed were dogs  
to savage and shame my dead sibling's naked corpse,  
my mother's child... but as it is I feel no pain nor hurt.

And if by chance I seem to you to act in foolishness, it may  
just be it is a fool himself condemns my foolishness. 470

**Ch.** The child reveals her savage heart, itself a legacy  
from Oedipus... and quite incapable of compromise.

**Cr.** Know well that the most stubborn souls most often take  
the hardest fall, and that you will most often see  
the iron that is tempered hard and rigid in the flames, 475  
will see that metal fragment and shatter and snap.

I also know that the highest spirited horse can be controlled  
with the merest curb... nor is it ever possible for a man  
to think proud thoughts when he is his neighbour's slave.

This woman, though, has always known the way 480

of arrogance, just now did contravene established law  
and still compounds, a second time, her crime of pride,  
indulging herself in laughter and boasting her guilt.  
And so I am myself no man, but rather she the man,  
should she retain this seeming victory unchecked. 485

It matters not she is my sister's child, closer to me by blood  
than any of the folk who worship Zeus within my house,  
since neither she nor yet her sister shall escape the worst  
of fates for I charge that woman too with a share,  
an equal share in this conspiracy to bring about the burial! 490

So call her here! For I saw her just now in a passionate fit  
of madness within, quite out of control of her wits.

The minds of those who contrive treason and plots  
in the dark are like to betray themselves and so be caught.

I hate the man who when apprehended as a criminal 495  
will choose to glorify and make a virtue of his crime.

**An.** Do you wish to do more than merely kill your prisoner?

**Cr.** No more than that, since that is all I need to do.

**An.** Why then delay? This conversation brings me no

enjoyment, nor would ever any talk with you, 500

while talk with me brings no delight to you, I trust.

And yet what greater acclamation could I win,

but from the burial of my own brother's corpse.

And all the people here would say this crime did please

them too, if only terror did not lock their silent lips. 505

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- 
- Cr.** But the king is blessed with many fine advantages, not least of  
**A** which is his capacity to speak and act just as he likes.
- n.** Alone of Cadmus' folk you see the situation so... They see it 510  
**C** also so, but fawn and cower down to you. Have you no shame  
**r.** to think to be apart from them?
- An.**  
**C**
- r.** There is no shame in honouring one's brothers so.  
**A** Your other brother too both fought against him and died?  
**n.** All siblings from the self-same sire and mother both... How 515  
**C** honour then the one to slight the other man?  
**r.** Eteocles would not bear witness thus against dead kin.  
**A**  
**n.**
- Cr.**  
**A**
- n.** He would were you to give the traitor equal rights.  
**C** This is not his slave's, but a brother's corpse and death...  
**r.** Who wished to rape this land, while he defended it. 520  
**A** But nonetheless lord Death desires these burial rites. The  
**n.** patriot demands a better share than the renegade...  
**C**  
**r.**
- An.**  
**C** Who knows if things are quite so clear in Hades' house?  
**r.** The enemy, the friend are separate, alive or dead. I am  
**A** disposed to love by nature not to hate... 525  
**n.** Then go beneath the earth to love your dead if love you  
**C** must! So long as I live, no woman shall rule me.  
**r.**
- Ch.** But see, before the gates, Ismene here,  
your sister comes, shedding sisterly tears... and clouds of  
grief upon her fevered brow do shade her face 530  
to drown her loveliness.
- Cr.** You there, you, secret serpent, lurking in my house, you too  
have fed on me, all unawares, nor did I know I nurtured a  
twofold curse to rise rebellious against my throne – come, 535  
speak to me, confess! Did you share  
this burial with her, or do you deny complicity on oath?

**Is.** I have done this thing, if only she accepts my claim,  
**A** and I would share the guilt and in the punishment.  
**n.** I might, but right and justice never shall allow you this, 540  
**I** since you refused to help, nor yet did I accept your help. But  
**s.** in your present storms of strife I feel no shame

myself to sail with you to share your suffering.  
**An.** The dead and Hades too can witness whose deed this is! I  
**I** have no love myself for those who love in word alone.  
**s.** I beg you, sister, don't dishonour me, forbidding me to 545  
**A** share your death, but rather let me share in honouring the  
**n.** dead.  
 You shall not share my death, nor claim a share in deeds  
 that were not yours my willing death shall satisfy the day.

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Is.  
 A What life or love remains for me despoiled of you? Ask Creon  
 n. that! Since all your care is all for him! What good does it do 550  
 I to hurt, to wound me so?  
 s.

An.  
 I  
 s. The hurt was mine when forced to sneer at you.  
 A What can I do to remedy that hurt?  
 n. Preserve your life I don't begrudge you life. And shall I have 555  
 I no share at all in what is yours? You chose to live, I chose to  
 s. die.  
 A  
 n.

Is.  
 A At least I had my say on that...  
 n. Some will approve your choice, still others mine. And yet  
 I our folly now is shared...  
 s. Have courage now... you are alive, my soul was long since 560  
 A dead, which fitted me to serve the dead. 5  
 n. It seems that of these girls the one has gone stark mad just 65  
 C now, the other though has been quite mad from birth. Our  
 r. native common sense, my lord, cannot remain untouched by  
 I situations dire, must take its leave.  
 s. So much is sure for you, who chose to share her crime.  
 C  
 r.

Is.  
 C  
 r. What life is left for me to live alone bereft of her.  
 I Speak not of her – she is no more.  
 s. And shall you kill your own son's bride to be? There are 570  
 C plenty of other fields for him to plough. But none to offer  
 r. such a loving union...  
 I  
 s.

Cr.  
 A  
 n. I do not desire my sons to marry wicked wives.  
 C My Haemon, best beloved, your father does you wrong!  
 r. You and your precious marriage, how they irk... 575  
 C You shall deny your son his bride?  
 h. Death rather is the one to stop their union.  
 C  
 r.

	You have, it seems, decreed her death.	
<b>Ch.</b>	Both I and you... Waste no more time, you there, but take	
<b>C</b>	them both inside. Our women must	580
<b>r.</b>	no more be left to wander out of doors... Brave men will	
	even try to flee when close	
	upon their lives they see the march of death.	
		<b>str.</b>
<b>Ch.</b>	Happy are they whose time has not tasted disaster. For a	<b>a</b>
	house that is shaken by gods, there the curse fails not at all,	5
	but floods each generation in turn:	85
	just so the swell and the surge, pushed hard by grim	
	blasts of storm winds from Thrace, scouring the crests of	590
	the deep, darkling sea, stirs up the black silted sands,	
	beneath where the wracked and abutting cliffs resound.	<b>ant.</b>
	I have seen the longstanding ills of the house of Labdacus	<b>a</b>
	fall, blow on blow, in serried ranks on each successive age,	595

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	with no relief for any generation, rather some one of the gods stalks, harries them implacable. For now the last hope of the clan, these girls, whose light illuminates with future hope the house	600
	of Oedipus, in turn is dimmed with blood and dust by the gods below, bestirred by foolishness and obsessive self-destructive talk.	
	What wild lawlessness of human kind can limit your strength, lord Zeus?	<b>str.</b>
	Nor sleep, which entraps all things can master your power, nor the sequence of months, unwearied, of gods can contain it, but deathless and timeless your rule over gleaming Olympus.	<b>b</b> 6 05 6 10
	Both the next to now and future time, time also past conforms to this law: no thing of excess can enter our lives divorced from disaster.	615
	And hope that wanders far and wide is a comfort to some in their hearts, to many another a source of deceptive, false dreams. The ignorant man remains oblivious, until he treads	<b>ant.</b> <b>b</b> 6 20
	upon the flame: wisdom revealed the truth long ago that a man can reason the bad into good, when a god seduces his wit. But for only the shortest of spans does he live free of grief.	625
	But see, young Haemon, approaches, your youngest son...does he come full of grief, lamenting the fate of his bride to be, Antigone, whose bed he has lost?	630
<b>Cr. Haem on</b>	We shall know soon enough and swifter than seers might tell. My son, it cannot be you come enraged against your sire, I trust, on hearing of my ruling as regards your bride to be? Or are we still your father, honoured and loved regardless of her? My father, I am yours... and you it is that guides my life	635

with rules set down for me, the which I trust and keep.

No marriage shall I deem ever to be worth more to me  
than your example and sound leadership.

**Cr.** Indeed, my son, your duty demands your heart  
remains disposed precisely so to hear me and obey. 640  
For this is the reason why men pray, to get and keep  
compliant sons within their house,  
that they might repay its enemies with evils due, and  
honour their father's friends on equal terms.

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However, any man that begets a thankless child, how else 645

describe him but as one who breeds himself a store of pain,

a source of much amusement for his enemies?

And so do not for the sake of pleasuring a woman

throw away good sense, and always bear in mind

that such embraces give but comfort cold, when she 650

who shares your house is proven vile. For what

could be a more dreadful plague than an evil mate?

No, shrink from her as from some enemy, and send

the child to make her marriage bed in Hades' halls.

For her alone of all the citizens have I caught 655

in blatant disobedience to my will, and so I shall

not betray myself as false before my people, no, for I

shall kill her. Let her then pray to Zeus familial!

For if I am to nurture kin that is unnatural, I must,

show any foreigner at least as deep or deeper love. 660

A man who shows himself as sound in things domestic

and in the home that man will also prove himself to be

a worthy citizen, but the criminal who disparages the law

by force, who even thinks it right to rule the men who rule,  
that man will never win a word of praise from me. 665

The man who is established by the state to lead must have  
obedience in matters constitutional, both small and great –  
and I am confident that such a man, who can obey  
with grace, would also make a splendid king,  
would, marshalled in the battle's hail of javelins, 670  
stay staunch in his appointed place beside his friends.

There is no crime more heinous than disloyalty!  
It is the death of cities, makes desolate our homes...  
this is the thing that breaks apart the allied ranks,  
imposing a fate of desertion and flight. The rule of law 675  
preserves to best effect the lives of honest men.

The constitution and the rule of law must be preserved,  
must never be compromised by a woman's crime.  
Far better to fall, if fall one must, to a warrior's hand.  
No shame of being mocked as weaker than a woman then. 680

**Ch.** Unless we are deceived by our advancing years,  
the things you say are sensible, articulated well.



**Ha.** My father, the gods have sown in men the gift  
of wisdom, which is the very best of all our gifts,  
but I lack both the skill and experience to judge 685  
if you are right or wrong in what you say,  
and yet another man may make good sense...  
and I am by nature one to watch on your behalf,

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to hear what men may say and do, what faults impute.

The common herd are afraid to provoke your rage 690

and eye with the kind of talk you hate to hear, while I

can listen to these shady murmurings, with which

the citizens express their grief for her, this child,

'Of womankind,' they say, 'the least deserving she

to die such a dreadful death, because of a deed after all 695

most noble, who would not suffer her brother's corpse

to lie unburied in the bloody aftermath of strife, to be

consumed by ravening dogs and carrion birds... and so

deserves, does she not, to win, rather, prizes of gold?'

Dark rumours such as these spread secretly abroad. 700

There is nothing I hold more precious, father, no prize

is more dear to me than your safety, your success.

What greater prize could children win beyond

a parent's fair fame, or a parent win beyond a son's?

And so, do not forever keep a single, stubborn mood, 705

do not believe that you alone monopolise the truth.

If any man believes that he alone of all mankind

is wise, his tongue and heart alone of all are true,  
then under test that man will prove to be a hollow man.

There is no shame in a man learning more, 710  
be he ever so wise, nor in remaining flexible.

You see yourself how next to the winter floods  
some trees yield to survive and save their limbs,  
while those resisting are uprooted and destroyed.

Just so the mariner who sails close hauled, no reefs 715  
in place, turns turtle and completes his trip capsized,  
the rowing benches all awash, keel uppermost.

So check your rage, allow yourself a change of heart.

For if it is right for a younger man, like me, to give  
advice, I say that though it is the best by far always 720

by nature to be judicious and indeed omniscient,  
why, failing that, and chance and fate will have it so –  
one should then learn from any man of good advice.

**Ch.** My lord, it is right to be advised by him, if his words  
ring true, and you by him, my son you both speak well... 725

**Cr.** Are we at our age then to take our lessons on how

to think and feel from such a callow youth as this?

**Ha.** But what I teach is just... I may be but a youth, but you  
should look not at my age, but at my character.

**Cr.** And is it in your character to honour criminals? 730

**Ha.** I would not recommend that any honour criminals.

**Cr.** And is not she herself assailed by such a malady?

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- Ha.** The men of Thebes, her city, think not so...
- Cr.** The city then dictates my policies to me?
- Ha.** Your answer smacks of youth and inexperience. 735
- Cr.** Whose judgement other than my own should guide my hand?
- Ha.** A city does not belong to any single man to rule...
- Cr.** Is not the state the business of the ruler's guiding hand?
- Ha.** Oh, better you to be sole ruler of a wilderness.
- Cr.** This youth, it seems, supports the female's cause! 740
- Ha.** If you are female, yes!! My care is all for you...
- Cr.** An utter traitor you to cross your father's just decree.
- Ha.** I rather see your view of justice is mistaken and awry.
- Cr.** I am mistaken then to honour what I legislate?
- Ha.** No law of man is just that tramples down the law of god. 745
- Cr.** A coward's nature yours to fawn on womanhood!
- Ha.** No coward's nature mine despite your charge...
- Cr.** But everything you say is said on her behalf...
- Ha.** And for me and you and for the gods below.
- Cr.** There is no way you'll marry her while yet she lives. 750
- Ha.** Then if she dies her death condemns another too...

- Cr.** You make so bold as to come and threaten me?
- Ha.** Where lies the threat in countering stupidity?
- Cr.** You will regret your empty wisdom when it causes tears.
- Ha.** If you were not my father I would say that you were mad. 755
- Cr.** A woman's plaything you, do not attempt to sweet-talk me...
- Ha.** You wish to have your say, but then refuse to hear me speak.
- Cr.** Quite so! But know this well, by all that's holy, you  
 will win no pleasure from your foul abuse of me...  
 Go, bring her out, the loathsome thing that she might die 760  
 at once in front of him, before her lover's very eyes.
- Ha.** No, not before my eyes, do not think that,  
 she shall not die in front of me, and nor  
 shall you lay eyes again upon my face.  
 Be mad and keep instead the company of sycophants. 765
- Ch.** My lord, the man has gone in rage and haste...  
 a young man's pain is deep and sharp.
- Cr.** Oh, let him dream immortal, adolescent dreams!  
 Yet still he will not save these women from their fate.
- Ch.** You have it in your mind to kill them both? 770

**Cr.** No, not the innocent... for your advice is sound.

**Ch.** What is the fate you have decreed to be Antigone's?

**Cr.** I shall take her somewhere off the beaten track

and hide her there, alive, within a rocky cave,

providing food enough to satisfy the rite,

775

so that the state might not incur blood guilt.

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	And in that place she then may pray to Death, the god she cherishes the most, to win from him the prize of life, or learn at last what a waste of effort and time it is to dedicate oneself to what is dead and gone.	780
	Desire, in battle unconquered, Desire besetting the fortunes of men, keeping sweet vigil on youth's downy cheek, sweeping over <b>Ch.</b> the sea and the dwellings of men in the wild, not one of the gods nor any of men, ephemeral things, can elude you, a passion to drive a man mad.	<b>str.</b> 79 0
	Perverting the minds of even right-minded men to corruption, confusion and strife you rouse here between men who are kin. Desire springing clear from the eyes of the beautiful bride	<b>ant.</b> 79 5
	is victorious, a power enthroned beside natural law, while Aphrodite always wins and works her arbitrary will.	799
	But now when I see these things I am myself transported past the bonds of blind obedience, no longer can restrain well springs of tears, when I see Antigone, embarked upon her path to the universal bridal suite of death.	805
<b>An.</b>	Observe me, fellow citizens of this my native land, how I embark on this my final journey, look one last time upon the light of day, and nevermore... Death leads me, living still, to universal sleep, the shores of Acheron.	<b>str.</b> <b>a</b> 81 2
	No share for me in marriage songs, no bridal hymn has ever honoured me, but I shall be the bride of Death.	
<b>Ch.</b>	Fair fame and praise are your companions, departing to the depths of those now dead, and no disease has wasted you, no fatal sword thrust earned,	<b>syst.</b> <b>A</b> 82 0
	but you shall, all willing and unique of mortals, go down alive to Hell.	



	I heard of Niobe, once stranger guest and child of Tantalus in	<b>ant.</b>
	Thebes, how on Mount Sipylus she died most dreadfully,	<b>a</b>
<b>An.</b>	overwhelmed by ivy tight tendrils of stone, eroded by rain, as	82
	men say,	5
	and unfailing snow, while she drenches with tears	83
	everlasting	0

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the hills and the vales of her breasts. The god has set just  
such a fate for me.

But she was immortal and born of the gods, while we are 835  
but mortals and men born of men.

**Ch.** Yet for a woman to share as she dies a fate that was won  
by a god, why that is renown, both in life and ever after in  
death!

I am mocked! Why mock me now before my face, by all  
the gods paternal, when you could mock me dead and  
gone? Ah, city mine – and wealthy gentlemen, her citizens! **str. b**  
**An.** You springs of Dircè, 840  
sacred ground of Thebes, so rich in chariots, you are my 845  
only witness now,

as, all unwept by friends, constrained by his decrees, I make  
my way to an alien tomb's confinement of rock. 850  
I grieve for my fate as one displaced, who shares no place

with neither the quick nor the dead.  
**Ch.** You have dared the very limit of audacity, to fall headlong **str. c**  
and heavily before 855  
the pedestal of Justice, child.

You pay the continuing price of a father's guilt.

**An.** You touch upon my bitterest distress,  
renew again my cries of grief for a father's fate, and the **ant. b**  
fate of all the famous house of Labdacus. 861

I grieve the curse upon  
my mother's marriage bed, and my father's union with 865  
her, incestuous and doomed.

Such were the parents that gave to me a life accursed.  
Accursed in turn myself and all unwed I go to live with  
them. You also won a fatal Argive marriage, Polyneices, 871  
and dead yourself win too for me a living death.

**Ch.** Respect for the dead deserves respect, but the king cannot  
condone an act that contravenes his majesty. **ant. C**  
Your own madness has destroyed you. 875

No tears for me, no friends, no marriage song for this poor  
**An.** wretch,  
as she is led upon her destined path. No more am I **epode**  
allowed to look upon

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	the sun's bright sacred light and seeing eye no friend, not one to weep or grieve for me and my pitiful fate.	880
<b>Cr.</b>	Do you not realise that none would cease from songs of grief and lament before a death, were they of any proven benefit? Get rid of her, and quickly now! And when you have enclosed	885
	her inside her hollow and vaulted tomb, according to my word, then leave her there alone and desolate, should it be her wish to die or be concealed and buried there alive in such a resting place; For we shall keep ourselves unsullied by her blood, this girl... however, she shall be deprived of life in the world above.	890
<b>An.</b>	My tomb and bridal chamber both, my shaded dwelling place and prison evermore, in which I start my journey now to meet my kin, the many of my numbered dead among the many dead Persephone has welcomed as her guests; And I go down to death before my span of life is spent,	895
	the last of all my line I am, and am by far most pitiful. And yet as I depart I nurture still the powerful hope my coming will well please my father, and my mother too, and that my dear, dear brother too will welcome me. For did I not with my own two hands take care to lay	900
	you out and wash your bodies properly, and pour the pious offerings? And now, dear Polyneices, I have earned a harsh reward for burying your corpse. And yet right thinking men approve the rites I gave... although I never would have taken on this task to spite	905
	the state, had I been mother to a brood of children, or if it had been some man of mine that lay corrupt in death. You ask that I should justify that paradox? One husband dead I might have won another man, or even further children by some other sire...	910
	but with both my parents dead in Hades' halls, there is no chance another brother can be born. This is the reason why I honoured you so much, and why King Creon thinks that I am mad to dare such a dreadful thing, my dearest Polyneices...	915

And now he has laid hands on me to drive me as  
his prisoner, unwed, no marriage song for me, no share in a  
family of my own, nor in the joy of rearing sons, but alone and  
desolate of friends, poor wretch, alive

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I go, deep down amidst the hollow regions of the dead. [1](#) 920

What privilege, or law of gods have I infringed?

But why should I look any more to gods for help?

Have I indeed one mortal friend to bring me aid,

now that my piety has earned this impious prize?

But if these things find favour with the gods, 925

I will in death find out the nature of my crime;

but if the fatal fault belongs to these, then let them too

achieve the self same fate they have prescribed for me.

**Ch.** Her soul is still beset

by the same emotional storm. 930

**Cr.** And so her guards will pay a price

of tears for tardiness.

**An.** That sentence brings my death

as close as it can be.

**Cr.** I have no words of spurious comfort 935

to bring false hope of delay.

**An.** Ancestral city and home that is Thebes,

ancestral gods,

I am their immediate victim now.

Observe me, lords of Thebes, 940

your last and lone princess,

and this my fate at the hands of such as these,

because I honoured what was right.

**Ch.** Danaë too was constrained to hide her form **str. a**

from heaven's light in a tomb of bronze – 945

concealed she bore the secret yoke of prisoner –

and yet she too was noble of birth, my child, my child –

entrusted then with the golden seed of Zeus. 950

The rule of fate is mystical indeed.

For there is no escape from fate, however rich or warlike

a man might be, possessed of black ships and a citadel.

Hasty tempered too, Lycurgus, son of Dyas, **ant.**  
**a**

was constrained, Edonian king – his mockery 956

the cause – by the god, enclosed in a prison of stone.

And in that place the joyous dread bloom of his madness 960

faded and died. He came to know the god he had

abjured in madness with his mockery.

For he had tried to check the Bacchants and the sacred  
flame

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1 There is considerable debate about the authenticity of vv. 903-920: if they are an interpolation, they were inserted before Aristotle's time, since he quotes vv. 911f in *Rhetoric*

3.16.9 and seems to have had the whole passage in his copy. The reservations of scholars about the authenticity of the lines may be due in part to their lack of sensitivity to Sophocles' presentation of Antigone's confusion and fear.



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	of Dionysus, had angered the Muses whose love is the pipe.	965
	Close by the Black Rock currents and twin sea	<b>st</b> <b>r. b</b>
	lay the shores of Bosphorus and Thracian Salmydessus' hostile coast, where neighbouring Ares saw	970
	the sockets of Phineus' twin sons blinded, cruelly gouged by the barbarous wife – sightless the two and demanding revenge – ensanguined the hands that plied and ploughed	975
	the shuttle, needle sharp.	
	Wasting away in wretched misery they wept for their fate, wretched itself, like their birth from a mother unhappily wed, who claimed for her line the race of Erechtheus, as ancient as days, nursed herself in a far flung cave as guest of her father's winds, Boreas, swift himself as the wind that sweeps the steep hills,	<b>ant.</b> <b>b</b> 98 0 98 5
	a daughter of gods – but even on her did the Fates, the immortals, bear down, my child.	
<b>Teiresias</b>	My lords of Thebes, we two are come a common road, and share one pair of eyes. A blind man's lot it is to journey thus dependent on a guide.	990
<b>Cr.</b>	What is it brings you here, Teiresias?	
<b>Te.</b>	I shall tell you all and you must heed my prophecy. I never yet have been a man to doubt your word.	995
<b>Cr.</b>	And so your guidance of the state was ever sound. I can bear witness to the benefits you brought.	
<b>Te.</b>	Believe that you are on fate's razor edge once more. Your meaning? For I shudder at your words. Then hear the evidence my art supplies and learn:	1000
<b>Cr.</b>	for I was sitting at an ancient vantage point where I observe the birds, a gathering place for each and every one	
<b>Te.</b>		

of them and there I heard a harsh cacophony of cries,  
unknown to me before, that drowned their song.  
I understood at last that with their bloody talons  
each was tearing at the others, as the whirl of wings      1005  
betrayed.  
At once in dread I sought to test the omen in an  
altar's flame

ignited for the task, but then Hephaestus' fire refused  
to kindle on the offerings, and from the victim's  
thigh there oozed and spat and sputtered on the  
embers there a noisome liquor, and then the bladder  
and its gall

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was dissipated in the air, while the thighs themselves 1010

lay bare, denuded of the fat which once had covered them.

Such were the signs of an experiment that had failed,

revealing nothing – and these I learned from my slave;

for he guides me just as I am a guide for other men.

Our city is sick with a sickness that your policy has brought. 1015

Our altars and our hearths are all alike polluted by the dogs

and birds with the flesh that they have garnered from

the corpse of the fallen and ill-fated son of Oedipus.

And so the gods no longer can accept our prayers

nor sacrifice nor yet our offerings of roasted meats, 1020

and nor can the cries of any bird give portents clear –

for they have glutted on a corpse's fat and blood.

Reflect, then, on these things, my son. For to err –

it is the common lot of all of humankind...

and yet, when a man has erred, that man need not 1025

remain mistaken and unfortunate, so long as he

redeems himself, does not remain intransigent.

Intransigence brings a reputation for stupidity.

Be easy with the dead, do not abuse the corpse:

what prowess is required to kill a victim twice? 1030

My son, my words are best designed to suit your case

the best, and best it is to profit from the best advice.

**Cr.** Old man, observe how each and every other man,

like an archer, makes of me his target, nor yet am I

without sure knowledge also of the art of prophecy, 1035

since its clannish masters long have traded in my life.

Make profits, drive your bargains in the silvered gold

of Sardis and, should you so desire, then trade as well

in Indian gold – but you shall not conceal him in a grave,

not even if the sacred eagle birds of Zeus himself desire 1040

to snatch and bring the carrion feast to Zeus's throne –

not even dread of that pollution would convince

me of the need to bury him. For I know well no man

can have the strength to bring pollution on the gods.

The very cleverest of men, Teiresias, my aged friend, 1045

fall fatally themselves into folly most foul, when they

for profit's sake dress up foul thoughts in fancy rhetoric!

**Te.** Agh!!

Does any member of this human race quite comprehend...

**Cr.** What? What is your present pearl of commonplace wit?

**Te.** that the pearl of greatest price is sound advice. 1050

**Cr.** As much, I trust, as folly is by far the greatest plague.

**Te.** Well, you should know, filled as you are with it...

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**Cr.** I do not wish to answer back a prophet with a curse.

**Te.** And yet you do by claiming that my words ring false!

**Cr.** Love of profit ever drove your prophet tribe. 1055

**Te.** The spawn of tyrants always hankers for ill-gotten gains.

**Cr.** Have you forgotten you are speaking to your king?

**Te.** No, nor that you hold that throne secure because of me.

**Cr.** You are skilled in prophecy, but attracted to crime...

**Te.** You will provoke my heart to betray its secret dread! 1060

**Cr.** Then spit it out, but do not hope to gain by what you say...

**Te.** There is no gain, I think, in what I say for you, or me.

**Cr.** Be sure you cannot trade upon my will to gain your ends.

**Te.** Be sure yourself of this: that you shall complete no more

than a minimum of days, as the racing chariot of the sun 1065

completes its daily course, before a son, begotten of

your loins, repays in death the living death of one

you thrust beneath the earth, while still alive, and housed

her in a tomb in shame, while yet again, you kept

above the earth a corpse, unburied and dishonoured, 1070

unholy, the lawful property of the gods below.

In bodies that belong to them you have no share,  
 nor do the gods above a rule that you have flouted now.  
 And so the Furies, vengeful emissaries of Death  
 himself, that soon or late destroy, shall lay in wait                    1075  
 to ambush you, and grasp you for these crimes.  
 Take note if I announce these things as one who has  
 been paid: for the brief erosion of time will soon reveal  
 the lamentations of the men and women of your house.  
 And all the towns of Greece are stirred with hostile rage,            1080  
 whose mutilated sons receive their burial rites from dogs  
 or beasts, or from some winged bird that takes the stench  
 of blasphemous corruption home to every city's hearth.  
 Such are the shafts I, archer like, have loosed at you,  
 because of provocation and the anger in my heart,                    1085  
 shafts accurate enough you'll not outrun their sting.  
 Boy, guide me homeward now, so he may vent  
 his spleen on younger men than me, and also learn  
 to cultivate a tongue which is more temperate  
 and a milder temper too than that he nurtures now.                    1090

**Ch.** My lord, the man has gone, dread omens on his lips,  
and I am very well aware that from the time my hair,  
once dark, grew white with the advance of years –  
I know his prophecies to us have never proven false

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<b>Cr.</b>	I know, I know, and so am deeply troubled in my mind... it is a	
<b>h.</b>	<b>C</b> dreadful thing to yield, but not to yield, and so	1095
	<b>C</b> to bring disaster crashing on my pride is dreadful too. It is	11
<b>r.</b>	your duty, Creon, to take due note of good advice.	00
<b>h.</b>	<b>C</b> What would you have me do? Advise, and I shall... yield. Go	
	now, release the maiden from her rocky tomb,	
<b>Cr.</b>	and rather give the corpse a proper burial.	
	And this is your advice you think that I should bend?	
<b>Ch.</b>	And as quickly as you can, my lord... swift footed nemesis	
<b>C</b>	advances from the gods to cut our folly quickly short. I	1105
<b>r.</b>	goes against the grain and yet in my heart of hearts	
<b>Ch.</b>	I know that my resolve must yield to harsh necessity.	
	Go then and act, do not entrust these tasks to other men.	
<b>Cr.</b>	I shall, and quickly, even as I am – do you go also too,	
	my friends, yes, all of you make haste, take axes in your	1110
	hands and hurry on to that far vantage point!	
	While I myself, since this is our decision made, shall be	
	the one to set her free in person who imprisoned her. For	
	now I apprehend it is the best to live one's whole life through	
	adhering strictly both to precedent and law.	
<b>Ch.</b>	Lord Dionysus, known by many names, the pride of Theban	<b>str.</b>
	Semele, and son of Zeus, deep thunderer, far Italy is in your	<b>a</b> 111
	watchful care, so too	6
	the sheltering and hospitable vale of Demeter's Eleusis...	11
		20
	Bacchus, Bacchus,	
	lord of Thebes, the maenads' and your mother's city, beside	1124
	the gentle stream of Ismenus your home, seeding ground of	
	the savage dragon's teeth.	
	In flickering light the Bacchic torch has spied you out beyond	<b>ant.</b>
	the double peak, up where the Corycian nymphs	<b>a</b>
	are eager in the Bacchic dance, beside Castalia's plunging	11
	stream.	30

The hilly heights of Nysa, ivy-clad  
bestow you on your way from vine green coastal plains,  
while Bacchanalian songs divine  
extol your glory on the road to Thebes. 1135

Yes, Thebes, honoured most by you of all the cities,  
your mother's home, the lightning's bride! And now this  
city and all its folk is in the grip 11  
40

of pollution and plague,

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	so stir your tread to heal, traversing high Parnassus' peak and the sounding straits of Euripus.	1145
	Leading the dance of lambent stars, conducting songs nocturnal, son sprung from Zeus, appear, reveal yourself our lord, attended by your	<b>ant.</b> <b>b</b> 11 50
	company of Nymphs, whose nightlong fervent dancing does your bounty honour, Iacchus!	
<b>Messenger</b>	You, neighbours of the house of Cadmus and of Amphion,	1155,
	there is no shape or condition of human life that I would praise as being stable, nor ever yet condemn for its monotony. For luck may stabilise or in its turn destabilise the fates of men who may be fortunate, or not, as the case may be; no man can prophecy for men about the permanence of things.	1160
	For Creon was once a man to envy, or so I thought, when he had saved the land of Cadmus from its enemies, had received as his reward the total rule and guidance of the land, and was blessed as well with a noble crop of sons. And now all of that is gone: for when a man himself betrays	1165
	his joy and pleasures, I cannot count his life worthwhile, but rather think of him as mere animate flesh, a corpse. For a man may be as vastly rich at home as you like, and live the life and style of a king – but if a man's capacity for joy in these is lost, well, as for ceremony, I would	1170
<b>Ch.</b>	not give the king a shadow of a price for all of that. What fresh burden of grief do you bring our royal house?	

<b>Me.</b> <b>Ch.</b> <b>Me.</b>	A burden of death, and the living are responsible. Who is the murderer and who the victim, speak! Haemon is dead, and slaughtered by no stranger's hand.	1175
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<b>Ch.</b> <b>Me.</b> <b>Ch.</b> <b>Me.</b> <b>Ch.</b>	His father's hand... or did he kill himself? He killed himself, enraged at his father's death decree. Teiresias, how true your prophecy has proved! Such are the facts. Yours the need ponder them. And now I also see Eurydice, poor thing, the wife	1180
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of Creon. Perhaps her coming shows awareness  
of her son's demise, unless it is coincidence...

<b>Eurydice</b>	Citizens of Thebes, I heard your words as I made my way to the gates, so that I could go and try propitiate the goddess Pallas with my prayers.	1185
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And as I prepared to free the bolt and open up

the gate, my ears were struck by the news of some disaster newly  
come upon the house... I staggered back in dread, and fainted in the  
arms of my attendants.

I beg you, tell me once again the nature of this news: 1190  
for I shall pay you heed as one well versed in woe.

**Me.** Dear lady, I was there and I shall tell you all I saw, shall not  
hold back one item of the truth of it.

For why should I seek to comfort you with words  
that must in time prove false? The truth is ever best. 1195

I accompanied your husband, walking as his guide across to the  
furthest reaches of the plain where still, harassed by dogs, there lay  
unpitied, Polyneices' corpse; and first we prayed to Hecate and to  
Pluto, both to check

their rage and smile on us, and then with waters pure 1200

we washed the body, what was left of it, and burned the scant  
remains with fresh cut boughs, and raised

up high a burial mound compounded of his native soil, and then  
we began to make our way to the stony bed

and hollow nuptial chamber of Antigone, bride of Death. 1205  
 Then from afar one of our number had heard shrill cries of grief,  
 their source – Antigone's unhallowed vault, and so he came to tell  
 this news to his master Creon;  
 then as the king crept ever nearer he too was met by cries,  
 quite inarticulate of grief, and so he moaned within, 1210  
 and gasped aloud his dread, 'What a fool I am, if my presentiments  
 are true! For this shall surely be  
 by far the most unlucky journey I have ever made. My son's  
 lament, it welcomes me... come, friends,  
 make haste, and when you reach the fissure in the tomb, 1215  
 near where the rocks were stripped away, observe  
 as you near the cave, if it is indeed the voice of Haimon I have  
 recognised, or if the gods have made a fool of me. So we obeyed the  
 master's bidding, desperate as he was,  
 and made the search: inside the farthest reaches of the tomb 1220  
 we saw that she was hanging there, suspended, her neck enclosed  
 in a delicate noose of muslin of the finest kind, while he was holding  
 her, his arms about her waist,  
 as he grieved for the loss of his bride beneath the earth,  
 and for his father's crimes and his own unhappy love. 1225  
 Then when the father saw his son he groaned within, approached  
 the boy and now, in tears, he spoke to him, 'My poor, poor child,  
 what have you done? What were you thinking of? Are you mad to  
 have broken in here?  
 Come out, my son, I beg of you with all my heart.' 1230

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Then Haimon rounded on his father with his eyes ablaze,  
made no reply, but spat in his face , wrenched out  
his double-hilted sword and, as his father ducked away  
in flight, he missed his stroke, so, disappointed then,  
and enraged at his failure, at once he flexed himself       1235  
against the sword and plunged the half of it within  
his side and, as he breathed his last, he clutched  
her in his moist embrace, and the swift red flood  
poured down to stain her pale white cheek.  
He lies there, his corpse entwined with corpse,       1240  
has won his marriage rites inside the hall of Death,  
to prove to mortal men that of all the ills that plague  
our kind the worst by far is plain stupidity.

**Ch.** What would you think to make of that? For Creon's wife  
has gone inside without a word to say of good or ill.       1245

**Me.** Her silence shocked me too... but I am nurtured by  
the hope she does not think it right to show in public view  
the pain she feels on hearing of her son's sad fate,  
but has rather gone inside to vent a private grief.

**Ch.** I do not know... although it seems to me that pain 1250

repressed in silence may threaten worse than loud lament.

**Me.** Then I will hurry now inside the house... in case

she harbours in the torment of her secret heart

some dark design, since your advice is sound and good:

that danger also lurks wherever earnest silence reigns. 1255

**Ch.** See where the king approaches now

and carries in his hands the proof,

if I may say, of his infatuation, since

no other made the tragic error here.

**Cr.** I grieve **str.**

for the tragic errors of an unsound mind,

that have ended in death –

behold the slayer and the slain,

the father and the son.

I grieve for my bankrupt and immoral soul! 1265

My son, my son, so young and dead,

I grieve for you,

your life has fled away...

and all because of my stupidity.

**Ch.** I see you realise the truth too late.

1270

**Cr.** I grieve

for the bitter lesson I have learned .

I see some mighty god has crushed my head

beneath his feet and thrust me onto cruel paths,

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has trampled all my love of life.  
I grieve the tragedy of humankind! 1275

**Messenger**

Lord king, your hands contain the cost of past  
and present grief, but soon inside the house  
it seems that you will see fresh cause of pain. 1280

**Cr.** Can any pain be worse than this?

**Me.** Your wife is dead, the loving mother of your dead  
son,  
poor woman, and she herself struck down just now.

**Cr.** I grieve,  
Hell, your harbour is insatiate! **ant.**  
But why am I your constant victim? 1285  
And you, you messenger of doom  
and news ineffable, what now?  
For I was dead and now you kill me twice!  
What say you, slave, what news?  
I grieve, I grieve... 1290  
Another death, you say, on top of death,  
and that my wife's?

<b>Ch.</b>	See for yourself. She is no longer hid within.	
<b>Cr.</b>	I grieve  to look upon this other second death, poor wretch.  What further doom awaits me still?  Just now I held my son within my arms.  And now another corpse confronting me...	1295
	I grieve for both the mother and the son.	1300
<b>Me.</b>	She sat beside the altar in the house and with a sharp-  edged blade allowed her eyes to close in peace, but not  before that she had wept for the fates of Megareus and her son,  the boy before you here, and, last of all had called  down all the curses due infanticide upon your head.	1305
<b>Cr.</b>	I grieve, I grieve  and my heart takes wing on fear. Will no one dare  to strike me down with a double edge of sword?  Poor wretch that I am, I grieve,  am drenched in wretched grief.	<b>str.</b>     1310
<b>Me.</b>	Indeed, you were found guilty by the woman dead	

of the death both of your son and of Antigone...

**Cr.** And by what means was she released by bloody death?

**Me.** With her own hand she stabbed herself beneath the heart, 1315

when she had learned about her son's departure,  
keenly wept.

**Cr.** The guilt for this cannot be fixed on any other man but me. **str.**

For I it was that killed you, I

and no man else, poor wretch, yes, I

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	confess the guilt. My servants, lead me off,	1320
	as quickly as you can, remove this block,	
	which is as good as dead.	1325
<b>Ch.</b>	If any words befit the time such words are they.	
	For briefest is best when tragedy strikes.	
<b>Cr.</b>	Let it come, let it come,	<b>ant.</b>
	yes, let it appear, the best of fates for me,	
	that brings for me the last of days,	1330
	let it come, let it come,	
	that I may never look again upon the light of day.	
<b>Ch.</b>	Such things are not for now. For we must do what the now	
	demands. For what will be must be for others to decide.	1335
<b>Cr.</b>	My prayers are all contained in that desire...	
<b>Ch.</b>	Then pray no more... for mortal men have no escape	
	from predetermined tragedy.	
<b>Cr.</b>	Then take this man quite out of sight,	<b>ant.</b>
	who, all unwilling, caused your death, my son,	1340
	and also yours, Eurydice, my wife, poor fool that I am,	
	nor do I know where I should look, where walk...	

For all my handiwork is awkward, ruined even, and 1345

upon my head there leaps intolerable fate...

**Ch.** By far the greatest part of happiness

is wisdom. We must not ever act impiously

toward the gods. Proud words 1350

of arrogant men receive harsh punishments...

old age learns at the last to be wise...

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## 9. Antigone (Audiobook)

[Click here to listen.](#)

## 10. Antigone (Film)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57x4ayPcsDo>





PART V

WEEK 6: THEATRICAL  
PRODUCTION, ACTING,  
AND DIRECTING, WEEK 7:  
THE IMPORTANCE OF  
BEING EARNEST, WEEK 8:  
THEATRICAL  
PRODUCTION, SET DESIGN,  
AND COSTUME DESIGN



# II. Part Two: Theatrical Production, Chapter 2 “Acting” & Chapter 3 “Directing”

This content can be found in its entirety with images by [clicking here for the pdf](#).

## **Part Two**

### **Theatrical Production**

#### 2      *Acting*Charlie Mitchell

One of the first images that spring forth when people think of actors is glamorous red carpet award shows filled with pampered stars whose pictures fill supermarket checkout magazines. Many assume a glamorous life of public attention, steady work, and colossal paychecks. But the reality of the average actor's life is starkly different, especially in the world of live theatre. There are extremely few overnight successes. Most actors toil for years before getting any high-profile acting jobs. Auditioning more than they work, they can face constant rejection from casting agents, directors, and producers. Most have studied for a long time to hone their skills, and even after establishing themselves, many continue to take classes or meet with coaches to keep their instincts sharp. Since lucrative acting jobs are hard to find and usually offer no permanent financial security, most actors have to

support themselves through other work. This is where the cliché of the “actor/waiter” originates; it is one of the few jobs where you can alter your hours to attend auditions.

So why become an actor when most other occupations offer more stable living conditions? Most will tell you no other medium offers the same rush of emotion and immediate connection with the audience. Simply put, they would not be happy doing anything else. Even those who have enjoyed success in film and television often return to the stage to practice their first love. Braving audiences and critics in professional theatre still remains the ultimate test of an actor’s ability and courage.

The 2003 production of *The Pillowman* (featuring Adam Godley and David Tennant). Intensely emotional scenes like this one must be duplicated by actors night after night. Photo © Robbie Jack/Corbis.

A Brief History of Acting Theory Before we delve into the particulars of how an actor approaches a role, reflect on this question: is the actor a craftsman or an artist? You could consider them craftsmen in the sense that they use a set of skills to build a character onstage; they do it by interpreting the lines set forth by the playwright in a manner that will ring truthfully to an audience. Although many of us might have little to say in matters of art, we are all critics of human behavior—we all know emotional truth when presented to us.

At the same time, you could call the actor an artist because he applies creativity and imagination to this interpretation, transcending the words on the page to create something highly individual. Ultimately, no two actors can play

a character exactly the same way.

No matter how you label it, acting is a paradoxical activity. Actors must explore the emotional world of the character, but at the same time they must meet a set of technical demands such as

articulating and projecting their words so they can be understood by an audience, applying a voice and physicality appropriate for their character, following proscribed movements dictated by the director, adjusting to the response of the audience, and dealing with any mishaps that might occur (missing props, actors forgetting lines, etc.). This balancing act, what one critic called a “special gift for double-consciousness,” is one of the skills that separate merely competent actors from great ones.

Schools throughout the world offer classes in acting, but there is no singular way to teach it. All acting teachers are, in some way, disciples of other teachers who have struggled with the same questions—when creating a character, what should get the most emphasis, technique or emotion? Should the actor truly feel the emotions of his character, or can they be somehow simulated by physical means? When playing the same character night after night, how personally invested must you be in your performance to give the appearance of truth?

We turn to the originators of Western theatre, the ancient Greeks, to find the first opinion on the emotion vs. technique debate. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, he suggests that when writing plays, playwrights should become actors because “they are most persuasive and affecting who are under the influence of actual passion” because the audience shares “the agitation of those who appear to be truly agitated—the anger of those who appear to be truly angry.” This idea that actors must actually feel and not just feign the emotions of their character was adopted by the Romans, whose powerful empire conquered the Greeks and imported their theatre. Although the Romans enjoyed plays among their pastimes and some actors were celebrated, the social status of the actor was at an all-time low.

Acting was left to slaves and noncitizens, which is probably why we do

not find debates on the subject during this period.

Performance *was* discussed, however, by the practitioners of public speaking. This was the last phase of education for men of ancient Rome; they needed the ability to argue and persuade to enter public life in politics, administration, or law. To speak well was the hallmark of a powerful Roman citizen. The most notable teacher of what we call **the rhetorical tradition** of performance was a teacher named Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (35–100 CE) known as Quintilian. He ran a school of oratory and produced an influential twelve-volume textbook on the subject. In it, he begins by echoing Aristotle's opinion that the effective player must first feel the emotions present in a speech. He then introduces the idea that after feeling these emotions, they can be "impersonated" later. But how? Quintilian's highly detailed writings offered advice such as the following:

Wonder is best expressed as follows: the hand turns slightly upwards and the fingers are brought in to the palm, one after the other, beginning with the little finger; the hand is then opened and turned round by a reversal of this motion.

This notion that physical movements such as gestures can simulate true emotion would linger for centuries as Quintilian's work was periodically forgotten and rediscovered. Still, to put his writing in context, there was no understanding of the complexities of the circulatory system or psychology. The belief was that our bodies were giant containers of four fluids or *humors*—blood, yellow and black bile, and phlegm. It was thought that our behaviors were affected by any imbalance in the composition of these components. It was also assumed that if you simulated emotions (called

“passions”) through proscribed movements but went too far in their execution, the result would be a poisoned body.

This is where **decorum** came into play. Modulating your performance to avoid any excess was considered a great skill, especially when you switched quickly from one emotion to another. The most famous example of this dictum comes from *Hamlet*. In William Shakespeare’s play, the title character gives thorough instructions to an actor he has hired to perform a play he has written:

A statue of Quintilian in Calahorra, La Rioja, Spain.

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief [I would prefer] the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent, tempest, and—as I may say—whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

Not only could Hamlet’s advice be considered a demand for a natural delivery of the lines, it could also be a thought of as a plea for personal safety.

By the eighteenth century, new ideas in physiology shifted to the notion that the body was a kind of natural machine. Under stress, it was thought this machine would generate emotions that could be catalogued by observation, much like a zoologist dividing animals into genus and species. Many actors would write about observing “nature” to create their

characters, suggesting that a universal code of emotions existed. If you could discover the correct set of movements, supposedly any emotion could be represented.

One theorist who took this idea to an extreme was François Delsarte (1811–1871). Until the late nineteenth century, no *systematic* means of training stage actors existed in the Western theatre tradition. An actor's early career was a process of trial and error or an apprenticeship with a veteran actor where he was often encouraged to imitate the master's style. Delsarte, a French singer and actor studying at the Paris Conservatory, experienced this bias toward imitation. After four different teachers corrected his delivery of a single line in four different ways, a frustrated

Delsarte decided to do his own scientific study of how people moved and reacted. After observations in parks, cafés, hospital wards, churches, and even mortuaries, the result of Delsarte's research was what he called his "Science of Applied Aesthetics." The positioning and movement of every part of the body and head was broken down into an extensive list, with a description of the corresponding emotion accompanying each item. For example, various combinations of eye and eyebrow movement could indicate disdain, moroseness, firmness, or indifference. Different movements of the head could suggest abandon, pride, or sensuality, and certain arm and hand positions could indicate acceptance, horror, or desire. Delsarte wanted an emotional connection to the words to accompany his physical system. However, the bastardized popular version taught by enthusiasts made his system a victim of its own success. In Europe and the United States, "Delsarte clubs" sprang up where simply posing and freezing was presented as artistic entertainment.



Photo of François Delsarte taken by Étienne Carjat in 1864.  
Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

In video games such as *The Sims*, the Delsartian idea is still alive—all characters have the same animation to represent emotions such as sadness and anger. However, the idea that physical poses can represent a finite number of emotional states is now out of favor in theatrical circles. Some anthropologists even disagree as to whether emotions are biologically universal. They hold that many emotional definitions such as happiness, sadness, and fear are

shaped by the culture in which people live. A notable exception is clinical psychologist Dr. Paul Ekman, who claims that everybody's facial muscles are involuntarily activated in exactly the same way when feeling certain emotions. According to Ekman, these "microexpressions" last for a fraction of a second and can be useful in detecting deception, an idea that formed the basis for the 2009 television crime drama *Lie to Me*.

The Stanislavsky Revolution One person who was determined to overturn mechanical and unrealistic performance styles was the Russian actor and director **Konstantine Stanislavsky**. His ongoing "system" of techniques would go on to revolutionize twentieth-century acting. Today, most Western training is based, wholly or in part, on his innovations.

Born in 1863, Konstantine Sergeyevich Alekseyev was the second of nine children. His father was a wealthy textile manufacturer who liked theatre, opera, circus, and ballet. In order to entertain guests with his children's performances, he converted a room in their country house into a theatre and eventually, a family theatre troupe was born. However, instead of embracing the amateur nature of their efforts, a fourteen-year-old Konstantine kept notebooks filled with serious questions about the

acting process. He would spend hours in front of a mirror practicing his role and agonizing over his costumes. In his twenties, he became determined to pursue a theatrical career but was concerned about his family's reputation. Therefore, he adopted the stage name Stanislavsky and appeared in risqué amateur shows in Moscow until his parents showed up at one of his performances. His father demanded that if he was to be an actor, he should work with professionals and apply himself to reputable material.

In 1888, Stanislavsky formed and financed a group called the Society of Art and Literature. Rejecting the "star system," where prominent actors received much attention when preparing a

production while actors with small parts received almost no direction, the society strove for a sense of ensemble. Stanislavsky was a strong believer in the adage “There are no small parts, only small actors,” and every actor on stage was expected to have an inner life. For Stanislavsky the director, his highly detailed productions received positive attention, but as an actor, he continued to struggle to find truth in his own performances. In 1897, he came under the notice of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, a critic and playwright, who requested a meeting. After an eighteen-hour conversation, the two men decided to create a new professional troupe that would overturn the artificiality of Russian theatre. It came to be known as the **Moscow Art Theatre** (MAT).

Postcard of Stanislavsky performing the role of Gayev in *The Cherry Orchard*, 1922. He also directed the production.

The entrance to the Moscow Art Theatre, where visitors are

greeted by a photo of playwright Anton Chekhov. Photo by Pablo Sanchez.

The first great success of this new theatre was *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov. A doctor and short story writer, Chekhov pioneered a new kind of play that had none of the heroes and villains found in the melodramas of the time. Instead, his characters are flawed human beings struggling for personal happiness. Despite his complaints that Stanislavsky's direction of *The Seagull* was too serious and theatrical, Chekhov allowed him to produce his subsequent plays, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. Engaging with this new style of writing led Stanislavsky to consider a new approach—creating a role from the inside out rather than the false external physical means he had always relied upon.

Eventually, Stanislavsky's concerns about his own acting reached a crisis point. At the time, it was common for theatres to present plays in repertory, that is, showing the same plays in rotation for a number of years. Over time, it was easy for a part to feel lifeless. Stanislavsky believed his work was still full of bad theatrical habits and tricks and was desperate to save his roles from what he called “spiritual petrification.” What made his situation worse was that the other actors felt his situation

too common to be a concern. Reflecting on the performances of his past, Stanislavsky realized that when he played the same role for a period of time, his most inspired performances came when he entered something he called “the creative mood” or “creative state of mind.” He wondered if there were systematic, technical means by which to make it appear and began to develop a series of exercises.

Years later, while directing nonrealistic drama, he began to put new ideas about this creative mood into practice during rehearsals and studio acting classes held at the MAT. Although the actors resisted at first, his approach soon became adopted as the theatre's primary training method. From 1909 until his death in 1938, he

continued to develop his system, often with the help of other members of the MAT. Hundreds of exercises were tried, rejected, or refined. Stanislavsky never stopped experimenting and scolded his pupils who published details about his early methods. Nevertheless, successful international MAT tours elevated Stanislavsky's notoriety, and many actors became intensely curious about these new techniques. Soon, Russian actors who emigrated began teaching early versions of the system, creating a false impression of a fixed set of rules instead of the provisional nature he wished to convey.

The culmination of his views on actor-training, *An Actor's Work on Himself*, did not appear in print until 1938. In the American edition, the material was divided into three books, translated as *An Actor Prepares* (1936), *Building a Character* (1948), and *Creating a Role* (1961), which was created from his notes. All took the form of the fictitious diary of an actor reporting his experiences of being taught by a teacher much like Stanislavsky.

The features of his early system centered on ways to inspire relaxation, concentration, naïveté, and imagination. Relaxation was meant to address muscular tension, which Stanislavsky believed blocked emotional truth and physical expression. Exercises in concentration developed an actor's ability to focus on objects and sensations, allowing the actor to direct the focus away from the audience. Naïveté and imagination improvisations were meant to produce a childlike state that would allow actors to believe in the imaginary circumstances of the play.

What would later become the most controversial technique was called **affective memory**. It was designed to produce emotional states appropriate to a scene; actors were asked to recall details about a strong emotional

moment in their lives such as fear, sadness, anger, love, or joy. Emotions were not meant to be accessed directly. Instead, actors would recall sensory details about the people and places involved.

Although this method was at the heart of Stanislavsky's program for some time, he later would consider it only as a last resort.

What eventually displaced affective memory in his system was an approach he called the **method of physical actions**. Stanislavsky believed that the link between the mind and body is inseparable. Therefore, if an actor pursued an action, the emotional life connected to that action would follow. Based on the given circumstances of the play, the actor would decide what his character wanted in the play overall (the superobjective) and then what he wanted in each scene (objective). All actions onstage would be in the service of these objectives. Acting would now be action-based rather than driven by emotion. Instead of trying to stir emotional states or copying the observed emotions of others, Stanislavsky would ask actors to practice what he called "the magic if." Actors would ask themselves: "What would I do if I were this character? What actions would I take to reach my objectives?" Unfortunately, these later developments were not as widely disseminated. As used today, the label "method acting" applies to American teachers such as Lee Strasberg who emphasized affective memory techniques.

Generations of teachers continue to build upon or refine Stanislavsky's work with their own exercises and imagery to produce desired results. Some even define themselves in opposition to his approach, proof of its continued importance. Today, you can find a host of training techniques for body and voice that have been created for actors or adapted from other disciplines to help performers broaden their skills as well as prepare and sustain a role. Examples include two Stanislavsky protégés, Michael Chekhov and Vsevolod Meyerhold, who developed their own unique actor

training techniques. In the field of movement and body awareness, Rudolf Laban, Frederick Matthias Alexander, and Moshe Feldenkrais have had a great influence. For vocal training, important

innovators include Kristin Linklater, Arthur Lessac, Catherine

Fitzmaurice, and Cicely Berry. Today, actors are usually exposed to a variety of different methods, eager to find the best tools to realize human truth on the stage and elsewhere.

### *Reading Plays Like an Actor*

Although most of us will not become professional actors, there is still a great value in reading a play like one. Seeing a play through an actor's eyes helps to build a greater, more nuanced understanding of a dramatic text. Actors treat each character they play like a riddle to be solved based on clues provided by the playwright. Here are some places to start:

**Name:** Begin with the character's name by looking up its etymology. Is it accurate or ironic? Take the character of Blanche DuBois from Tennessee Williams's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Derived from the French word *blanc*, meaning white, the name eventually came to mean fair or pure. In the play, Blanche, a former schoolteacher, has come to New Orleans to visit her sister Stella (derived from the Latin meaning "star") because she is trying to leave behind her troubled past. Later, it is revealed that she was fired for having an affair with a student and was ejected from a hotel for numerous encounters with men. But her name is not entirely ironic. The related word "blanch" also means to lose color, and as the play progresses, she is revealed as someone who has lost her former wealth, beauty, and energy.

**Past:** Before the move toward realism, characters in melodramas were either good or bad, heroes or villains. However, with the influence of thinkers such as Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, the idea that we are shaped by our environment as well as our past took hold. Now it is not unusual for actors to construct a backstory

for their characters based on the text. In doing so, they can gain insight into why specific choices are made throughout the play.

**Language:** Language is a quick way to divine a character's nature. Is profanity used in every sentence, only in extreme circumstances, or not at all? Do they use short blunt sentences or poetic language

with an extensive vocabulary? Word choice and use or misuse of grammar can tell us volumes about their background and how they relate to the world.

**Stage directions:** Pay special attention to the stage directions associated with a character, separate from his or her words. Car dealers have a saying, "Buyers are liars," meaning customers often misrepresent their true feelings when trying to get a good deal. The same could be said for most characters in a play. As in real life, we want what we want, but we often do not openly say what we want. For example, a man could state his unconditional love to a woman, but if he slowly inches toward the exit during a scene, we could have reason to doubt his sincerity. Frequently, we find out what a character truly wants toward the end of a scene. This is because they must become more direct since they have used up all of their other tactics.

**References:** What does the character say about herself? At the same time, what do other characters say about her? Sometimes there is a great disparity between our conception of ourselves and true reality.

**Objective:** Ultimately, all of the factors above may influence the answer to the most important puzzle—what does the character want in each scene? Choosing a character's objective profoundly changes a performance and colors the reading of every line.

### 3 Directing *Kevin Browne*



Of all of the collaborators who create live theatre, the stage director's contribution may be the least visible and least understood. The playwright's words can be heard or read. The producer raises and spends money. Designers create costumes, scenery, lights, and sound. Actors create a direct and immediate relationship with the spectators. All of these are easily visible and apprehended as separate components. The title of director *sounds* important. But what exactly does he or she do?

Simply put, the director is the “captain” of the collaborative team, responsible for all artistic aspects of the production. He is the person who makes sure that all of the pieces are put together to make a coherent, effective, and entertaining artistic whole. Above all, the director provides the overall artistic vision for the production, organizing and leading the entire collaborative process to ensure that the production is artistically unified according to this vision. In this capacity, the director stands in for the audience throughout the preparation and rehearsal of the production; he is the spectator's eye.

If the playwright is the author of the words on the page, we can consider the director as *the author of the production*. He does not “author” its *pieces*, but rather uses them to “write” the staged production. While some directors are more authoritarian than others, the best encourage the full creative powers of all of the artists involved. The collaborative director leads, coaches,

encourages, cajoles, and mentors, but trusts and respects the artistic processes of each of the teammates. The collaborative director does not force results, but guides the process according to his or her vision for the production.

In practical terms, the director's main functions can be broken down as follows:

1. Interpreting the script and developing a vision or concept for the production.
2. Working with the design team to develop the visual, oral, and spatial world of the production.
3. Casting the actors.
4. Rehearsing the actors.
5. Integrating all of the elements into a unified whole.

The Development of the Modern Director Directing as a completely separate function is a relatively recent development in the history of the theatre. In all theatrical traditions, someone has usually been on hand to supervise the process of preparing a play for performance, running rehearsals, and coordinating the various elements that make up the theatrical event. Often the playwright or a leading actor carried out these tasks. Rehearsals were often short and cursory. Even when a person was specifically designated as being in charge, his or her duties were much more executive than artistic.

Most historians locate the emergence of the modern theatre director with the rise of realism in the late nineteenth century. This took place in the context of rapidly changing social and artistic norms. However, some of the changes (both social and theatrical) associated with the birth of modern directing had been evolving for some time. Beginning in the eighteenth century, powerful actor-managers such as Britain's David Garrick (1717–1779) effected great changes in production and acting styles, calling for longer and more

thorough rehearsals and greater attention to detail in all aspects of production. But for most actor-managers, the primary concern was to use plays as vehicles for their talents, not to faithfully execute the playwright's intentions. They were actors first and objective interpreters second.

When pressed, most historians will name Georg II, the Duke of the German state of Saxe-Meiningen (1826–1914), and his collaborator Ludwig Chronek as the originators of modern directing. Unlike the actormanagers, Saxe-Meiningen and Chronek neither wrote nor acted in the

productions they created, but supervised the proceedings from the viewpoint of the audience. They were meticulous in their preparations, and each production was the result of a strong artistic vision. Beginning with their tours of Europe in the 1870s, the Meiningen players became famous for their historical accuracy and attention to detail. They were particularly lauded for the intricacy and realism of their crowd scenes.

In the late nineteenth century, great social changes blasted conventions and inspired great changes in art, including theatre. While the Meiningen players performed mostly classics and heroic melodramas, a new form of drama arrived in Europe. Developing from a concern with social issues, this new drama sought to portray the truth of human behavior and interaction. It came to be known as realism and its first great dramatists were the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen and the Russian Anton Chekhov. Inspired by the work of Saxe-Meiningen and motivated to create new theatrical methods to bring the plays of Chekhov to life, Russian actor/director Konstantine Stanislavsky put the actor's truthfulness at the center of his theatrical practices. He and other directors of realistic drama understood the importance of detail, specificity, and the absence of false notes on the stage.

The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen in 1914.

The Director and the Script: A Continuum It is the primary function of the modern director to interpret the script and to develop an artistic vision or **production concept**. This fundamental approach based on their reaction to the script varies along a continuum. Using the faithful approach, the playwright is treated as the production's

In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, first presented in 1604, the Duke of Vienna is disgusted with the moral decay he sees with his people and pretends to take a leave of absence. While in

disguise, he observes how his second-in-command, Lord Angelo, is corrupted by power. Director Ralf Remshardt moved the action to the 1960s *Mad Men* era in order to make the forces of control and

freedom more accessible to a contemporary audience. Executing his concept, set designer Jamie Frank provided a set with a corporate space above and a background of advertising slogans below. The costume design by Erica Bascom provided a sharp divide between the bohemian citizens of Vienna and the suited figures that rule them. Photos by Jamie Frank.

primary creator. The director serves the dramatist and attempts to realize the play as literally as possible. Using this approach, the director retains the time and place exactly as described and follows all stage directions indicated by the playwright as closely as possible.

The translator approach is probably the most common in today's theatre. The director honors the spirit of the play as received but may depart from many of the specifics. Usually the original dialogue is left intact, but stage directions, the time and place of the action, and many other details may be altered. Productions using this approach are often based on a director's strong vision of the play. In this way, the production finds its own unique style.

*Auteur* is a French word meaning "author." In this approach, the script serves as raw material that the director feels free to shape and reshape according to his or her artistic intentions. At its most extreme, this approach uses the play as a jumping-off point, adding, subtracting, and rearranging text at will. Bear in mind that what we have illustrated is a continuum, and that the work of any particular director may be located at any point.

A Process for DirectingAlthough the directing process may widely vary depending on the material and the director's approach, most directors cover the same bases. The steps in the process, as described next, usually overlap to some degree. For example, the wise director is continuously analyzing the play in response to discoveries made throughout the process.

## Analyzing and Interpreting the Play

While the director is ultimately responsible for the interpretation taken by the production, *all* of the collaborators we are discussing must engage in a close analysis of the script. In order to engage and utilize the creative powers of the design team, many directors involve them in the early stages of interpretation. Therefore, the earliest **design meetings** comprise a dialogue about the play. The discussion of the text led by the director must include practical questions. What are the given circumstances in this play? What is the play's central action? What is the main conflict? Which character is the play's protagonist and what is he or she fighting for? The director must lead a detailed analysis of the play's structure, the

characters in the play, the play's language, and the play's themes. What do we want the audience to go away *feeling*? What do we want them to go away *thinking* about? What does the play mean?

The discussion must also cover the play's genre, mood, and style. What is the world of this play? Is it primarily comic, tragic, dark, or light? Is it primarily realistic, or not? How do the characters fit in this world? This in-depth critical inquiry into the play leads the process into the next steps. Without a firm grasp on the play and a clearly defined creative vision, it will be difficult for the director and his or her team to maintain a steady course.

## The Production Concept

The exploration of these questions leads the director to an interpretation, vision, or concept. The concept is often articulated in terms of an overriding metaphor. It can be articulated in the form

of a verbal phrase (“a chess game” for *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Christopher Hampton), a painting or picture (Munch’s “The Scream” for *Marisol* by Jose Rivera), or even a physical object (an early typewriter for *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell). Concept metaphors can be augmented by verbal descriptions of the world of the play, by a picture or series of pictures, by sounds and music, or by a combination of these elements. However the concept is expressed, it needs to be vivid, motivating, and clear enough to put the whole team on the same page. The concept statement should also communicate the director’s approach along the faithful-translator-auteur continuum, and determine such questions as the time and place of the action.

## Working with Designers

Next, armed with the production concept, the designers explore the fundamental questions that will help the team develop the visual, aural, and spatial world of the play. These questions are based on the fundamental elements of design—color, texture, line, shape, mass, and rhythm. The members of the team also discuss practical and technical considerations—how many doors are needed, whether the radio needs to work, or how much movement the costumes allow. At each subsequent meeting, these artists present their written or visualized ideas to the director and to the other designers. The designs for the production thus develop as a give and take among the whole creative group.

## Casting

Good casting is vital to the production's success and will make the director's job in rehearsal smooth and productive. Conversely, mistakes in casting can irretrievably harm a show. Therefore, it is imperative that the director have a firm grasp of the characters' personalities, their physical characteristics, and how they interrelate. The director should have a strong image of the characters but also remain open to what the actors who audition have to offer.

These are examples of headshots, representative photos that actors give to casting agents and directors. A résumé listing is attached to the back showing acting experience and special skills.

### *Breakdowns*

Who do you see in your mind's eye when you see words like CEO, police captain, thug, nurse, judge, mother, or leader of a criminal empire? Casting can force us to confront the cultural baggage we carry, which may include stereotypes about race, gender, age, or body type. For a long time, there was an assumption in the industry that, unless otherwise indicated, all parts were given to white male actors. Today, many theatre directors practice what is called **nontraditional casting**. The Actors' Equity Association, the labor union for theatrical performers, defines it as “the casting of ethnic minority and female actors in roles where race, ethnicity, or sex is not germane.” Every day, character descriptions called breakdowns are distributed to the casting industry so they can put forth actors for auditions. Many will include the instruction “Please Submit Actors of All Ethnicities.” However, some actors still complain that



there is an understanding that words such as *urban*, *all-American*, and *sassy best friend* are euphemisms for specific ethnicities.

The following are real breakdowns from various professional productions:

[LENNIE SMALL] Late 20s to late 30s, Latino, Filipino or Caucasian. A large, kind, childlike man. He has a mental disability, perhaps from an early childhood injury, which has left him emotionally immature, unable to control his enthusiasm and unable to control his anger. He is often forgetful, but has great joy for life, and is tremendously loyal to George. Physically large and extremely strong, he depends upon George for guidance and protection.

[LUCIA] (age 25–35) Leading role. Ideally Chinese-American, but would consider women of other ethnicities with same qualities: an emergency room physician at start. Strong and sensitive, principled. Very attractive. Loses her fiancé in the 9/11 attacks. Becomes a doctor at Bagram Air Force Base, Afghanistan. Witnesses torture. Becomes a whistle-blower.

[ANTIGONE] (20) An outsider. Scrawny, pensive, passionate, and full of pride. Regal despite her age and stature. Disinterested in her appearance and the expected functions of a princess, but innately mesmerizing and powerful.

[OGUN SIZE] Male actor, African American, late 20s. An auto mechanic; he is the more solid older brother of Oshoosi. His name comes from “war” and “iron” and he has the toughness and resilience of an everyday warrior.

[ROSAMUND] Late 20s, the quintessence of Midwestern charm, beauty, and privilege. She is enchanting and possesses an irresistible laugh. Yet well concealed under the surface is a woman of psychological instability.

[ELOYT CHASE] Caucasian, 5'7" and taller. Male, 35–45, 1930s period piece. Actor must be sophisticated, highly intelligent. Exceedingly charming, he has an acidic wit that he brandishes regardless of the situation. Think George Clooney, Cary Grant, Daniel Craig, Ralph Fiennes, Rex Harrison, Laurence Olivier.

[IAGO] Late 20s–40s. Any ethnicity. Role requires significant experience with classical text. Othello's ensign, a military veteran from Venice. Obsessive, relentless, bold, and ingenious in his efforts to manipulate and deceive the other characters, particularly Othello.

[SARA] Mid–late 30s. An Upper West Side mom who can't quite leave her rock-'n'-roll wild-child past behind. Vital, sexy, and a little tough. A warm and funny mother and wife; unfussy. But she has a reckless streak, and a yearning for the excitement of her youth. A complicated woman.

[TRACY TURNBLAD] A big fat ball of energy and light who was born to dance. She is compassionate, effervescent, optimistic, and enthusiastic but still spends a good deal of time in detention. She believes

The audition process unfolds in a number of ways, depending on the production and the type of theatre. In many instances such as theatre festivals and academic theatre, actors are sought by a number of directors for a number of different plays. This process might start with an **open call**, often referred to as a "cattle call." This is a session in which actors present a prepared monologue or possibly a portion of a song in the case of auditions for musicals. From this pool, directors will choose whom to consider further and

will invite them to read for particular roles. Auditions of this nature are referred to as *callbacks*, where actors perform *cold readings* from the script, named so because it is unlikely the actor has seen the text prior to auditioning. This is an opportunity to hear and see the actors read together. Because the actors must complement each other, this is also an occasion to experiment with different combinations of actors. Often in professional theatre, there are **closed calls**, where specific actors are invited to read because they are already known to the director, or because they have been sent by a **casting director**. Casting directors, working directly with actors or through actors' agents, can be useful in trimming the pool of potential performers down to those who will work best for the parts.

*What is a casting director?*

The casting director is hired by the producer of the project. I read the play. I have discussions with the director and the playwright (if living). I then send out a breakdown of the characters that I am casting and get submissions from agents of actors that they would like me to see. I then make lists using these submissions plus my own ideas. Then auditions are set up . . . we probably have callbacks and then make offers.

*How important is physical type?*

It differs from role to role. Some roles require very specific physical features . . . others don't. We are always looking for basically one thing in an actor . . . talent.

*What does it mean to act "professionally" in an audition?*

Be on time, be friendly, and be prepared. I always give out material in advance. Being prepared means that the actor learned the song or worked on the scene.

*What mistakes do actors make in audition situations?*

Being late, being unprepared, chatting too much, not chatting enough.

*How did you become a casting director?*

I learned the business by working for a talent manager. I thought that casting looked interesting and told all the casting directors that I was on the phone with all the time that I was looking. One of them bit.

*What qualities should a good casting director possess?*

I think what sets casting directors apart is their taste. Their ability to see talent, ability, charisma, training . . . again, hard to define.

*How do you define talent?*

I'm not sure how to answer that. This is where what we do gets very ephemeral. Many people walk through the door. Some are good.

Some aren't. Some are special and charismatic, others aren't. It's almost impossible to define.

*What excites you about being a casting director?*

It's very fulfilling when you become part of the creative process . . . when playwrights and directors actually listen to you and take your advice. And it's fun getting people work.

*How is casting theatre different from casting television or film?*

Film and TV is much more corporate. . . . Network execs and studio execs who know nothing about acting have a huge say in the process. Theatre is MUCH more about the art.

*What qualities do you think successful actors have in common?*

This is a business of flukes and timing and opportunities in addition to being a business of talent and training. I don't think that

all successful actors have *anything* in common. Some are gorgeous, others aren't. Some are trained, others aren't. Some have drive and determination, others fell into success.

*Is there one casting situation that has stuck with you over time?*

My favorite story is when I was casting a replacement for the original cast of *Once on This Island*. Ten women were on time, sang what we had asked to prepare, and then danced. As we were wrapping up, one woman who hadn't showed walked in very late. We said that we would hear her sing. She didn't even have sheet music with her so she had to sing a cappella. Since she was obviously the best of the bunch, she got the job, which goes to prove that talent always wins out in the end and that this is an unfair business.

## Rehearsals

The specifics of the rehearsal process and schedule may differ from director to director. They may also differ from production to production depending on the particular demands of the material and the length of the rehearsal period. The essential elements, however, are common to most productions. Although the order and duration of each element may

differ, smart directors understand that, like design, rehearsal is a collaborative process.

Usually a first cast meeting is designed to introduce the actors to each other, to the production staff, and to the script. Presentations by the designers are often a preview of the scenery, costumes, lights, and sound. This is an excellent opportunity to share the production concept with the actors and have a first reading aloud of the script. Additional early rehearsals may be devoted to closely

exploring the text, a part of the process known as **table work**. During this process, actors read their parts aloud, stopping frequently to discuss elements including the meaning of words and lines, poetic and literary devices the playwright has employed, the characters' objectives, and the play's dominant themes. This allows the entire cast to arrive at the meaning of the play together in order to better communicate it to the audience.

Before the actors can start rehearsing the play on its feet, it is necessary to have developed a **ground plan**. This is a two-dimensional bird's-eye view of the set with the entrances and exits, furniture, and all of the acting areas mapped out. The acting space can then be taped out well in advance of the completion of the set so that the team has the geography of the space in which to rehearse.

Armed with a fundamental understanding of the play, the production concept, and the ground plan, the actors get on their feet and begin the most time-consuming and intensive phase of the rehearsal process, **scene work**, exploring the play in smaller units. Using their own processes, the performers collaborate to find the acting values that will most effectively communicate the play's action. The director's role in this process is both crucial and sensitive: to confidently lead the actors toward his or her interpretation of the action but at the same time allow the actors to pursue their own creativity. This can be a difficult balance. The collaborative director serves as facilitator and coach, questioning the actors to make choices about given circumstances, relationships, and the wants and needs of the characters. The actors are led to the emotional qualities and line readings that will best communicate character, thought, and action to the audience. Forcing results too early can stifle the actors' creative powers but in the end, the director is the editor who decides which choices are right for the production and which must be discarded.

While guiding the acting values, the director also manipulates space by creating **stage pictures**, bodies artfully arranged on the playing space

Director James Lapine speaks with the cast of his play *Amour* during rehearsal at the Music Box Theatre on Broadway, 2003. Photo © Mark Peterson/Corbis.

to communicate ideas. These pictures are created through **blocking** (or staging), a term for the movement and placement of the actors on the stage. This is a powerful tool and is the only element entirely under the director's control. Blocking may come from the play's stage directions or may be deduced from the dialogue. It can be completely planned by the director, but more often it is developed in collaboration between the actors and the director. Depending on the material, blocking can be realistic or nonrealistic. It must, however, be motivated and believable.

The third element the director shapes is time. He or she does so by exerting influence over the pace and rhythm of the scenes. In the theatre, pacing refers not merely to tempo—how fast or slow the action is moving—but to variations in tempo. A performance that plays at the same speed throughout, even if that speed is fast, will ultimately become tedious and will muddy the story. The director needs to decide which moments need to move quickly, and which need to move more slowly. For example, an early expository scene in which the audience is provided with backstory may need to play slowly enough to be absorbed and understood. On the other hand, a climactic action scene may well move at roaring speed.

In order for directors to tell actors where to move on stage in rehearsals, they must have a shared map to work from. A director might tell an actor originally standing “up left” to cross to “right

center,” pause, and then end up “down center.” In order to make the process easier, blocking is given from the actor’s perspective.

Working small units of the play is essential, but it is also essential to get a sense of the whole. Therefore, a director will periodically schedule a **run-through**. Typically the first of these rehearsals will take place as soon as the blocking is roughed in and the actors are **off-book** (free from holding the script, though they may call for lines from the stage manager). This first run-through is commonly known as a **stumble-through** because it is almost always very rough. We may then return to scene work with run-throughs planned regularly until **technical rehearsals**, the period in which all of the technical elements—lights, sound, scene changes—are introduced and integrated. Before the show opens for an audience, **dress rehearsals** run the show in full costume with all of the technical elements as though the audience is present.

The major professional theatres may then offer **previews**. These are performances before audiences with discounted tickets, before the

**Color-blind casting** is different from nontraditional casting in that it overlooks race entirely as a consideration in casting. Intended to open new opportunities for nonwhite actors, it relies on the suggestive nature of theatre, sometimes at the expense of the playwright’s intentions, historical accuracy, or biological reality. Supporters say it rewards talent and makes audiences focus on the story. Detractors find it jarring and say it harms the suspension of disbelief. This photo of the Trinity Repertory Company’s 2010 production of *A Christmas Carol* depicts a multiracial Cratchit family observed by an elevated Ebenezer Scrooge. Photo by Mark Turek, [www.markturekphotography.com](http://www.markturekphotography.com).



official opening of the show. By custom, critics refrain from reviewing during this period, which may last several weeks. Previews give the director, playwright, and, in the case of musicals, the lyricist and composer, the opportunity to fine-tune the show with the benefit of audience response. During the entire process, from the first design meetings through to opening night, the director's closest partner is the **stage manager**. This person is responsible for running all activities backstage, for maintaining the **prompt book** (a copy of the script marked up with all of the blocking, acting notes, and light and sound cues), and for facilitating communication among the entire production team. Once the show opens, the director's job is done and the stage manager takes control, running the show each evening and ensuring that throughout the run, the production continues the way it was directed.

The stage director employs a unique and complex set of skills. The most important is leadership. The director must be coach and cheerleader, but also must be prepared to make tough decisions. He must be an excellent communicator, know enough about each of the designers' processes to communicate in their language, and know the acting process inside and out. He must also be an expert in theatre history and dramatic analysis. The director shoulders a huge responsibility for the success of his teammates and the experience of the audience.

# 12. The Importance of Being Earnest (Text)

[The Importance of Being Earnest, by Oscar Wilde](#)

## The Importance of Being Earnest A Trivial Comedy for Serious People

### THE PERSONS IN THE PLAY

John Worthing, J.P.  
Algernon Moncrieff  
Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.  
Merriman, Butler  
Lane, Manservant  
Lady Bracknell  
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax  
Cecily Cardew  
Miss Prism, Governess

### THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.  
ACT II. The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.  
ACT III. Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton.  
TIME: The Present.

# LONDON: ST. JAMES'S THEATRE

Lessee and Manager: Mr. George Alexander

February 14th, 1895

\* \* \* \* \*

John Worthing, J.P.: Mr. George Alexander.

Algernon Moncrieff: Mr. Allen Aynesworth.

Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.: Mr. H. H. Vincent.

Merriman: Mr. Frank Dyll.

Lane: Mr. F. Kinsey Peile.

Lady Bracknell: Miss Rose Leclercq.

Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax: Miss Irene Vanbrugh.

Cecily Cardew: Miss Evelyn Millard.

Miss Prism: Mrs. George Canninge.

## FIRST ACT

### SCENE

Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.

[**Lane** is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, **Algernon** enters.]

**Algernon.** Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

**Lane.** I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

**Algernon.** I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

**Lane.** Yes, sir.

**Algernon.** And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [Hands them on a salver.]

**Algernon.** [Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

**Lane.** Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

**Algernon.** Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

**Lane.** I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

**Algernon.** Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

**Lane.** I believe it is a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

**Algernon.** [Languidly.] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

**Lane.** No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

**Algernon.** Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

**Lane.** Thank you, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Lane.** Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[Enter **Jack**.]

[**Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

**Jack.** Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

**Algernon.** [Stiffly.] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

**Jack.** [Sitting down on the sofa.] In the country.

**Algernon.** What on earth do you do there?

**Jack.** [Pulling off his gloves.] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

**Algernon.** And who are the people you amuse?

**Jack.** [Airily.] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

**Algernon.** Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

**Jack.** Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

**Algernon.** How immensely you must amuse them! [Goes over and takes sandwich.] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

**Jack.** Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

**Algernon.** Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

**Jack.** How perfectly delightful!

**Algernon.** Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

**Jack.** May I ask why?

**Algernon.** My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

**Jack.** I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

**Algernon.** I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

**Jack.** How utterly unromantic you are!

**Algernon.** I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about

a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

**Jack.** I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

**Algernon.** Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—[**Jack** puts out his hand to take a sandwich. **Algernon** at once interferes.] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [Takes one and eats it.]

**Jack.** Well, you have been eating them all the time.

**Algernon.** That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [Takes plate from below.] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

**Jack.** [Advancing to table and helping himself.] And very good bread and butter it is too.

**Algernon.** Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

**Jack.** Why on earth do you say that?

**Algernon.** Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

**Jack.** Oh, that is nonsense!

**Algernon.** It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

**Jack.** Your consent!

**Algernon.** My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [Rings bell.]

**Jack.** Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Algernon.** Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

**Jack.** Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

**Algernon.** Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

**Jack.** There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

[Enter **Lane** with the cigarette case on a salver. **Algernon** takes it at once. **Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [Opens case and examines it.] However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

**Jack.** Of course it's mine. [Moving to him.] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

**Algernon.** Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

**Jack.** I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.

**Algernon.** Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name.

**Jack.** Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

**Algernon.** Your aunt!

**Jack.** Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

**Algernon.** [Retreating to back of sofa.] But why does she call

herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [Reading.] 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.'

**Jack.** [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [Follows **Algernon** round the room.]

**Algernon.** Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

**Jack.** It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

**Algernon.** You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

**Jack.** Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

**Algernon.** Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

**Jack.** My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression.

**Algernon.** Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always



suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

**Jack.** Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

**Algernon.** I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

**Jack.** Well, produce my cigarette case first.

**Algernon.** Here it is. [Hands cigarette case.] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [Sits on sofa.]

**Jack.** My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

**Algernon.** Where is that place in the country, by the way?

**Jack.** That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

**Algernon.** I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburied all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

**Jack.** My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

**Algernon.** The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

**Jack.** That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

**Algernon.** Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

**Jack.** What on earth do you mean?

**Algernon.** You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

**Jack.** I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

**Algernon.** I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

**Jack.** You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

**Algernon.** I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent . . . and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

**Jack.** I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily

is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . . with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

**Algernon.** Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

**Jack.** That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

**Algernon.** Then your wife will. You don't seem to realise, that in married life three is company and two is none.

**Jack.** [Sententiously.] That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

**Algernon.** Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.

**Jack.** For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

**Algernon.** My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything nowadays. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. [The sound of an electric bell is heard.] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

**Jack.** I suppose so, if you want to.

**Algernon.** Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Lane.** Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

[**Algernon** goes forward to meet them. Enter **Lady Bracknell** and **Gwendolen**.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

**Algernon.** I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. [Sees **Jack** and bows to him with icy coldness.]

**Algernon.** [To **Gwendolen.**] Dear me, you are smart!

**Gwendolen.** I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

**Jack.** You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.** Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. [Gwendolen and **Jack** sit down together in the corner.]

**Lady Bracknell.** I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

**Algernon.** Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [Goes over to tea-table.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

**Gwendolen.** Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

**Algernon.** [Picking up empty plate in horror.] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

**Lane.** [Gravely.] There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

**Algernon.** No cucumbers!

**Lane.** No, sir. Not even for ready money.

**Algernon.** That will do, Lane, thank you.

**Lane.** Thank you, sir. [Goes out.]

**Algernon.** I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

**Lady Bracknell.** It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

**Algernon.** I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

**Lady Bracknell.** It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. [Algernon crosses and hands tea.]

Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

**Algernon.** I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Frowning.] I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that.

**Algernon.** It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [Exchanges glances with **Jack**.] They seem to think I should be with him.

**Lady Bracknell.** It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

**Algernon.** Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

**Lady Bracknell.** Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

**Algernon.** I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

**Lady Bracknell.** Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [Rising, and following **Algernon**.] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

**Gwendolen.** Certainly, mamma.

[**Lady Bracknell** and **Algernon** go into the music-room, **Gwendolen** remains behind.]

**Jack.** Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.** Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

**Jack.** I do mean something else.

**Gwendolen.** I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

**Jack.** And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . .

**Gwendolen.** I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

**Jack.** [Nervously.] Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since . . . I met you.

**Gwendolen.** Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [**Jack** looks at her in amazement.] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute

confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

**Jack.** You really love me, Gwendolen?

**Gwendolen.** Passionately!

**Jack.** Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

**Gwendolen.** My own Ernest!

**Jack.** But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

**Gwendolen.** But your name is Ernest.

**Jack.** Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

**Gwendolen.** [Glibly.] Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

**Jack.** Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest . . . I don't think the name suits me at all.

**Gwendolen.** It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

**Jack.** Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

**Gwendolen.** Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

**Jack.** Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

**Gwendolen.** Married, Mr. Worthing?

**Jack.** [Astounded.] Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and

you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

**Gwendolen.** I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

**Jack.** Well . . . may I propose to you now?

**Gwendolen.** I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you.

**Jack.** Gwendolen!

**Gwendolen.** Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

**Jack.** You know what I have got to say to you.

**Gwendolen.** Yes, but you don't say it.

**Jack.** Gwendolen, will you marry me? [Goes on his knees.]

**Gwendolen.** Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

**Jack.** My own one, I have never loved any one in the world but you.

**Gwendolen.** Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present. [Enter **Lady Bracknell**.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

**Gwendolen.** Mamma! [He tries to rise; she restrains him.] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

**Lady Bracknell.** Finished what, may I ask?

**Gwendolen.** I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma. [They rise together.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should



his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself . . . And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

**Gwendolen.** [Reproachfully.] Mamma!

**Lady Bracknell.** In the carriage, Gwendolen! [**Gwendolen** goes to the door. She and **Jack** blow kisses to each other behind **Lady Bracknell's** back. **Lady Bracknell** looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.] Gwendolen, the carriage!

**Gwendolen.** Yes, mamma. [Goes out, looking back at **Jack**.]

**Lady Bracknell.** [Sitting down.] You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.

[Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.]

**Jack.** Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Pencil and note-book in hand.] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

**Jack.** Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

**Lady Bracknell.** I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

**Jack.** Twenty-nine.

**Lady Bracknell.** A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

**Jack.** [After some hesitation.] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole

theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

**Jack.** Between seven and eight thousand a year.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Makes a note in her book.] In land, or in investments?

**Jack.** In investments, chiefly.

**Lady Bracknell.** That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

**Jack.** I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

**Lady Bracknell.** A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

**Jack.** Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

**Lady Bracknell.** Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

**Jack.** Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

**Lady Bracknell.** Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

**Jack.** 149.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Shaking her head.] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

**Jack.** Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

**Lady Bracknell.** [Sternly.] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

**Jack.** Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

**Lady Bracknell.** Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

**Jack.** I have lost both my parents.

**Lady Bracknell.** To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

**Jack.** I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

**Lady Bracknell.** Found!

**Jack.** The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

**Lady Bracknell.** Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

**Jack.** [Gravely.] In a hand-bag.

**Lady Bracknell.** A hand-bag?

**Jack.** [Very seriously.] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

**Lady Bracknell.** In what locality did this Mr. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

**Jack.** In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

**Lady Bracknell.** The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

**Jack.** Yes. The Brighton line.

**Lady Bracknell.** The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

**Jack.** May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

**Lady Bracknell.** I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

**Jack.** Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

[**Lady Bracknell** sweeps out in majestic indignation.]

**Jack.** Good morning! [**Algernon**, from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are!

[The music stops and **Algernon** enters cheerily.]

**Algernon.** Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her.

**Jack.** Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

**Algernon.** My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

**Jack.** Oh, that is nonsense!

**Algernon.** It isn't!

**Jack.** Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

**Algernon.** That is exactly what things were originally made for.

**Jack.** Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself . . . [A pause.] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

**Algernon.** All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

**Jack.** Is that clever?

**Algernon.** It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be.

**Jack.** I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

**Algernon.** We have.

**Jack.** I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

**Algernon.** The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

**Jack.** What fools!

**Algernon.** By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

**Jack.** [In a very patronising manner.] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman!

**Algernon.** The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to some one else, if she is plain.

**Jack.** Oh, that is nonsense.

**Algernon.** What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

**Jack.** Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?

**Algernon.** Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

**Jack.** You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind?

**Algernon.** Of course it isn't!

**Jack.** Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest to carried off suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

**Algernon.** But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

**Jack.** Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

**Algernon.** I would rather like to see Cecily.

**Jack.** I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

**Algernon.** Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

**Jack.** Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll

bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

**Algernon.** Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

**Jack.** [Irritably.] Oh! It always is nearly seven.

**Algernon.** Well, I'm hungry.

**Jack.** I never knew you when you weren't . . .

**Algernon.** What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

**Jack.** Oh no! I loathe listening.

**Algernon.** Well, let us go to the Club?

**Jack.** Oh, no! I hate talking.

**Algernon.** Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

**Jack.** Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

**Algernon.** Well, what shall we do?

**Jack.** Nothing!

**Algernon.** It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Lane.** Miss Fairfax.

[Enter **Gwendolen**. **Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** Gwendolen, upon my word!

**Gwendolen.** Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

**Algernon.** Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.

**Gwendolen.** Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that.

[**Algernon** retires to the fireplace.]

**Jack.** My own darling!

**Gwendolen.** Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But

although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry some one else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

**Jack.** Dear Gwendolen!

**Gwendolen.** The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country?

**Jack.** The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

[**Algernon**, who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt-cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.]

**Gwendolen.** There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily.

**Jack.** My own one!

**Gwendolen.** How long do you remain in town?

**Jack.** Till Monday.

**Gwendolen.** Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

**Algernon.** Thanks, I've turned round already.

**Gwendolen.** You may also ring the bell.

**Jack.** You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling?

**Gwendolen.** Certainly.

**Jack.** [To **Lane**, who now enters.] I will see Miss Fairfax out.

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [**Jack** and **Gwendolen** go off.]

[**Lane** presents several letters on a salver to **Algernon**. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as **Algernon**, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.]

**Algernon.** A glass of sherry, Lane.

**Lane.** Yes, sir.

**Algernon.** To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

**Lane.** Yes, sir.

**Algernon.** I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put



up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits . .

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [Handing sherry.]

**Algernon.** I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.

**Lane.** It never is, sir.

**Algernon.** Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.

**Lane.** I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.

[Enter **Jack**. **Lane** goes off.]

**Jack.** There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever cared for in my life. [**Algernon** is laughing immoderately.] What on earth are you so amused at?

**Algernon.** Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

**Jack.** If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day.

**Algernon.** I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

**Jack.** Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

**Algernon.** Nobody ever does.

[**Jack** looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. **Algernon** lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.]

ACT DROP

## SECOND ACT

### SCENE

Garden at the Manor House. A flight of grey stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew-tree.

[**Miss Prism** discovered seated at the table. **Cecily** is at the back watering flowers.]

**Miss Prism.** [Calling.] Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

**Cecily.** [Coming over very slowly.] But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

**Miss Prism.** Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

**Cecily.** Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well.

**Miss Prism.** [Drawing herself up.] Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

**Cecily.** I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother.

**Cecily.** I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. [**Cecily** begins to write in her diary.]

**Miss Prism.** [Shaking her head.] I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour

of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

**Cecily.** I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down, I should probably forget all about them.

**Miss Prism.** Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

**Cecily.** Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us.

**Miss Prism.** Do not speak slightly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

**Cecily.** Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

**Miss Prism.** The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

**Cecily.** I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

**Miss Prism.** Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. [**Cecily** starts.] I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.

**Cecily.** [Smiling.] But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.

**Miss Prism.** [Rising and advancing.] Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

[Enter **Canon Chasuble**.]

**Chasuble.** And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

**Cecily.** Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

**Cecily.** No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson, when the Rector came in.

**Chasuble.** I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive.

**Cecily.** Oh, I am afraid I am.

**Chasuble.** That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [**Miss Prism** glares.] I spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet?

**Miss Prism.** We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

**Chasuble.** Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

**Miss Prism.** Egeria? My name is Lætitia, Doctor.

**Chasuble.** [Bowing.] A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

**Miss Prism.** I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

**Chasuble.** With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

**Miss Prism.** That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

[Goes down the garden with **Dr. Chasuble**.]

**Cecily.** [Picks up books and throws them back on table.] Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

[Enter **Merriman** with a card on a salver.]

**Merriman.** Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

**Cecily.** [Takes the card and reads it.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4,

The Albany, W? Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr. Worthing was in town?

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

**Cecily.** Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a room for him.

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss.

[**Merriman** goes off.]

**Cecily.** I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like every one else.

[Enter **Algernon**, very gay and debonnair.] He does!

**Algernon.** [Raising his hat.] You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

**Cecily.** You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. [**Algernon** is rather taken aback.] But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

**Algernon.** Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

**Cecily.** If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

**Algernon.** [Looks at her in amazement.] Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

**Cecily.** I am glad to hear it.

**Algernon.** In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

**Cecily.** I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

**Algernon.** It is much pleasanter being here with you.

**Cecily.** I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

**Algernon.** That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious . . . to miss?

**Cecily.** Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

**Algernon.** No: the appointment is in London.

**Cecily.** Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

**Algernon.** About my what?

**Cecily.** Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

**Algernon.** I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

**Cecily.** I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

**Algernon.** Australia! I'd sooner die.

**Cecily.** Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

**Algernon.** Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world, are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

**Cecily.** Yes, but are you good enough for it?

**Algernon.** I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, cousin Cecily.

**Cecily.** I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

**Algernon.** Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

**Cecily.** It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

**Algernon.** I will. I feel better already.

**Cecily.** You are looking a little worse.

**Algernon.** That is because I am hungry.

**Cecily.** How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that

when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

**Algernon.** Thank you. Might I have a buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first.

**Cecily.** A Marechal Niel? [Picks up scissors.]

**Algernon.** No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

**Cecily.** Why? [Cuts a flower.]

**Algernon.** Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

**Cecily.** I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

**Algernon.** Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. [Cecily puts the rose in his buttonhole.] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

**Cecily.** Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

**Algernon.** They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

**Cecily.** Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

[They pass into the house. **Miss Prism** and **Dr. Chasuble** return.]

**Miss Prism.** You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

**Chasuble.** [With a scholar's shudder.] Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

**Miss Prism.** [Sententiously.] That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realise, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

**Chasuble.** But is a man not equally attractive when married?

**Miss Prism.** No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

**Chasuble.** And often, I've been told, not even to her.

**Miss Prism.** That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the

woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. [Dr. Chasuble starts.] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

**Chasuble.** Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

[Enter **Jack** slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.]

**Miss Prism.** Mr. Worthing!

**Chasuble.** Mr. Worthing?

**Miss Prism.** This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

**Jack.** [Shakes **Miss Prism's** hand in a tragic manner.] I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well?

**Chasuble.** Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

**Jack.** My brother.

**Miss Prism.** More shameful debts and extravagance?

**Chasuble.** Still leading his life of pleasure?

**Jack.** [Shaking his head.] Dead!

**Chasuble.** Your brother Ernest dead?

**Jack.** Quite dead.

**Miss Prism.** What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

**Chasuble.** Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

**Jack.** Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

**Chasuble.** Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

**Jack.** No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

**Chasuble.** Was the cause of death mentioned?

**Jack.** A severe chill, it seems.

**Miss Prism.** As a man sows, so shall he reap.

**Chasuble.** [Raising his hand.] Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here?



**Jack.** No. He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

**Chasuble.** In Paris! [Shakes his head.] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [**Jack** presses his hand convulsively.] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [All sigh.] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

**Jack.** Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [**Dr. Chasuble** looks astounded.] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

**Miss Prism.** It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

**Chasuble.** But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

**Jack.** Oh yes.

**Miss Prism.** [Bitterly.] People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

**Jack.** But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

**Chasuble.** But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already?

**Jack.** I don't remember anything about it.

**Chasuble.** But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

**Jack.** I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the

thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

**Chasuble.** Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

**Jack.** Immersion!

**Chasuble.** You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?

**Jack.** Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

**Chasuble.** Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, a most hard-working man.

**Jack.** Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

**Chasuble.** Admirably! Admirably! [Takes out watch.] And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.

**Miss Prism.** This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

[Enter **Cecily** from the house.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrid clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily!

**Chasuble.** My child! my child! [**Cecily** goes towards **Jack**; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.]

**Cecily.** What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! You look as if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

**Jack.** Who?

**Cecily.** Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

**Jack.** What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

**Cecily.** Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to

you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? [Runs back into the house.]

**Chasuble.** These are very joyful tidings.

**Miss Prism.** After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

**Jack.** My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

[Enter **Algernon** and **Cecily** hand in hand. They come slowly up to **Jack**.]

**Jack.** Good heavens! [Motions **Algernon** away.]

**Algernon.** Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future. [**Jack** glares at him and does not take his hand.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

**Jack.** Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in every one. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend Mr. Bunbury whom he goes to visit so often. And surely there must be much good in one who is kind to an invalid, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain.

**Jack.** Oh! he has been talking about Bunbury, has he?

**Cecily.** Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr. Bunbury, and his terrible state of health.

**Jack.** Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury or about anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly frantic.

**Algernon.** Of course I admit that the faults were all on my side. But I must say that I think that Brother John's coldness to me is peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, especially considering it is the first time I have come here.

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest I will never forgive you.

**Jack.** Never forgive me?

**Cecily.** Never, never, never!

**Jack.** Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it. [Shakes with **Algernon** and glares.]

**Chasuble.** It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily, you will come with us.

**Cecily.** Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over.

**Chasuble.** You have done a beautiful action to-day, dear child.

**Miss Prism.** We must not be premature in our judgments.

**Cecily.** I feel very happy. [They all go off except **Jack** and **Algernon**.]

**Jack.** You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman.** I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

**Jack.** What?

**Merriman.** Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the room next to your own.

**Jack.** His luggage?

**Merriman.** Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat-boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.

**Algernon.** I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

**Jack.** Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

**Merriman.** Yes, sir. [Goes back into the house.]

**Algernon.** What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

**Jack.** Yes, you have.

**Algernon.** I haven't heard any one call me.

**Jack.** Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

**Algernon.** My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

**Jack.** I can quite understand that.

**Algernon.** Well, Cecily is a darling.

**Jack.** You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

**Algernon.** Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is actually staying for a whole week with you in your house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

**Jack.** You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave . . . by the four-five train.

**Algernon.** I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't.

**Jack.** Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

**Algernon.** Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

**Jack.** Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

**Algernon.** If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

**Jack.** Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you.

[Goes into the house.]

**Algernon.** I think it has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

[Enter **Cecily** at the back of the garden. She picks up the can and begins to water the flowers.] But I must see her before I go, and make arrangements for another Bunbury. Ah, there she is.

**Cecily.** Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

**Algernon.** He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

**Cecily.** Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

**Algernon.** He's going to send me away.

**Cecily.** Then have we got to part?

**Algernon.** I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.

**Cecily.** It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable.

**Algernon.** Thank you.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman.** The dog-cart is at the door, sir. [**Algernon** looks appealingly at **Cecily**.]

**Cecily.** It can wait, Merriman for . . . five minutes.

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss. [Exit **Merriman**.]

**Algernon.** I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

**Cecily.** I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary. [Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.]

**Algernon.** Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

**Cecily.** Oh no. [Puts her hand over it.] You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

**Algernon.** [Somewhat taken aback.] Ahem! Ahem!

**Cecily.** Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough. [Writes as **Algernon** speaks.]

**Algernon.** [Speaking very rapidly.] Cecily, ever since I first looked

upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

**Cecily.** I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

**Algernon.** Cecily!

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman.** The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

**Algernon.** Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

**Merriman.** [Looks at **Cecily**, who makes no sign.] Yes, sir.

[**Merriman** retires.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

**Algernon.** Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

**Cecily.** You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

**Algernon.** For the last three months?

**Cecily.** Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

**Algernon.** But how did we become engaged?

**Cecily.** Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him, after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

**Algernon.** Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

**Cecily.** On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring

in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover's knot I promised you always to wear.

**Algernon.** Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

**Cecily.** Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. [Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.]

**Algernon.** My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

**Cecily.** You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

**Algernon.** Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

**Cecily.** Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [Replaces box.] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

**Algernon.** But was our engagement ever broken off?

**Cecily.** Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [Shows diary.] 'To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.'

**Algernon.** But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

**Cecily.** It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

**Algernon.** [Crossing to her, and kneeling.] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

**Cecily.** You dear romantic boy. [He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

**Algernon.** Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

**Cecily.** I am so glad.



**Algernon.** You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

**Cecily.** I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

**Algernon.** Yes, of course. [Nervously.]

**Cecily.** You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [**Algernon** rises, **Cecily** also.] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

**Algernon.** But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

**Cecily.** But what name?

**Algernon.** Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance . . .

**Cecily.** But I don't like the name of Algernon.

**Algernon.** Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily . . . [Moving to her] . . . if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

**Cecily.** [Rising.] I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

**Algernon.** Ahem! Cecily! [Picking up hat.] Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church?

**Cecily.** Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

**Algernon.** I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

**Cecily.** Oh!

**Algernon.** I shan't be away more than half an hour.

**Cecily.** Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you to-day for the first time, I think it

is rather hard that you should leave me for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it twenty minutes?

**Algernon.** I'll be back in no time.

[Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]

**Cecily.** What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

[Enter **Merriman.**]

**Merriman.** A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

**Cecily.** Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

**Merriman.** Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

**Cecily.** Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss. [Goes out.]

**Cecily.** Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

[Enter **Merriman.**]

**Merriman.** Miss Fairfax.

[Enter **Gwendolen.**]

[Exit **Merriman.**]

**Cecily.** [Advancing to meet her.] Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

**Gwendolen.** Cecily Cardew? [Moving to her and shaking hands.] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

**Cecily.** How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

**Gwendolen.** [Still standing up.] I may call you Cecily, may I not?

**Cecily.** With pleasure!

**Gwendolen.** And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

**Cecily.** If you wish.

**Gwendolen.** Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

**Cecily.** I hope so. [A pause. They both sit down together.]

**Gwendolen.** Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

**Cecily.** I don't think so.

**Gwendolen.** Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

**Cecily.** Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

**Gwendolen.** [After examining **Cecily** carefully through a lorgnette.] You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

**Cecily.** Oh no! I live here.

**Gwendolen.** [Severely.] Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

**Cecily.** Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

**Gwendolen.** Indeed?

**Cecily.** My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

**Gwendolen.** Your guardian?

**Cecily.** Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

**Gwendolen.** Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [Rising and going to her.] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little

older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly—

**Cecily.** Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

**Gwendolen.** Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

**Cecily.** I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

**Gwendolen.** Yes.

**Cecily.** Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

**Gwendolen.** [Sitting down again.] Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

**Cecily.** I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

**Gwendolen.** Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

**Cecily.** Quite sure. [A pause.] In fact, I am going to be his.

**Gwendolen.** [Inquiringly.] I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** [Rather shy and confidingly.] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

**Gwendolen.** [Quite politely, rising.] My darling Cecily, I think

there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

**Cecily.** [Very politely, rising.] I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [Shows diary.]

**Gwendolen.** [Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully.] It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. [Produces diary of her own.] I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

**Cecily.** It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

**Gwendolen.** [Meditatively.] If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

**Cecily.** [Thoughtfully and sadly.] Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

**Gwendolen.** Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

**Cecily.** Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

**Gwendolen.** [Satirically.] I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

[Enter **Merriman**, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. **Cecily** is about to retort. The presence

of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.]

**Merriman.** Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

**Cecily.** [Sternly, in a calm voice.] Yes, as usual. [Merriman begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. **Cecily** and **Gwendolen** glare at each other.]

**Gwendolen.** Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

**Cecily.** Oh! yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

**Gwendolen.** Five counties! I don't think I should like that; I hate crowds.

**Cecily.** [Sweetly.] I suppose that is why you live in town? [Gwendolen bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol.]

**Gwendolen.** [Looking round.] Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

**Cecily.** So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.** I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

**Cecily.** Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

**Gwendolen.** Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

**Cecily.** Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

**Gwendolen.** [With elaborate politeness.] Thank you. [Aside.] Detestable girl! But I require tea!

**Cecily.** [Sweetly.] Sugar?

**Gwendolen.** [Superciliously.] No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. [Cecily looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.]

**Cecily.** [Severely.] Cake or bread and butter?

**Gwendolen.** [In a bored manner.] Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

**Cecily.** [Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray.] Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

[**Merriman** does so, and goes out with footman. **Gwendolen** drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.]

**Gwendolen.** You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

**Cecily.** [Rising.] To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

**Gwendolen.** From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

**Cecily.** It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

[Enter **Jack**.]

**Gwendolen.** [Catching sight of him.] Ernest! My own Ernest!

**Jack.** Gwendolen! Darling! [Offers to kiss her.]

**Gwendolen.** [Draws back.] A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? [Points to **Cecily**.]

**Jack.** [Laughing.] To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

**Gwendolen.** Thank you. You may! [Offers her cheek.]

**Cecily.** [Very sweetly.] I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

**Gwendolen.** I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** This is Uncle Jack.

**Gwendolen.** [Receding.] Jack! Oh!

[Enter **Algernon.**]

**Cecily.** Here is Ernest.

**Algernon.** [Goes straight over to **Cecily** without noticing any one else.] My own love! [Offers to kiss her.]

**Cecily.** [Drawing back.] A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

**Algernon.** [Looking round.] To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

**Cecily.** Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

**Algernon.** [Laughing.] Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

**Cecily.** Thank you. [Presenting her cheek to be kissed.] You may. [**Algernon** kisses her.]

**Gwendolen.** I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

**Cecily.** [Breaking away from **Algernon.**] Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! [The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.]

**Cecily.** Are you called Algernon?

**Algernon.** I cannot deny it.

**Cecily.** Oh!

**Gwendolen.** Is your name really John?

**Jack.** [Standing rather proudly.] I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

**Cecily.** [To **Gwendolen.**] A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

**Gwendolen.** My poor wounded Cecily!

**Cecily.** My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

**Gwendolen.** [Slowly and seriously.] You will call me sister, will you not? [They embrace. **Jack** and **Algernon** groan and walk up and down.]



**Cecily.** [Rather brightly.] There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

**Gwendolen.** An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

**Jack.** [Slowly and hesitatingly.] Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

**Cecily.** [Surprised.] No brother at all?

**Jack.** [Cheerily.] None!

**Gwendolen.** [Severely.] Had you never a brother of any kind?

**Jack.** [Pleasantly.] Never. Not even of any kind.

**Gwendolen.** I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to any one.

**Cecily.** It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

**Gwendolen.** Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

**Cecily.** No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

[They retire into the house with scornful looks.]

**Jack.** This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

**Algernon.** Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

**Jack.** Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

**Algernon.** That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

**Jack.** Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

**Algernon.** Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

**Jack.** Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too.

**Algernon.** Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

**Jack.** As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

**Algernon.** I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

**Jack.** I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

**Algernon.** Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

**Jack.** There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

**Algernon.** I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

**Jack.** Well, that is no business of yours.

**Algernon.** If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. [Begins to eat muffins.] It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stock-brokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties.

**Jack.** How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

**Algernon.** Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

**Jack.** I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

**Algernon.** When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as any one who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [Rising.]

**Jack.** [Rising.] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [Takes muffins from **Algernon**.]

**Algernon.** [Offering tea-cake.] I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

**Jack.** Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

**Algernon.** But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

**Jack.** I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

**Algernon.** That may be. But the muffins are the same. [He seizes the muffin-dish from **Jack**.]

**Jack.** Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

**Algernon.** You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest.

**Jack.** My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr. Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

**Algernon.** Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

**Jack.** Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

**Algernon.** Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that some one very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

**Jack.** Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

**Algernon.** It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

**Jack.** [Picking up the muffin-dish.] Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

**Algernon.** Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. [Takes them.] I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

**Jack.** But I hate tea-cake.

**Algernon.** Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

**Jack.** Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

**Algernon.** I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left. [**Jack** groans, and sinks into a chair. **Algernon** still continues eating.]

ACT DROP

## THIRD ACT

### SCENE

Morning-room at the Manor House.

[**Gwendolen** and **Cecily** are at the window, looking out into the garden.]

**Gwendolen.** The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as any one else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

**Cecily.** They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

**Gwendolen.** [After a pause.] They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

**Cecily.** But I haven't got a cough.

**Gwendolen.** They're looking at us. What effrontery!

**Cecily.** They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

**Gwendolen.** Let us preserve a dignified silence.

**Cecily.** Certainly. It's the only thing to do now.  
[Enter **Jack** followed by **Algernon**. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British Opera.]

**Gwendolen.** This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

**Cecily.** A most distasteful one.

**Gwendolen.** But we will not be the first to speak.

**Cecily.** Certainly not.

**Gwendolen.** Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

**Cecily.** Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

**Algernon.** In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

**Cecily.** [To **Gwendolen**.] That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

**Gwendolen.** Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

**Cecily.** I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

**Gwendolen.** True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you

offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

**Jack.** Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

**Gwendolen.** I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. [Moving to **Cecily**.] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

**Cecily.** I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

**Gwendolen.** Then you think we should forgive them?

**Cecily.** Yes. I mean no.

**Gwendolen.** True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

**Cecily.** Could we not both speak at the same time?

**Gwendolen.** An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

**Cecily.** Certainly. [**Gwendolen** beats time with uplifted finger.]

**Gwendolen** and **Cecily** [Speaking together.] Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

**Jack** and **Algernon** [Speaking together.] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

**Gwendolen.** [To **Jack**.] For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

**Jack.** I am.

**Cecily.** [To **Algernon**.] To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

**Algernon.** I am!

**Gwendolen.** How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

**Jack.** We are. [Clasps hands with **Algernon**.]

**Cecily.** They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

**Gwendolen.** [To **Jack.**] Darling!

**Algernon.** [To **Cecily.**] Darling! [They fall into each other's arms.]

[Enter **Merriman.** When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.]

**Merriman.** Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

**Jack.** Good heavens!

[Enter **Lady Bracknell.** The couples separate in alarm. Exit **Merriman.**]

**Lady Bracknell.** Gwendolen! What does this mean?

**Gwendolen.** Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

**Lady Bracknell.** Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [Turns to **Jack.**] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

**Jack.** I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell!

**Lady Bracknell.** You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

**Algernon.** Yes, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

**Algernon.** [Stammering.] Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

**Lady Bracknell.** Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

**Algernon.** [Airily.] Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

**Lady Bracknell.** What did he die of?

**Algernon.** Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

**Lady Bracknell.** Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

**Algernon.** My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

**Lady Bracknell.** He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

**Jack.** That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [**Lady Bracknell** bows coldly to **Cecily**.]

**Algernon.** I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** [With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down.] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary inquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons



whose origin was a Terminus. [**Jack** looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.]

**Jack.** [In a clear, cold voice.] Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporrán, Fifeshire, N.B.

**Lady Bracknell.** That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

**Jack.** I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Grimly.] I have known strange errors in that publication.

**Jack.** Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

**Lady Bracknell.** Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr. Markby's is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

**Jack.** [Very irritably.] How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

**Lady Bracknell.** Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. [Rises, looks at her watch.] Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

**Jack.** Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Sitting down again.] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at

her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [To **Cecily**.] Come over here, dear. [**Cecily** goes across.] Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

**Jack.** And after six months nobody knew her.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Glares at **Jack** for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to **Cecily**.] Kindly turn round, sweet child. [**Cecily** turns completely round.] No, the side view is what I want. [**Cecily** presents her profile.] Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!

**Algernon.** Yes, Aunt Augusta!

**Lady Bracknell.** There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

**Algernon.** Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

**Lady Bracknell.** Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [To **Cecily**.] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

**Algernon.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** Cecily, you may kiss me!

**Cecily.** [Kisses her.] Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

**Cecily.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

**Algernon.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Cecily.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

**Jack.** I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

**Lady Bracknell.** Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

**Jack.** It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him of being untruthful. [**Algernon** and **Cecily** look at him in indignant amazement.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

**Jack.** I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretence of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother,

not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

**Lady Bracknell.** Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

**Jack.** That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

**Lady Bracknell.** [To Cecily.] Come here, sweet child. [Cecily goes over.] How old are you, dear?

**Cecily.** Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when I go to evening parties.

**Lady Bracknell.** You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating . . . [In a meditative manner.] Eighteen, but admitting to twenty at evening parties. Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

**Jack.** Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

**Lady Bracknell.** That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I see no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property.

**Cecily.** Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

**Algernon.** Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

**Cecily.** Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like

punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

**Algernon.** Then what is to be done, Cecily?

**Cecily.** I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff.

**Lady Bracknell.** My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

**Jack.** But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Rising and drawing herself up.] You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

**Jack.** Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

**Lady Bracknell.** That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. [Pulls out her watch.] Come, dear, [**Gwendolen** rises] we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

[Enter **Dr. Chasuble**.]

**Chasuble.** Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

**Lady Bracknell.** The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

**Chasuble.** [Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to **Jack** and **Algernon**.] Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

**Lady Bracknell.** At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptized. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

**Chasuble.** Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

**Jack.** I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.

**Chasuble.** I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Starting.] Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

**Chasuble.** Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

**Lady Bracknell.** Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

**Chasuble.** [Somewhat indignantly.] She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

**Lady Bracknell.** It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

**Chasuble.** [Severely.] I am a celibate, madam.

**Jack.** [Interposing.] Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

**Lady Bracknell.** In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

**Chasuble.** [Looking off.] She approaches; she is nigh.

[Enter **Miss Prism** hurriedly.]

**Miss Prism.** I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three-quarters. [Catches sight of **Lady Bracknell**, who has fixed her with a stony glare. **Miss Prism** grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.]

**Lady Bracknell.** [In a severe, judicial voice.] Prism! [**Miss Prism** bows her head in shame.] Come here, Prism! [**Miss**

**Prism** approaches in a humble manner.] Prism! Where is that baby? [General consternation. The **Canon** starts back in horror. **Algernon** and **Jack** pretend to be anxious to shield **Cecily** and **Gwendolen** from hearing the details of a terrible public scandal.] Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. [**Miss Prism** starts in involuntary indignation.] But the baby was not there! [Every one looks at **Miss Prism**.] Prism! Where is that baby? [A pause.]

**Miss Prism.** Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the basinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

**Jack.** [Who has been listening attentively.] But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

**Miss Prism.** Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

**Jack.** Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

**Miss Prism.** I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

**Jack.** What railway station?

**Miss Prism.** [Quite crushed.] Victoria. The Brighton line. [Sinks into a chair.]

**Jack.** I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

**Gwendolen.** If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life. [Exit **Jack** in great excitement.]

**Chasuble.** What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

**Lady Bracknell.** I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

[Noises heard overhead as if some one was throwing trunks about. Every one looks up.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

**Chasuble.** Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

**Lady Bracknell.** This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

**Chasuble.** [Looking up.] It has stopped now. [The noise is redoubled.]

**Lady Bracknell.** I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

**Gwendolen.** This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last. [Enter **Jack** with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.]

**Jack.** [Rushing over to **Miss Prism**.] Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

**Miss Prism.** [Calmly.] It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

**Jack.** [In a pathetic voice.] Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

**Miss Prism.** [Amazed.] You?



**Jack.** [Embracing her.] Yes . . . mother!

**Miss Prism.** [Recoiling in indignant astonishment.] Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

**Jack.** Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. [Tries to embrace her again.]

**Miss Prism.** [Still more indignant.] Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [Pointing to **Lady Bracknell**.] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

**Jack.** [After a pause.] Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

**Lady Bracknell.** I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

**Jack.** Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? [Seizes hold of **Algernon**.] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

**Algernon.** Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice.

[Shakes hands.]

**Gwendolen.** [To **Jack**.] My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become some one else?

**Jack.** Good heavens! . . . I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

**Gwendolen.** I never change, except in my affections.

**Cecily.** What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

**Jack.** Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt

Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?

**Lady Bracknell.** Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

**Jack.** Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

**Lady Bracknell.** Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

**Jack.** [Irritably.] Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

**Lady Bracknell.** [Meditatively.] I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.

**Jack.** Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

**Algernon.** My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

**Jack.** His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

**Lady Bracknell.** The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

**Jack.** The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. [Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.] M. Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. [Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.] I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

**Lady Bracknell.** Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest, I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

**Gwendolen.** Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

**Jack.** Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

**Gwendolen.** I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

**Jack.** My own one!

**Chasuble.** [To **Miss Prism.**] Lætitia! [Embraces her]

**Miss Prism.** [Enthusiastically.] Frederick! At last!

**Algernon.** Cecily! [Embraces her.] At last!

**Jack.** Gwendolen! [Embraces her.] At last!

**Lady Bracknell.** My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

**Jack.** On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

TABLEAU

\*\*\*END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE  
IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST\*\*\*

# 13. The Importance of Being Earnest (Audiobook)

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## 14. The Importance of Being Earnest (Stage)



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## 15. UMTG Presents: The Importance of Being Earnest (Stage Series)



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PART VI

# WEEK 9: THE WORLD OF SHAKESPEARE



# 16. Part Three: Special Topics, Chapter 8 “The World of Shakespeare”

This content can be found in its entirety with images by [clicking here for the pdf](#).

## 8 The World of Shakespeare

*Jeremy Fiebig*

While realism remains the dominant mode of performance today, William Shakespeare remains, by far, the most-produced playwright in the world. He has had the most significant, if not overriding, presence in English-speaking theatre since his work as a playwright, actor, and theatre company co-owner in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Many consider Shakespeare to be the greatest writer and dramatist in the English language. In English-speaking countries and the West, experience with Shakespeare signals a kind of “mastery” of theatre, for both companies and practitioners; in many places, performing or seeing a Shakespearean production means one is participating in the most essential or highest form of theatre.

In addition to being a major theatrical presence, Shakespeare is also an object of great cultural fascination, whether part of a high school curriculum, a slate of shows at a local theatre, or the subject of a major Hollywood film. In many respects, he represents a kind of ideal about what it is to use language, make art, create story, and invent character—all expressions we value as part of the way we express ourselves in theatre and culture.

Of course, Shakespeare’s influence and permanence can also be problematic: Shakespeare was male, white, and Anglo and has come to represent, for some, a kind of colonial takeover of Western

cultures and values. For better or worse, Shakespeare's emergence as a cultural icon—a great writer who has come to represent the good and bad values in Englishspeaking societies and the West—means that by looking at Shakespeare and his plays, we are looking at ourselves and our roles in Western life. Therefore, we can consider Shakespeare in two main ways: one, as a

Shakespeare the man represented by art, film, and theatre. (center) Title page of Heminge and Condell's 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare's work, engraving by Martin Droeshout, considered the closest representation of William Shakespeare. (bottom left and right) The Chandos and Cobbe portraits, c. 1610. Named for the painting's owners, both works are believed to be Shakespeare by some, disputed by others. (top left) Joseph Fiennes as the bard in the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*, a fictional love story set during the writing of *Romeo and Juliet*. (center left) Rafe Spall in the 2011 film *Anonymous* plays an illiterate Shakespeare who is a front for Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. This imaginary account is derived from the "authorship question," a position taken by some who believe that only someone with aristocratic ties and education could have penned Shakespeare's plays. (top right) Patrick Stewart in the 2012 revival of Edward Bond's play *Bingo*, where an unhappily retired Shakespeare deals with his personal life. (center right) Simon Callow's 2010 performance in Jonathan Bate's play *The Man from Stratford* creates a picture of the playwright through snippets of his plays. Sources: Cobbe portrait © Corbis. Chandos portrait © National Portrait Gallery. *Shakespeare in Love* © Bureau L.A. Collection/Sygma/Corbis. *Anonymous* © Sony Pictures. *Bingo* and *The Man from Stratford* © Robbie Jack/Robbie Jack/Corbis.

historical presence, a master of the predominant dramatic form prior to the twentieth century, and two, as a contemporary



presence, a figure whose work sits at the heart of today's theatrical and cultural practices.

Who Was Shakespeare? William Shakespeare, a product of the English educational system and a middle-class family, spent his career as a professional playwright, poet,

actor, and company sharer, or co-owner of a theatre company, from the late 1580s until at least 1612. Born on or around April 23, 1564, he was the son of John Shakespeare, a glove maker and sometime city official, and Mary Arden, the daughter of a landowner. He grew up in Stratford-upon-Avon, a town in the vast countryside of Warwickshire, a county well to the northwest of London and Oxford. Few records exist of William's early life, but scholars believe that he benefited from the economic and cultural engagement resulting from Stratford-upon-Avon's status as a market town and from a robust curriculum at the grammar school in town. Shakespeare received no other formal education of which we are aware. At age eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, about eight years his senior.

A few years later in the early 1590s, he appeared in London having recently written at least a small handful of plays. The historical record is unclear about the reasons for Shakespeare's departure from Stratford-upon-Avon, his decision to seek a trade outside the family business, and his apparent choice to leave his wife and children to pursue a career in London. There is evidence that Shakespeare was surrounded by personal and family dramas such as his father's descent into debt and loss of his city office, his own marriage to a then-pregnant Anne Hathaway, and his

The house in Stratford-upon-Avon where Shakespeare was born and spent his childhood years. Photo by Richard Towell.

coming of age in a time of great political and religious upheaval in and around England.

Though it is not known when exactly he started writing, scholars widely acknowledge his arrival on the London theatre scene in 1592 when another playwright, Robert Greene, referred to Shakespeare as an “upstart crow, beautified with our feathers,” possibly referring to Shakespeare’s lack of a university education. Shakespeare’s writing career began modestly with plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* but seemed to hit commercial success—and gain the attention of Greene—with a string of plays about the English civil wars of the prior century. These plays, the three parts of *Henry VI*, catapulted Shakespeare to the top of the London theatre world. By 1594, his reputation as a playwright made him such a commodity that he formed a company with Richard Burbage, one of London’s leading actors, and several other stars of the London stage. This company was co-owned by Shakespeare and his fellow sharers and sponsored by the Lord Chamberlain, a highly placed government official responsible for Queen Elizabeth’s household. Such patronage indicates the high level of attainment the company and its chief playwright, Shakespeare, had reached by the mid-1590s.

Kelly Kilgore (Lavinia) and Justin Baldwin (Bassanius) in the background; Greg Jackson (Satturinus) and Jean Tafler (Tamora) in Orlando Shakespeare Theater’s 2013 production of *Titus Andronicus*. Photo by Tony Firriolo.

The 2012 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Globe

Theatre (featuring Samantha Spiro and Simon Paisley Day; directed by Toby Frow). © Robbie Jack/Robbie Jack/Corbis.

By 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men had relocated its operation to the Globe Theatre in the south suburbs of London and was performing new plays like *Hamlet* and *As You Like It*. In 1603, after Elizabeth's death, the company received a royal patent, a kind of official license and recognition reserved for achievement with special value to the crown, from Elizabeth's successor, King James. The company was now the King's Men, and this heightened status, along with plays like *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, cemented Shakespeare's and the company's legacy at the top of the London theatre.

In 1608, the company established a second theatre, this one indoors in London's Blackfriars district, which allowed them to perform at a higher ticket price and for a typically wealthier clientele. The company performed at both Blackfriars and the Globe after 1608. Between this time and 1612, Shakespeare undertook several collaborations with other writers, most notably John Fletcher, who succeeded him as the chief playwright upon Shakespeare's retirement. Shakespeare died on or around April 23, 1616, and was buried in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. After his death, the King's Men remained the leading company in London until the closure of the theatres in 1642. In 1623, two of Shakespeare's fellow actors and sharers, John Heminges and Henry Condell,

Detail from *The Long View of London from Bankside*, 1647. This etching by Czech artist Wenceslaus Hollar provides an invaluable representation of London before the Great Fire of 1666. However,

the labels of the Globe Theatre and the "Beere bayting" ring (also known as the Hope Theatre) are reversed. Bearbaiting was a popular

sport in which a bear was chained to a post and attacked by bulldogs. Gamblers placed wagers on the winner.

collected his plays, some never before published, into a Folio meant to represent and honor Shakespeare's work.

We often overlook many of the conditions that created Shakespeare— or rather that allowed Shakespeare, the son of a glove maker, to become Shakespeare, the successful playwright and cultural icon. He began his writing career at a time when theatre enjoyed an especially prized position in English society. In the century before Shakespeare's birth, Johannes Gutenberg's printing press, a German invention that allowed for movable type and mass printing of all kinds of writing, made its way to England. A society that had been largely illiterate—outside the nobility, the church, and some in the merchant class, most citizens could not read—suddenly had access to printed texts of all sorts. This access to the printed word created an atmosphere of excitement and interest in the English language among the many social classes that could now afford the printed word and the education necessary to read it. As part of this atmosphere, writers were inventing new words, style, and grammar. New verse forms were emerging. Readers were soaking up the novelties of the language and a sense was growing about what it meant to speak, and be, English.

This cultural identity was emerging in other areas of English life as well. The political landscape in England in the half-century or so prior to Shakespeare's theatrical career had changed radically as the English

church split off from the governance and authority of the Catholic church, headed by the pope in Rome. Henry VIII, the English king who instituted the split and made himself the head of the church in England, set off a decades-long reimagining of English spirituality and religious life that began to further shape England's cultural identity and put it at odds with the rest of a largely Catholic Europe.

In 1588, the English defeated the Spanish Armada in what was widely regarded as a major military upset. Catholic Spain was the chief foreign threat to England; as a result, England's reaction to the victory was profound. After England had spent more than half a century discovering its Englishness, the defeat of Spain cemented the English national identity.

The theatre was a place where the English theatre language, still in flux, could be experimented and played with, and it was accessible to all—both those who could and could not read. English playwrights thrived during this time and together created one of the most vibrant and productive periods in theatre history. Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, Robert Greene, Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, Thomas Kyd, John Fletcher, Francis Beaumont, and a host of other playwrights, along with Shakespeare, produced dozens of new plays each year, written predominantly in verse, that were performed at playhouses in and around the city of London. These new plays were ostensibly “read” for the audience—notice the *audio* part of *audience*—each with new words, turns of phrase, or rhetorical flourishes that made each playhouse a kind of spoken printing press. These spoken presses were cheap—it cost one penny to see a play on the ground floor of the Globe—and one did not need to be able to read to appreciate the play or its language.

The plays also focused on what it meant to be English. As mentioned, Shakespeare's first commercial successes were plays about the English civil war. Many of Shakespeare's contemporaries wrote similarly about events in English history. Many others focused their work even more locally, in what we now refer to as “city comedies”—plays set in and around London proper. Virtually all playwrights referred to or used current events within their English and London society as material for their plays, from the latest ballads sung on London street corners to the exploits of noteworthy Londoners to both significant and insignificant bits of news. In this regard, playhouses in England at this time were not merely spoken presses; they drew upon London, the entire country, and

the emerging national identity as they presented plays to the audiences of London.

In this marketplace primed for theatre, playing companies of the period built sophisticated enterprises aimed at negotiating the challenges of making theatre in London while making a profit. All companies in this period used a repertory model when producing plays, which meant that a different play was performed each day, with repeated performances of the same play coming days, weeks, or even months apart. The rapid shift from show to show meant that companies did not have time to build elaborate sets or costumes, which helped keep costs down, and could not rehearse more than a few hours on a single play. With no sets, plays were performed largely on a bare stage, possibly with a couple of doorways, an upper-level balcony, and perhaps only a few props, such as a throne or a bed—used when needed. Sensitive to the cost of paying actors, companies kept their cast size relatively small—usually only twelve to twenty actors for a single performance, with several actors playing more than one role in the course of the performance. Companies, composed exclusively of men because of a combination of aesthetic and cultural preferences and common theatre practice that eliminated women on the

stage, used young boys to play women's roles. In the absence of meaningful copyright laws, playing companies kept only one complete copy of the script for a play, fearing that an actor might take a full copy of the script and have it published for profit. Instead, actors learned their lines using “parts” or “sides” with only their lines written. Without electricity and effective lighting, companies performed either outdoors during the daylight hours or indoors under candlelight.

The playing conditions of the time—repertory, actor doubling, limited rehearsal time, bare stages, minimal props, men and boys playing all roles, working from sides—presented unique challenges to the playwrights and audiences of the period and allowed Shakespeare to emerge both uniquely English and theatrical. As he responded to the atmosphere of writing and culture around him, Shakespeare likewise responded to the conditions around him in the playhouse. With a bare stage, he is able to shift from Egypt to Rome, or from Sicilia to Bohemia, or England to France with simple word craft. With a balcony, he writes the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. With boys playing women's roles, he invents lasting characters like Rosalind in *As You Like It* or Viola in *Twelfth Night*—women who disguise themselves as young men in the course of their respective plays. This adaptability and creativity enabled him to cement a career, along with his playing company, at the top of the theatre world.

After Shakespeare's plays resonated in the generations after his death in 1616 and the demise of the King's Men in 1642 and came to define how theatre has been made in English-speaking countries and much of the West since that time. In 1642, after several decades of a highly productive English theatre in which Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and others were able to thrive, the English Parliament voted to close all theatres in England, believing them to perpetuate lies and attract sinful behavior. This move was part of a major religious upheaval between a religiously conservative parliament and King Charles I, which resulted in a bloody civil war and, ultimately, Parliament's victory and long period of rule in England. After eighteen years and the restoration of Charles's son, Charles II, as king, new theatres and theatre companies opened to a society hungry, once again, for "English" theatre. The work of Shakespeare

was performed and adapted by dramatists like William Davenant

and Nahum Tate who, along with their audiences, saw Shakespeare and other early modern playwrights like Beaumont and Fletcher as cultural touchstones harking back to the prewar days. Davenant, who had been a playwright for the King's Men prior to 1642, and his rival playwright and company manager, Thomas Killigrew, each received patents, or licenses, to form new theatre companies after Charles II's restoration to the throne. Killigrew's company even reconstituted the title of the King's Men for his new company. Davenant, Killigrew, and Tate performed Shakespeare but usually only after major adaptation. The postwar, postPuritan London audiences did not, for understandable reasons, have quite the same taste for violence and tragedy as their prewar predecessors, so even Shakespeare's starkest tragedies were reimaged for the Restoration audience. Whereas Shakespeare's *King Lear* is unrelenting in its tragic conclusion—Lear and his beloved daughter, Cordelia, both die in the play's final moments—Nahum Tate's *King Lear* reads as much more of a dramatic comedy. In Tate's version, Cordelia and Lear both live, Cordelia marries, and Lear contemplates a quiet retirement. These two starkly different versions of *Lear* signal us how early practitioners and audiences regarded both Shakespeare and his plays as something to be preserved and a canvas onto which more contemporary values, tastes, and styles could be painted.

In some respects, this early reaction to and use of Shakespeare's plays has continued to characterize how we have approached Shakespeare since. The initial impulse to see the plays as something of value—deeply resonant poetic dramas, reflections of England's politics and culture, current events, frontiers of a freshly emerging language, pieces of art or literature—continued. Shakespeare was at the heart of theatre in England throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, championed from the London stage by actor-managers like David Garrick and in writing by diarists and critics like Samuel Johnson, each of whom held special positions as cultural tastemakers in Britain. Shakespeare was also exported to Europe, with plays like *Ham- let*



being adapted and performed in France and Germany, and even as puppet shows in Italy and America, where his plays were among the first performed in English.

In this period, responses to Shakespeare's work developed into new traditions of academic study, theatrical performance, and cultural expression.

Three characters from *Hamlet*. These antique marionettes were found in the attic of a church in what used to be a predominately Czech neighborhood in New York City. Today, they are used by the Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre.

Each of these traditions had its roots in his plays and stagecraft, but also adapted to the new conditions and needs of practitioners, audiences, and cultures. Some practitioners and audiences continued to see the plays in much the same vein as their predecessors: Shakespeare was about being English and celebrating Englishness. By performing Shakespeare, an actor or company was performing the work of the great master of the English language in a way that bought it some legitimacy with its audience. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a unified Britain was emerging as a major world power, building its empire, and colonizing America, Australia, Africa, and parts of Asia, the assertion of this Englishness became even more important. At home, Shakespeare's plays and language allowed audiences to celebrate themselves and their great cultural heritage with Shakespeare right at the center of this expression, the literary persona responsible for the culture's crowning achievements. Abroad, in colonies like those that would become the United States, Canada, and India, Shakespeare was simply part of a way to connect to and assert what

it meant to be English, to be civilized, and to be Western; volumes of Shakespeare's

plays became what English speakers placed on their shelves right next to their Bibles.

In all, Shakespeare's poetic drama had become the predominant theatrical form of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this preoccupation with him extended beyond the stage into societies that were increasingly literate and increasingly literary. In some respects, Shakespeare had become both a dramatic and a literary ideal, representing the highest, most essential mode of theatrical performance on stages throughout the West and serving as the singular literary and artistic figure in the culture. At its most benign, thinking about Shakespeare as a genius meant that Britain could assert its position at the apex of Western civilization; as the producer of the world's greatest poet and greatest artistic mind, Great Britain could be articulated as more refined, smarter, or having achieved more than others. As Britain's influence expanded in North America, southern Asia, Australia, and Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Shakespeare's role at the forefront of cultural expression meant that both he and his work were valued not only on their own merits, but as representations of the nation, of cultural superiority, and of genius itself.

This new position meant that Shakespeare's plays were no longer being encountered as the fresh, relevant reflections of England and its language, but as the basic material used for making the best theatre and defining a cultural ideal. Shakespeare's plays were, for actors, audiences, readers, and scholars, part of a canon—must-read, must-watch material that defined what it meant to see theatre and be English. This idea of “canon,” a notion that the greatest artistic and cultural works of Europe could be thought of as a collective achievement of a civilization, put Shakespeare's plays into a more integrated role in society. In the schoolhouse, the plays became part of organized curricula. At universities and among the

scholarly community, the plays became the subject of scholarly study and writing. Scholars like Edmund Malone began to dig into Shakespeare, both in essays and in newly edited versions of the plays, meaning that Shakespeare was taking his place alongside the great classical and Renaissance writers worthy of serious study. On the stage, stars were made based, in large part, on their achievements in the great Shakespearean roles like Hamlet, Othello, and Richard III. Many actors became “great” only after performing Shakespeare well. For actors such as David Garrick, Sarah Siddons and the Kemble and Booth families,

Shakespeare was a staple of performance. Stars also helped to generate new excitement around Shakespeare’s plays. With great actors in Shakespeare’s leading roles, theatre in England and the emerging United States reached its heyday—Shakespeare was being reinvented and made relevant again in the performances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This newness was expressed not only in the performances of the stars, each with their own “brand” of doing Shakespeare, but also in how audiences identified with the Shakespeare they saw.

In Europe, Shakespeare’s plays were translated into German, French, and Italian as Romanticism emerged—a movement that, for the first time, put Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers and artists at or above the level of classical authors like Euripedes, Seneca, and Virgil—and composers like Giuseppe Verdi, Hector Berlioz, and Richard Wagner adapted Shakespeare for the opera. In the United States, Shakespeare’s plays were becoming part of the cultural landscape for African Americans, with popular black actor Ira Aldridge playing roles like Hamlet and Othello. More broadly, Shakespeare’s work represented an ideal mode of performance and of literature; to perform Shakespeare, see it performed, or read or study it was to play a part in the mainstream of cultural life. For Aldridge and others who existed, at least in part, outside

The 2011 production of *Richard III* by the Propeller Theatre Company. Photo by Manuel Harlan.

Ira Aldridge as Othello, c. 1830. Oil on canvas. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

the cultural mainstream, Shakespeare may have been seen as a catalyst or gateway for blacks, Jews, immigrants, women, colonized populations, and other cultural minorities to converse with and contribute to the otherwise English-speaking, white, male cultural norm.

At the same time, Shakespeare's plays could become the mechanism for distinguishing oneself or one's group from that norm. One such example of this was in the 1849 Astor Place Opera House Riot in New York City. Here, rival actors Edwin Forrest, an

American, and William Charles Macready, an Englishman, had presented competing interpretations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The rivalry between the two men was primarily a stylistic one, with each representing a different way of acting the title role in the play. Audiences, however, saw in the two interpretations a break along other, more deeply seeded, lines of social class and status. Many in the American audience, primed with anti-English sentiment that saw Macready and other English as socially elite, turned on Macready and his supporters, and violence erupted, leaving several dead and scores wounded.

Though this example is by far the most extreme, it demonstrates what Shakespeare's plays were becoming by the dawn of the twentieth century, both in the theatre and in society: material that, on one hand,

Engraving of the Astor Place Opera House Riot in New York, 1849.  
Library of Congress.

represented a kind of cultural continuity—touchstones that signified connectedness and commonality and, on the other hand, could reflect the endless values and conditions with which they came into contact. In this way, Shakespeare's plays were paradoxically both a connection to the larger English-speaking world, a nod to a particular country's—or culture's—English heritage, and a means of asserting a separation or adaptation of that heritage.

What Was Shakespeare? For theatre practitioners, the ideal Shakespeare encountered in the dynamic, heightened performance in some of today's theatres can be at odds with the educational or academic Shakespeares whose treatment can be comparatively static. Our first engagement with Shakespeare is likely to be reading

the play as a literary object rather than a text for performance. For some potential audiences, this notion of Shakespeare as a bookish enterprise—a static, printed thing rather than an enacted, embodied thing—can be intimidating and off-putting. At the same time, some readers who like Shakespeare as something to be read and closely studied might find the theatrical Shakespeare too loud, too garish, or, as with many film adaptations we see today, not as good as the book.

Our responses to Shakespeare can often fall along cultural lines. Shakespeare's identity, his style, the cultural changes that have passed since his career in London theatre, and the role he plays and has played in the culture each allow for different responses based on who we are and what role we occupy in the culture. In some sense, this means that Shakespeare, no matter how ideal, must always answer for the agendas and traditions that have appropriated the playwright and his work over time. If Shakespeare can be identified as a heady poet, a bawdy writer, a male, a symbol of colonial power, an English speaker, a white person, a Catholic or Protestant, a member of the middle class, or any other thing that Shakespeare was in his own day or has become since, our responses will be vastly different depending on who we are. These responses enable our exchange with Shakespeare and ultimately put us into conversation with and about Shakespeare's work. Common critical responses—lenses for looking at Shakespeare in close study—include feminist criticism, performance criticism, and consideration of the historical contexts that influenced Shakespeare's work.

The presence of the many traditions, responses, and understandings of seeing, reading, studying, and performing Shakespeare—and it can be argued easily that there are more to consider—signal how we would think of him in the twentieth century and how we continue to consider the playwright-poet and his work today. Each Shakespearean tradition—theatrical, literary,

educational, cultural—is a way of appropriating Shakespeare and aligning the ideals of that tradition with perceived ideals of Shakespeare. For the scholar of English, Shakespeare can be the master poet or the timeless, even universal, artist. For the schoolteacher, Shakespeare can be the “safe,” “proper,” or “authorized” subject of study. For those in society, literacy in Shakespearean plays and poems can serve as a badge of cultural achievement, a ticket to sophistication. In the theatre, Shakespeare can be an ideal mode of performance—a heightened way of approaching the theatre craft that carries with it a sense of seriousness, authenticity, classicality, or heightened expression.

**The Values of Poetic Drama** Though there are hundreds of Shakespeare brands—methods of doing theatre that differ from theatre to theatre and country to country—the Shakespearean theatrical tradition is a rich one, and one that is distinct

from the primarily realistic modes of performance we see in many plays and films today. Shakespeare’s poetic drama has different values than its counterparts in realism and therefore is a different kind of theatrical expression, one that requires different tools in rehearsal and performance. The following are among the values that set poetic drama apart:

**Language as the Primary Means of Conveyance** Poetic drama puts a premium on language in performance. Though language is an important part of most kinds of theatre, poetic drama uses language as the primary means of revealing characters and story. In realism and other modes of making theatre, other means of revelation might be used, from spectacular effects, to dance or movement, to physicality, behavioral acting choices, or subtextual discoveries. One example of language as the primary means of revealing the characters and story is in this speech from *Hamlet* as Hamlet

happens upon his uncle, Claudius, the play's villain, who is praying and debates whether or not to kill him:

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;

And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd: A villain kills my father; and for that,

I, his sole son, do this same villain send To heaven.

O, this is hire and salary, not revenge. He took my father grossly, full of bread;

With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May; And how his audit stands who knows save heaven? But in our circumstance and course of thought, 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged,

To take him in the purging of his soul, When he is fit and season'd for his passage? No!

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent: When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed; At game, a-swearing, or about some act That has no relish of salvation in't;

Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, And that his soul may be as damn'd and black

As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays: This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Here, Hamlet is revealing to the audience everything happening in this moment through his language: He has an opportunity to kill his uncle, but his uncle is praying, maybe for forgiveness; if Claudius is forgiven, Hamlet's choice to murder him would be an act of grace, not of revenge; Hamlet wants to kill Claudius anyway and tells us he is raising his sword to do it; ultimately he relents, promising to find another, more opportune moment to kill his uncle, preferably while Claudius is engaged in some sort of sin.

Though there are notable exceptions in realistic drama,



Shakespeare's use of language to convey the dramatic moment, the plot, and even the character's thoughts and actions is an essential element of poetic drama. In realistic drama, we might expect to get all of this information but by an array of different means: Hamlet might raise his sword but not necessarily tell us he is doing so. We might see the character struggle psychologically or physically with the idea of killing his uncle but not necessarily reveal that thought process to the audience. Lighting cues, sound effects, or musical underscoring might help tell the story of this suspenseful moment of reluctance. In contrast, in Shakespeare's poetic drama—not only in speeches like this but also in dialogue—the spoken language becomes the primary means of making the theatrical moment.

Heightened Language Leads to Heightened ExperienceEspecially as compared to realistic drama, poetic drama simply sounds different than realistic dialogue. One of the ways we might describe this difference is that realistic dialogue sounds more or less the way we speak to each other as part of our everyday lives, while in poetic drama, there is a heightened sense to the language—it operates in a special, more intense way. This heightened language is directly tied to the poetry: Shakespeare's language, for instance, does not merely convey ideas, as it might in realism, but conveys rhythm, structure, rhetorical patterns, linguistic flourishes, and image in a complex way. Take the first part of Richard's speech from the opening of *Richard III*:

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this sun of York; And all the clouds that  
lour'd upon our house In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths; Our bruised  
arms hung up for monuments;

Our stern alarums chang'd to merry meetings, Our dreadful  
marches to delightful measures. Grim-visag'd war hath smooth'd his  
wrinkled front; And now,—instead of mounting barbed steeds

To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,— He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber

To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.

In this speech, the language works differently than it would if Richard III were a realistic drama. First, the language is poetic: each line has a certain number of syllables and a certain rhythm, the sentence structure is occasionally manipulated to fit a better rhythm or to make for a more beautiful line reading, the images are especially rich (e.g., “grim-visag’d war,” the idea that war could be a stern-looking person), and there are patterns built into the language that give the speech its heightened sense. In another mode of drama, this speech could just as easily be:

We’re really glad the York family just won the civil war. The sad days for us are over and we’re going to trade in our days of war for music and parties.

Instead, Shakespeare’s speech has a lot more going on in it—contrasting images (summer and winter), recurrent sounds (the assonance in “clouds,” “lour’d,” and “house” and the consonance in “bosom,” “buried,” “brows,” and “bound”), the setting up and breaking of rhetorical patterns (the three lines beginning with “Our . . .”), and the expansive word choice (*lascivious*, *lour’d*, and *barbed*).

This heightened approach to the language in the Shakespearean the-

atrical tradition calls for a heightened experience, both for actors and audience. For actors, speaking poetic drama might mean matching the heightened, more intense, more lyrical nature of the language with a heightened approach to physicality, vocal delivery, or emotional payout.

Certainly not all of the patterns have been identified in this selection. Shakespeare's language is full of these and many other rhetorical elements. What other patterns can you identify in this speech?

For the audience, the heightened language can mean a more demanding, more complex theatrical experience.

Language Prompts the Imagination in a Special Way  
In part because of the heightened language and experience associated with it, and in part because of its literary nature, poetic drama calls upon both the practitioner and the audience to engage their imaginations in ways that may be less common in realistic drama. In Shakespeare's plays, we can be called upon to imagine the setting; to stretch our imagination to account for a magical character or a fantastical, unrealistic element; or to believe that the woman in the play who is dressed like a man passes muster.

The requirement of imagination is a key element of Shakespeare's plays in particular. One example is **spoken décor**, settings that are described rather than demonstrated, as in this example from *Macbeth*:

Duncan: This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself Unto our gentle senses.

Banquo: This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,  
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle: Where they  
most breed and haunt, I have observed, The air is delicate.

Here we do not see Macbeth's castle, which Duncan and Banquo describe, but rather we hear about it through descriptive

language—spoken décor. For Shakespeare and other dramatists in early modern England, spoken décor proved an economical means of creating setting for a particular scene. Rather than building a new set for each scene, or even a new set for each play, both of which were very expensive and impractical options for the playing companies of the day, spoken décor called upon the actors to paint a world—Scotland, Rome, Egypt, Italy—that audience could imagine together.

In addition to spoken décor, Shakespeare's plays stoke the imagination in other ways: a few actors might have to represent an entire army, weeks might pass in just a few moments on the stage, or a character might hide in plain sight or adopt what is, to the audience, a very transparent disguise. The Chorus in *Henry V* points to some of the ways audiences might be prompted to imagine:

... can this cockpit hold

The vasty fields of France? or may we cram Within this wooden O  
the very casques That did affright the air at Agincourt?

O, pardon! since a crooked figure may Attest in little place a  
million;

And let us, ciphers to this great accompt, On your imaginary  
forces work.

Suppose within the girdle of these walls Are now confined two  
mighty monarchies,

Whose high upreared and abutting fronts The perilous narrow  
ocean parts asunder:

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts; Into a thousand  
parts divide on man,

And make imaginary puissance;

Think when we talk of horses, that you see them Printing their  
proud hoofs i' the receiving earth; For 'tis your thoughts that now  
must deck our kings, Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,  
Turning the accomplishment of many years

Into an hour-glass: for the which supply, Admit me Chorus to this history;

Who prologue-like your humble patience pray, Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

For audiences, imagining and filling in the world of the play is a cue to take a more active part in how the play is made and, ultimately, in its successful performance. Because Shakespeare's poetic drama asks us to imagine that Rosalind, a beautiful young woman, is instead a young man named Ganymede, the ultimate success of Rosalind's disguise depends on whether we allow it to work over the course of the play, *As You Like It*. This stretching or testing of our imaginative will is key in Shakespeare's plays and represents a clear distinction from what can often be a more literal and more plausible way of making theatre in the realistic mode. Though there are myriad exceptions among plays in contemporary theatre—*Angels in America*, *Parts I & II*, for instance—poetic drama, particularly that of Shakespeare, seems to make these special demands on the audience as a rule.

Interpreting ShakespeareIn the theatrical tradition, the imagination required to engage Shakespeare's plays prompts practitioners—particularly directors and designers—to realize, in production, their own imagined responses to the play. Because Shakespeare is such a presence in the theatre and the culture, the plays can become a bit like a blank canvas onto which modern practitioners can invent new worlds around the play. Directors and designers of modern Shakespeare productions might do this with a stylized

Emily Plumtree as Nerissa and Susannah Fielding as Portia in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2011 production of *The Merchant of*

*Venice*, which takes place in present-day Las Vegas amid a television dating game in which a blond wig-wearing Portia hosts. Photo © Robbie Jack/Corbis.

Sir Ian McKellen as the titular role in the 1995 film *Richard III*, reset in midtwentieth-century fascist England. Director Richard Loncraine brings the reality of World War II into the Shakespearean world. Photo © United Artists.

production design or “concept.” In some of these concept productions, a given play can be reimagined in a different era or setting that resonates with the play’s central themes, helps the audience connect the play to other ideas, or makes the play look or feel fresh and contemporary.

These concepts are mostly sensorial adaptations that fill in the imagined setting with an actual one and create a fuller theatrical experience for audiences that have come to expect plays with compelling lighting, sets, and effects while keeping Shakespeare’s original texts largely intact. Other concepts might include rewriting or reorganizing the texts, using a limited number of actors (say, in a four-person production of *Romeo and Juliet*), or using a play as the basis for a much more highly stylized performance.

Concept productions are one approach to these imaginative texts, but there are others. Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London and the American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Virginia, both reconstructions of two of Shakespeare’s original theatres, often attempt to present Shakespeare’s plays in an “original” setting with bare stages, live music, “universal” lighting (lighting of actor and audience together with no blackouts as one might see in a conventional theatre), and early modern costuming. Though not all productions at the Globe or the

This 2010 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* featured a cast of eight actors playing multiple roles, including gender-, race-, and age-nonspecific casting. Burning Coal Theatre Company (directed by Emily Rann). Photo by Jerome Davis.

The Globe Theatre. Built in 1599 and demolished in 1644, it was recreated based on historical evidence and opened in 1997. Photo by Heidi Blanton.

Interior of the Globe Theatre. Photo by David Welch.

Blackfriars are performed with all of these elements, these companies attempt to respond to the poetic drama with simple concepts and relatively few trappings in an effort to return some of the business of imagination to their audiences.

Our imaginative response to Shakespeare—taking our cue as practitioners and audiences to engage these plays in ways that make sense and speak to us—and our awareness of the agendas and traditions that

have informed and will continue to inform how we make and remake Shakespeare is ultimately a way of keeping the plays and their ideas and language fresh, contemporary, and alive. Because Shakespeare's words still resonate today, practitioners and audiences are in a unique position to say something back to him and to each other.

LanguageShakespeare wrote primarily in **blank verse**. Verse

means that the lines have meter—a regular pattern of stressed syllables that occurs in the poetic line. Blank means that the verse is unrhymed. Therefore, blank verse is unrhymed, metered verse. The meter Shakespeare uses—for the most part—is called **iambic pentameter**. An iamb is a kind of metrical “foot” with one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, like:

/re WARD/

*Penta* (of *pentameter*) means “five.” So in iambic pentameter, there are five iambs (five feet) in a regular line of verse:

/now, FAIR/ hiPPOL/yTA,/ our NUP/tial HOUR/

Say that out loud and you will hear yourself naturally speak five iambs (/unstressed-STRESSED/). Even if you do not know the identity of Hippolyta, or the definition of a nuptial, this line sounds relatively normal. However, there will be some lines in Shakespeare that sound very strange by comparison. They may be strange for one of two reasons: (a) you may be pronouncing or stressing the words incorrectly (Shakespeare’s language does have some oddly pronounced words, like “commendable”—pronounced a bit like “common double”) or (b) the line isn’t regular. Here is an example of a slightly irregular line:

/to BE/ or NOT/ to BE/that IS/ the QUEST/ion/

This line has five perfectly normal iambs followed by an extra, unstressed, syllable (“ion”). This is called a weak ending and it occurs quite a lot throughout Shakespeare’s poetic verse. This is still technically a “regular” line. In Hamlet’s speech that follows, however, he has a lot of these

weak endings right in a row—and this string of weak endings



becomes a pattern unto itself. Patterns like this one are important to notice. In a play about a prince who cannot decide whether to go through with killing his uncle, this series of weak endings makes Hamlet sound like he is waffling (which is true). This is a pattern the actor can use to think about, and perhaps unlock, a choice about how to play this particular moment.

Verse may cause the actor to pronounce words irregularly so that they better fit the verse line. Take this speech from *Macbeth*:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well It were done quickly: if the assassination

Could trammel up the consequence, and catch With his surcease success; that but this blow Might be the be-all and the end-all here,

But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases We still have judgment here; that we but teach Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice

Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice To our own lips.

The lines are mostly regular, but to make them so, Shakespeare had to elide some words. Examples of **elisions** from the preceding speech include 'tis, 'twere, We'd, and poison'd. This short speech contains a relatively high percentage of elisions and therefore might be a pattern to notice and then address as a potential acting choice, simply: why is Macbeth rushing through his words? Is he anxious? Hurried? When the actor begins to address those questions brought on by the language, he or she has a potential character choice.

Sometimes actors may have to elide words themselves to make the words fit the verse line—she might have a two-syllable “TROylus” in one line and a three-syllable “TRO-ih-lus” in another, for example. On the printed page, both pronunciations simply appear as “Troilus.” The actor must expand or overenunciate the pronunciation of some words, too, to fit the verse line:

And change misdoubt to resolution

To scan correctly, you have to expand the word “REsoLushun” to “REsoLUsheUN.” Or here:

Had left the flushing in her galled eyes

“Galled” becomes two syllables: “gall-ed.” For modern actors and audiences, these pronunciations can seem antiquated and can actually obscure, rather than reveal, a moment in the play. The idea with verse is to notice how it is working, particularly the places where it works differently, and then use the observations as a basis for performance choices.

As the actors begin to do all this analysis, they may find that in the verse line, this “pulse” throughout the poetry often highlights a point—a kind of “thesis” for the character in a given moment. Here is another example from *Macbeth*:

/toMOR/ow AND/to MOR/ow AND/to MOR/ow

This is just a regular line with a weak ending. Now just try to say the STRESSED syllables:

/MORE/AND/MORE/AND/MORE

For a character giving this particular speech in a play about ambition, and who has just learned his wife is dead and enemies are on the way to kill him, a line like “MORE AND MORE AND MORE” speaks volumes—he wanted more and more and more, and now more and more and more bad news keeps coming. Very often, irregularities do not mean nearly as much as this example. The point is to notice them and account for them as an actor by making a choice.

In addition to verse patterns, variations, and rules, Shakespeare’s

poetic drama is also rich with other kinds of patterns that have more to do with how ideas are constructed. We examined rhetorical patterns earlier in the speech from *Richard III*. **Rhetorical patterns** are what you notice happening in the language that sound like something organized is happening. Alliteration, consonance, assonance, repetition, antithesis— all these are rhetorical devices that, like verse patterns, can help the actor and the audience navigate how a particular character thinks or sounds.

In part because of the unique role of theatre in the early modern period, audiences came to the theatre to hear new words and new uses of the language—Shakespeare was meeting that demand in many ways by offering new words or new uses of existing words. Encountering words that are unfamiliar to us was also experienced by the earliest listeners of Shakespeare. For the actor both in Shakespeare’s day and today, the task is to reveal the meaning of those words through gesture, clear acting choices that help to convey meaning, and careful listening to the context of the moment.

**Printing Conventions and Modern Editions**For most actors—and for those of us who read Shakespeare—we encounter more than just spoken words, but also punctuation, spelling, typography, and stage directions. Though most of us encounter Shakespeare in an edition that has modern, consistent spelling and punctuation, offset stage directions, clear breaks between scenes, and so on, printed texts from the early modern period are very different.

For most actors and readers today, this text from *The Tempest* in Shakespeare’s First Folio is difficult to navigate; there are variations in spelling, some older and out-of-use; inconsistent line arrangements; abbreviations

for character names; and older uses of punctuation. As practitioners and readers of Shakespeare today, we need to know that the modern, clean, edited versions of the play we might use in production or study in class are different from those used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. These differences are editorial choices that may illuminate or obscure meaning for the actor, director, or reader. One example from *The Tempest*, earlier, is that a modern edition might say either “ducks” or “docks” instead of “dockes” in an attempt to provide clarity, potentially obscuring the definition here, which is that a “docke” or “dock” is a kind of weed. Other editorial choices in the preceding passage might be to convert some of the many colons to semicolons, periods, commas, or exclamation points so that the passage might read as this one does:

Sebastian: Very well.

Antonio: And most chirurgonly.

Gonzalo: It is foul weather in us all, good sir, When you are cloudy.

Sebastian: Foul weather? Antonio: Very foul.

Gonzalo: Had I plantation of this isle, my lord,— Antonio: He’ld sow’t with nettle-seed.

Sebastian: Or docks, or mallows.

Gonzalo: And were the king on’t, what would I do? Sebastian: ‘Scape being drunk for want of wine.

Gonzalo: I’ the commonwealth I would by contraries Execute all things; for no kind of traffic Would I admit; no name of magistrate; Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,

And use of service, none; contract, succession, Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;

No occupation; all men idle, all!

And women too, but innocent and pure; No sovereignty;—

Sebastian: Yet he would be king on’t.

For most, the updates to the punctuation, formatting, and spelling

on the page can be helpful in providing clarity and in making the text

readable but, depending on the editor, meaning can be changed—sometimes very slightly, as in the preceding example, but sometimes much more substantially—and can affect both performance and reception. Here is an example of how editors might affect our understanding of *Romeo and Juliet*. We see three source texts (Q1 and Q2 are the first two “quarto” editions of the play, and F1 is the “folio” edition of the play) that are later negotiated, shifted, and conflated in the modern (Norton) edition.

#### **Romeo and Juliet Q1 (1597)**

*Juliet*: Whats Mountague? It is nor hand nor foote, Nor arme, nor face, nor any other part.

Whats in a name? That which we call a Rose, By any other name would smell as sweet:

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo cald,

#### **Q2 (1599)**

*Juliet*. Whats Mountague? it is nor hand nor foote, Nor arme nor face, o be some other name Belonging to a man.

Whats in a name that which we call a rose, By any other word would smell as sweete, So Romeo would were he not Romeo cald,

#### **F1 (1623)**

*Juliet*: What's Mountague? it is nor hand nor foote, Nor arme, nor face, O be some other name Belonging to a man.

What? in a names that which we call a Rose, By any other word would smell as sweete,

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo cal'd,

#### **Norton Shakespeare (1998)**

*Juliet:* What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!

What's in a name? That which we call a rose By any other word would smell as sweet.

Obviously there are major editorial differences between the source texts and the modern edition. These differences range from spelling to punctuation to word choice. The editors of modern editions like the Norton shown here are negotiating the text for the modern reader and making judgments about what should and should not be included based on preference. No editorial choices made to update the text for the modern reader are malignant, but they can affect our understanding of the text, obscuring or clarifying in different ways. For the actor or director, having at least a connection to how the older, original texts look and function can provide helpful insights for performance.

**Stagecraft**In addition to understanding Shakespeare's language and how modern editions can affect how we read and perform his plays, it can be helpful to understand how Shakespeare made theatre, and how that stagecraft can provide insight for performance. Though there were many conditions for which Shakespeare wrote, we will focus on a few that can strongly affect production choices.

**Universal Lighting**Shakespeare's playhouses—the Theatre, the Globe, the Blackfriars— were lit by a combination of daylight and candlelight. In the absence of electricity and the ability to control lights, as we might in a blackout in the theatre today, both actors and audience were lit together. Perhaps because of this condition, plays from these periods—Shakespeare's and others—almost without exception feature characters that talk to the audience.

Though there are exceptions in today's theatre and film (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is a classic example), the frequency with which it happened in early modern drama made this direct address a common convention in Shakespearean performance and presents a different kind of challenge for today's actors and directors who may be more used to dealing with audiences in the dark. The challenge of a seen audience is that they move, they occasionally talk back, and they may or may not

be paying attention—and so the actor has to account for a number of variables besides his or her own performance.

**Song and Dance** Shakespeare's plays have much more song and dance than we might expect in a modern, realistic, play, putting Shakespeare's work somewhere between what we might think of as a play and what we would consider a musical. The presence of song and dance in Shakespeare can enliven the piece, set a certain emotional tone, or convey the nature of a particular moment such as the entrance of a king or queen. While we have some of the original music for many of these songs, other tunes have disappeared. Even with the ones we still have, directors and designers may find that the songs or tunes do not fit an updated concept. These songs, signals, and dances present challenges to actors, directors, designers, and technicians who have to navigate them in performance.

**Casting** Shakespeare wrote for a small company composed exclusively of males. Women were forbidden to take the stage in early modern England, so boys who had not yet gone through vocal changes of puberty played the parts of younger women. The economics of playing companies prevented them from hiring more than usually twelve to eighteen actors. These casting conditions have two major impacts on performance today. First, since women were not allowed to perform in Shakespeare's plays,

there are fewer women's roles in Shakespeare, meaning practitioners often choose to break conventional casting rules to accommodate their desire for more women in the cast, often either by putting women into "breeches" roles (where women play men) or by making a given character a woman instead of a man.

Second, as a result of the small companies, one actor played potentially several small roles in a given production. In performance today, companies may choose to adopt this Shakespearean practice or cast a fuller company based on the named characters in a script. The latter option is a common one but can often lose what may have been a clever or compelling second layer to the performance. If one actor plays a role, say Banquo in *Macbeth*, who is killed about halfway through the play and returns to the stage later on in the play as Siward, we see an actor who is, in a sense, taking revenge for his own death.

**EmbeddedStageDirections**In very few cases do Shakespeare's plays state in the stage directions where a scene is taking place, what time it is, what the temperature is, or any of the other given circumstances of the scene. Instead, the plays contain stage directions that are embedded in the dialogue itself or referenced with a prop. If a character is carrying a torch or candle, there's an embedded cue that it's nighttime. If it is nighttime, and dark out, there's a direction for the actor to follow: you probably can't see very well—that's why you brought the light. The impact of this embedded stage direction has a direct impact on performance, telling the actor how to behave and, ultimately, how to tell the story more clearly.



Understanding some of the conditions for which Shakespeare wrote, and the conventions at work in the plays—internal cues, casting considerations, and the like—may help some modern practitioners navigate what can sometimes be a daunting, or obstructed, text. At the same time, there are plenty of other resources—new understandings of the text that scholars or previous productions have unveiled, longstanding performance traditions, critical essays on a given play, careful study of original texts, examination of derivative works, training in classical acting techniques, performance itself, and so on—that can help inform directorial choices and acting approaches. Our own imaginations, dispositions, and ideas can also help unlock Shakespeare, both for ourselves and for potential audiences. While we, as audiences or practitioners, can work to better understand Shakespeare, ultimately the quality of the exchange between Shakespeare and ourselves and with each other does not rely solely upon whether we understand how Shakespeare is supposed to work, but simply whether he does work as we enact the plays, speak the language, and engage in the performance. In this sense, Shakespeare is not Shakespeare, the imposing, weighted (and weighty), antiquated, supposedly perfect, monolith we have come to consider, but rather the fresh, sometimes bad, sometimes very good, “new,” alive Shakespeare we can help to create.



PART VII

WEEK 10: ELIZABETHAN  
THEATER, WEEK 11:  
STAGECRAFT



# 17. The Taming of the Shrew

[Project Gutenberg's The Taming of the Shrew, by William Shakesp](#)

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

by William Shakespeare

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ACT V

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PLAYERS

HUNTSMEN

SERVANTS

BAPTISTA MINOLA, a rich gentleman of Padua  
VINCENTIO, an old gentleman of Pisa  
LUCENTIO, son to Vincentio; in love with Bianca  
PETRUCHIO, a gentleman of Verona; suitor to Katherine

Suitors to Bianca

GREMIO

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Servants to Lucentio

TRANIO

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PEDANT, set up to personate Vincentio

Daughters to Baptista

KATHERINA, the shrew

BIANCA

WIDOW

Tailor, Haberdasher, and Servants attending on Baptista and Petruchio

SCENE: Sometimes in Padua, and sometimes in PETRUCHIO'S house in the country.

INDUCTION

SCENE I. Before an alehouse on a heath.

Enter Hostess and Sly

SLY.

I'll pheeze you, in faith.

HOSTESS.

A pair of stocks, you rogue!

SLY.

Y'are a baggage; the Slys are no rogues; look in the chronicles: we came in with Richard Conqueror. Therefore, pauca pallabris; let the world slide. Sessa!

HOSTESS.

You will not pay for the glasses you have burst?

SLY.

No, not a denier. Go by, Saint Jeronimy, go to thy cold bed and warm thee.

HOSTESS.

I know my remedy; I must go fetch the third-borough.

[Exit]

SLY.

Third, or fourth, or fifth borough, I'll answer him by law. I'll not budge an inch, boy: let him come, and kindly.

[Lies down on the ground, and falls asleep.]

Horns winded. Enter a Lord from hunting, with Huntsmen and Serv



LORD.

Huntsman, I charge thee, tender well my hounds;  
Brach Merriman, the poor cur is emboss'd,  
And couple Clowder with the deep-mouth'd brach.  
Saw'st thou not, boy, how Silver made it good  
At the hedge-corner, in the coldest fault?  
I would not lose the dog for twenty pound.

FIRST HUNTSMAN.

Why, Bellman is as good as he, my lord;  
He cried upon it at the merest loss,  
And twice today pick'd out the dullest scent;  
Trust me, I take him for the better dog.

LORD.

Thou art a fool: if Echo were as fleet,  
I would esteem him worth a dozen such.  
But sup them well, and look unto them all;  
Tomorrow I intend to hunt again.

FIRST HUNTSMAN.

I will, my lord.

LORD.

[ Sees Sly.] What's here? One dead, or drunk?  
See, doth he breathe?

SECOND HUNTSMAN.

He breathes, my lord. Were he not warm'd with ale,  
This were a bed but cold to sleep so soundly.

LORD.

O monstrous beast! how like a swine he lies!  
Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image!

Sirs, I will practise on this drunken man.  
What think you, if he were convey'd to bed,  
Wrapp'd in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,  
A most delicious banquet by his bed,  
And brave attendants near him when he wakes,  
Would not the beggar then forget himself?

FIRST HUNTSMAN.

Believe me, lord, I think he cannot choose.

SECOND HUNTSMAN.

It would seem strange unto him when he wak'd.

LORD.

Even as a flattering dream or worthless fancy.  
Then take him up, and manage well the jest.  
Carry him gently to my fairest chamber,  
And hang it round with all my wanton pictures;  
Balm his foul head in warm distilled waters,  
And burn sweet wood to make the lodging sweet.  
Procure me music ready when he wakes,  
To make a dulcet and a heavenly sound;  
And if he chance to speak, be ready straight,  
And with a low submissive reverence  
Say 'What is it your honour will command?'  
Let one attend him with a silver basin  
Full of rose-water and bestrew'd with flowers;  
Another bear the ewer, the third a diaper,  
And say 'Will't please your lordship cool your hands?'  
Someone be ready with a costly suit,  
And ask him what apparel he will wear;  
Another tell him of his hounds and horse,  
And that his lady mourns at his disease.  
Persuade him that he hath been lunatic;  
And, when he says he is—say that he dreams,

For he is nothing but a mighty lord.  
This do, and do it kindly, gentle sirs;  
It will be pastime passing excellent,  
If it be husbanded with modesty.

FIRST HUNTSMAN.

My lord, I warrant you we will play our part,  
As he shall think by our true diligence,  
He is no less than what we say he is.

LORD.

Take him up gently, and to bed with him,  
And each one to his office when he wakes.

[Sly is bourne out. A trumpet sounds.]

Sirrah, go see what trumpet 'tis that sounds:

[Exit Servant.]

Belike some noble gentleman that means,  
Travelling some journey, to repose him here.

Re-enter Servant.

How now! who is it?

SERVANT.

An it please your honour, players  
That offer service to your lordship.

LORD.

Bid them come near.

Enter Players.

Now, fellows, you are welcome.

PLAYERS.

We thank your honour.

LORD.

Do you intend to stay with me tonight?

PLAYER.

So please your lordship to accept our duty.

LORD.

With all my heart. This fellow I remember  
Since once he play'd a farmer's eldest son;  
'Twas where you woo'd the gentlewoman so well.  
I have forgot your name; but, sure, that part  
Was aptly fitted and naturally perform'd.

PLAYER.

I think 'twas Soto that your honour means.

LORD.

'Tis very true; thou didst it excellent.  
Well, you are come to me in happy time,  
The rather for I have some sport in hand  
Wherein your cunning can assist me much.  
There is a lord will hear you play tonight;  
But I am doubtful of your modesties,  
Lest, over-eying of his odd behaviour,-  
For yet his honour never heard a play,-  
You break into some merry passion  
And so offend him; for I tell you, sirs,

If you should smile, he grows impatient.

PLAYER.

Fear not, my lord; we can contain ourselves,  
Were he the veriest antick in the world.

LORD.

Go, sirrah, take them to the buttery,  
And give them friendly welcome everyone:  
Let them want nothing that my house affords.

[Exit one with the Players.]

Sirrah, go you to Barthol'mew my page,  
And see him dress'd in all suits like a lady;  
That done, conduct him to the drunkard's chamber,  
And call him 'madam,' do him obeisance.  
Tell him from me—as he will win my love,—  
He bear himself with honourable action,  
Such as he hath observ'd in noble ladies  
Unto their lords, by them accomplished;  
Such duty to the drunkard let him do,  
With soft low tongue and lowly courtesy,  
And say 'What is't your honour will command,  
Wherein your lady and your humble wife  
May show her duty and make known her love?'  
And then with kind embracements, tempting kisses,  
And with declining head into his bosom,  
Bid him shed tears, as being overjoy'd  
To see her noble lord restor'd to health,  
Who for this seven years hath esteemed him  
No better than a poor and loathsome beggar.  
And if the boy have not a woman's gift  
To rain a shower of commanded tears,  
An onion will do well for such a shift,

Which, in a napkin being close convey'd,  
Shall in despite enforce a watery eye.  
See this dispatch'd with all the haste thou canst;  
Anon I'll give thee more instructions.

[Exit Servant.]

I know the boy will well usurp the grace,  
Voice, gait, and action of a gentlewoman;  
I long to hear him call the drunkard husband;  
And how my men will stay themselves from laughter  
When they do homage to this simple peasant.  
I'll in to counsel them; haply my presence  
May well abate the over-merry spleen,  
Which otherwise would grow into extremes.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II. A bedchamber in the LORD'S house.

Sly is discovered in a rich nightgown, with Attendants: some with  
apparel, basin, ewer, and other appurtenances; and Lord, dressed  
like a servant.

SLY.

For God's sake! a pot of small ale.

FIRST SERVANT.

Will't please your lordship drink a cup of sack?

SECOND SERVANT.

Will't please your honour taste of these conserves?

THIRD SERVANT.

What raiment will your honour wear today?

SLY.

I am Christophero Sly; call not me honour nor lordship. I ne'er drank sack in my life; and if you give me any conserves, give me conserves of beef. Ne'er ask me what raiment I'll wear, for I have no more doublets than backs, no more stockings than legs, nor no more shoes than feet: nay, sometime more feet than shoes, or such shoes as my toes look through the over-leather.

LORD.

Heaven cease this idle humour in your honour!

O, that a mighty man of such descent,

Of such possessions, and so high esteem,

Should be infused with so foul a spirit!

SLY.

What! would you make me mad? Am not I Christopher Sly, old Sly's son of Burton-heath; by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker? Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot, if she know me not: if she say I am not fourteen pence the score for sheer ale, score me up for the lyingest knave in Christendom. What! I am not bestraught. Here's—

THIRD SERVANT.

O! this it is that makes your lady mourn.

SECOND SERVANT.

O! this is it that makes your servants droop.

LORD.

Hence comes it that your kindred shuns your house,

As beaten hence by your strange lunacy.  
O noble lord, bethink thee of thy birth,  
Call home thy ancient thoughts from banishment,  
And banish hence these abject lowly dreams.  
Look how thy servants do attend on thee,  
Each in his office ready at thy beck:  
Wilt thou have music? Hark! Apollo plays,

[Music.]

And twenty caged nightingales do sing:  
Or wilt thou sleep? We'll have thee to a couch  
Softer and sweeter than the lustful bed  
On purpose trimm'd up for Semiramis.  
Say thou wilt walk: we will bestrew the ground:  
Or wilt thou ride? Thy horses shall be trapp'd,  
Their harness studded all with gold and pearl.  
Dost thou love hawking? Thou hast hawks will soar  
Above the morning lark: or wilt thou hunt?  
Thy hounds shall make the welkin answer them  
And fetch shrill echoes from the hollow earth.

FIRST SERVANT.

Say thou wilt course; thy greyhounds are as swift  
As breathed stags; ay, fleeter than the roe.

SECOND SERVANT.

Dost thou love pictures? We will fetch thee straight  
Adonis painted by a running brook,  
And Cytherea all in sedges hid,  
Which seem to move and wanton with her breath  
Even as the waving sedges play with wind.

LORD.

We'll show thee Io as she was a maid



And how she was beguiled and surpris'd,  
As lively painted as the deed was done.

THIRD SERVANT.

Or Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,  
Scratching her legs, that one shall swear she bleeds  
And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep,  
So workmanly the blood and tears are drawn.

LORD.

Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord:  
Thou hast a lady far more beautiful  
Than any woman in this waning age.

FIRST SERVANT.

And, till the tears that she hath shed for thee  
Like envious floods o'er-run her lovely face,  
She was the fairest creature in the world;  
And yet she is inferior to none.

SLY.

Am I a lord? and have I such a lady?  
Or do I dream? Or have I dream'd till now?  
I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak;  
I smell sweet savours, and I feel soft things:  
Upon my life, I am a lord indeed;  
And not a tinker, nor Christophero Sly.  
Well, bring our lady hither to our sight;  
And once again, a pot o' the smallest ale.

SECOND SERVANT.

Will't please your mightiness to wash your hands?

[Servants present a ewer, basin and napkin.]

O, how we joy to see your wit restor'd!  
O, that once more you knew but what you are!  
These fifteen years you have been in a dream,  
Or, when you wak'd, so wak'd as if you slept.

SLY.

These fifteen years! by my fay, a goodly nap.  
But did I never speak of all that time?

FIRST SERVANT.

O! yes, my lord, but very idle words;  
For though you lay here in this goodly chamber,  
Yet would you say ye were beaten out of door,  
And rail upon the hostess of the house,  
And say you would present her at the leet,  
Because she brought stone jugs and no seal'd quarts.  
Sometimes you would call out for Cicely Hacket.

SLY.

Ay, the woman's maid of the house.

THIRD SERVANT.

Why, sir, you know no house nor no such maid,  
Nor no such men as you have reckon'd up,  
As Stephen Sly, and old John Naps of Greece,  
And Peter Turph, and Henry Pimpernell;  
And twenty more such names and men as these,  
Which never were, nor no man ever saw.

SLY.

Now, Lord be thanked for my good amends!

ALL.

Amen.

Enter the Page, as a lady, with Attendants.

SLY.

I thank thee; thou shalt not lose by it.

PAGE.

How fares my noble lord?

SLY.

Marry, I fare well; for here is cheer enough.  
Where is my wife?

PAGE.

Here, noble lord: what is thy will with her?

SLY.

Are you my wife, and will not call me husband?  
My men should call me lord: I am your goodman.

PAGE.

My husband and my lord, my lord and husband;  
I am your wife in all obedience.

SLY.

I know it well. What must I call her?

LORD.

Madam.

SLY.

Alice madam, or Joan madam?

LORD.

Madam, and nothing else; so lords call ladies.

SLY.

Madam wife, they say that I have dream'd  
And slept above some fifteen year or more.

PAGE.

Ay, and the time seems thirty unto me,  
Being all this time abandon'd from your bed.

SLY.

'Tis much. Servants, leave me and her alone.  
Madam, undress you, and come now to bed.

PAGE.

Thrice noble lord, let me entreat of you  
To pardon me yet for a night or two;  
Or, if not so, until the sun be set:  
For your physicians have expressly charg'd,  
In peril to incur your former malady,  
That I should yet absent me from your bed:  
I hope this reason stands for my excuse.

SLY.

Ay, it stands so that I may hardly tarry so long; but I would  
be loath to fall into my dreams again: I will therefore tarry i  
despite of the flesh and the blood.

Enter a Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Your honour's players, hearing your amendment,  
Are come to play a pleasant comedy;  
For so your doctors hold it very meet,  
Seeing too much sadness hath congeal'd your blood,  
And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy:

Therefore they thought it good you hear a play,  
And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,  
Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.

SLY.

Marry, I will; let them play it. Is not a commonty a  
Christmas gambold or a tumbling-trick?

PAGE.

No, my good lord; it is more pleasing stuff.

SLY.

What! household stuff?

PAGE.

It is a kind of history.

SLY.

Well, we'll see't. Come, madam wife, sit by my side and let  
the world slip: we shall ne'er be younger.

ACT I

SCENE I. Padua. A public place.

Flourish. Enter Lucentio and Tranio.

LUCENTIO.

Tranio, since for the great desire I had  
To see fair Padua, nursery of arts,  
I am arriv'd for fruitful Lombardy,  
The pleasant garden of great Italy,

And by my father's love and leave am arm'd  
With his good will and thy good company,  
My trusty servant well approv'd in all,  
Here let us breathe, and haply institute  
A course of learning and ingenious studies.  
Pisa, renowned for grave citizens,  
Gave me my being and my father first,  
A merchant of great traffic through the world,  
Vincentio, come of the Bentivolii.  
Vincentio's son, brought up in Florence,  
It shall become to serve all hopes conceiv'd,  
To deck his fortune with his virtuous deeds:  
And therefore, Tranio, for the time I study,  
Virtue and that part of philosophy  
Will I apply that treats of happiness  
By virtue specially to be achiev'd.  
Tell me thy mind; for I have Pisa left  
And am to Padua come as he that leaves  
A shallow plash to plunge him in the deep,  
And with satiety seeks to quench his thirst.

TRANIO.

Mi perdonato, gentle master mine;  
I am in all affected as yourself;  
Glad that you thus continue your resolve  
To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy.  
Only, good master, while we do admire  
This virtue and this moral discipline,  
Let's be no stoics nor no stocks, I pray;  
Or so devote to Aristotle's checks  
As Ovid be an outcast quite abjur'd.  
Balk logic with acquaintance that you have,  
And practise rhetoric in your common talk;  
Music and poesy use to quicken you;  
The mathematics and the metaphysics,

Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you:  
No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en;  
In brief, sir, study what you most affect.

LUCENTIO.

Gramercies, Tranio, well dost thou advise.  
If, Biondello, thou wert come ashore,  
We could at once put us in readiness,  
And take a lodging fit to entertain  
Such friends as time in Padua shall beget.  
But stay awhile; what company is this?

TRANIO.

Master, some show to welcome us to town.

[Lucentio and Tranio stand aside.]

Enter Baptista, Katherina, Bianca, Gremio and Hortensio.

BAPTISTA.

Gentlemen, importune me no farther,  
For how I firmly am resolv'd you know;  
That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter  
Before I have a husband for the elder.  
If either of you both love Katherina,  
Because I know you well and love you well,  
Leave shall you have to court her at your pleasure.

GREMIO.

To cart her rather: she's too rough for me.  
There, there, Hortensio, will you any wife?

KATHERINA.

[To Baptista] I pray you, sir, is it your will  
To make a stale of me amongst these mates?

HORTENSIO.

Mates, maid! How mean you that? No mates for you,  
Unless you were of gentler, milder mould.

KATHERINA.

I' faith, sir, you shall never need to fear;  
I wis it is not half way to her heart;  
But if it were, doubt not her care should be  
To comb your noddle with a three-legg'd stool,  
And paint your face, and use you like a fool.

HORTENSIO.

From all such devils, good Lord deliver us!

GREMIO.

And me, too, good Lord!

TRANIO.

Husht, master! Here's some good pastime toward:  
That wench is stark mad or wonderful froward.

LUCENTIO.

But in the other's silence do I see  
Maid's mild behaviour and sobriety.  
Peace, Tranio!

TRANIO.

Well said, master; mum! and gaze your fill.

BAPTISTA.

Gentlemen, that I may soon make good  
What I have said,—Bianca, get you in:  
And let it not displease thee, good Bianca,  
For I will love thee ne'er the less, my girl.



KATHERINA.

A pretty peat! it is best put finger in the eye, and she knew w

BIANCA.

Sister, content you in my discontent.

Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe:

My books and instruments shall be my company,

On them to look, and practise by myself.

LUCENTIO.

Hark, Tranio! thou mayst hear Minerva speak.

HORTENSIO.

Signior Baptista, will you be so strange?

Sorry am I that our good will effects

Bianca's grief.

GREMIO.

Why will you mew her up,

Signior Baptista, for this fiend of hell,

And make her bear the penance of her tongue?

BAPTISTA.

Gentlemen, content ye; I am resolv'd.

Go in, Bianca.

[Exit Bianca.]

And for I know she taketh most delight

In music, instruments, and poetry,

Schoolmasters will I keep within my house

Fit to instruct her youth. If you, Hortensio,

Or, Signior Gremio, you, know any such,

Prefer them hither; for to cunning men

I will be very kind, and liberal  
To mine own children in good bringing up;  
And so, farewell. Katherina, you may stay;  
For I have more to commune with Bianca.

[Exit.]

KATHERINA.

Why, and I trust I may go too, may I not? What! shall I be appoyed  
though, belike, I knew not what to take and what to leave? Ha!

[Exit.]

GREMIO.

You may go to the devil's dam: your gifts are so good  
here's none will hold you. Their love is not so great,  
Hortensio, but we may blow our nails together, and fast it fair  
out; our cake's dough on both sides. Farewell: yet, for the love  
bear my sweet Bianca, if I can by any means light on a fit man  
to teach her that wherein she delights, I will wish him to her  
father.

HORTENSIO.

So will I, Signior Gremio: but a word, I pray. Though  
the nature of our quarrel yet never brooked parle, know now, upon  
advice, it toucheth us both,—that we may yet again have access  
to our fair mistress, and be happy rivals in Bianca's love,—to labour  
and effect one thing specially.

GREMIO.

What's that, I pray?

HORTENSIO.

Marry, sir, to get a husband for her sister.

GREMIO.

A husband! a devil.

HORTENSIO.

I say, a husband.

GREMIO.

I say, a devil. Thinkest thou, Hortensio, though her father be very rich, any man is so very a fool to be married to hell?

HORTENSIO.

Tush, Gremio! Though it pass your patience and mine to endure her loud alarums, why, man, there be good fellows in the world, and a man could light on them, would take her with all faults, and money enough.

GREMIO.

I cannot tell; but I had as lief take her dowry with this condition: to be whipp'd at the high cross every morning.

HORTENSIO.

Faith, as you say, there's small choice in rotten apples. But come; since this bar in law makes us friends, it shall be so far forth friendly maintained, till by helping Baptista's eldest daughter to a husband, we set his youngest free for a husband, and then have to't afresh. Sweet Bianca! Happy may be his dole! He that runs fastest gets the ring. How say you, Signior Gremio?

GREMIO.

I am agreed; and would I had given him the best horse in Padua to begin his wooing, that would thoroughly woo her, wed her, and bed her, and rid the house of her. Come on.

[Exeunt Gremio and Hortensio.]

TRANIO.

I pray, sir, tell me, is it possible  
That love should of a sudden take such hold?

LUCENTIO.

O Tranio! till I found it to be true,  
I never thought it possible or likely;  
But see, while idly I stood looking on,  
I found the effect of love in idleness;  
And now in plainness do confess to thee,  
That art to me as secret and as dear  
As Anna to the Queen of Carthage was,  
Tranio, I burn, I pine, I perish, Tranio,  
If I achieve not this young modest girl.  
Counsel me, Tranio, for I know thou canst:  
Assist me, Tranio, for I know thou wilt.

TRANIO.

Master, it is no time to chide you now;  
Affection is not rated from the heart:  
If love have touch'd you, nought remains but so:  
Redime te captum quam queas minimo.

LUCENTIO.

Gramercies, lad; go forward; this contents;  
The rest will comfort, for thy counsel's sound.

TRANIO.

Master, you look'd so longly on the maid.  
Perhaps you mark'd not what's the pith of all.

LUCENTIO.

O, yes, I saw sweet beauty in her face,

Such as the daughter of Agenor had,  
That made great Jove to humble him to her hand,  
When with his knees he kiss'd the Cretan strand.

TRANIO.

Saw you no more? mark'd you not how her sister  
Began to scold and raise up such a storm  
That mortal ears might hardly endure the din?

LUCENTIO.

Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move,  
And with her breath she did perfume the air;  
Sacred and sweet was all I saw in her.

TRANIO.

Nay, then, 'tis time to stir him from his trance.  
I pray, awake, sir: if you love the maid,  
Bend thoughts and wits to achieve her. Thus it stands:  
Her elder sister is so curst and shrewd,  
That till the father rid his hands of her,  
Master, your love must live a maid at home;  
And therefore has he closely mew'd her up,  
Because she will not be annoy'd with suitors.

LUCENTIO.

Ah, Tranio, what a cruel father's he!  
But art thou not advis'd he took some care  
To get her cunning schoolmasters to instruct her?

TRANIO.

Ay, marry, am I, sir, and now 'tis plotted.

LUCENTIO.

I have it, Tranio.

TRANIO.

Master, for my hand,  
Both our inventions meet and jump in one.

LUCENTIO.

Tell me thine first.

TRANIO.

You will be schoolmaster,  
And undertake the teaching of the maid:  
That's your device.

LUCENTIO.

It is: may it be done?

TRANIO.

Not possible; for who shall bear your part  
And be in Padua here Vincentio's son;  
Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends;  
Visit his countrymen, and banquet them?

LUCENTIO.

Basta, content thee, for I have it full.  
We have not yet been seen in any house,  
Nor can we be distinguish'd by our faces  
For man or master: then it follows thus:  
Thou shalt be master, Tranio, in my stead,  
Keep house and port and servants, as I should;  
I will some other be; some Florentine,  
Some Neapolitan, or meaner man of Pisa.  
'Tis hatch'd, and shall be so: Tranio, at once  
Uncase thee; take my colour'd hat and cloak.  
When Biondello comes, he waits on thee;  
But I will charm him first to keep his tongue.

[They exchange habits]

TRANIO.

So had you need.

In brief, sir, sith it your pleasure is,

And I am tied to be obedient;

For so your father charg'd me at our parting,

'Be serviceable to my son,' quoth he,

Although I think 'twas in another sense:

I am content to be Lucentio,

Because so well I love Lucentio.

LUCENTIO.

Tranio, be so, because Lucentio loves;

And let me be a slave, to achieve that maid

Whose sudden sight hath thrall'd my wounded eye.

Enter Biondello.

Here comes the rogue. Sirrah, where have you been?

BIONDELLO.

Where have I been? Nay, how now! where are you?

Master, has my fellow Tranio stol'n your clothes?

Or you stol'n his? or both? Pray, what's the news?

LUCENTIO.

Sirrah, come hither: 'tis no time to jest,

And therefore frame your manners to the time.

Your fellow Tranio here, to save my life,

Puts my apparel and my count'nance on,

And I for my escape have put on his;

For in a quarrel since I came ashore

I kill'd a man, and fear I was descried.

Wait you on him, I charge you, as becomes,  
While I make way from hence to save my life.  
You understand me?

BIONDELLO.

I, sir! Ne'er a whit.

LUCENTIO.

And not a jot of Tranio in your mouth:  
Tranio is changed to Lucentio.

BIONDELLO.

The better for him: would I were so too!

TRANIO.

So could I, faith, boy, to have the next wish after,  
That Lucentio indeed had Baptista's youngest daughter.  
But, sirrah, not for my sake but your master's, I advise  
You use your manners discreetly in all kind of companies:  
When I am alone, why, then I am Tranio;  
But in all places else your master, Lucentio.

LUCENTIO.

Tranio, let's go.

One thing more rests, that thyself execute,  
To make one among these wooers: if thou ask me why,  
Sufficeth my reasons are both good and weighty.

[Exeunt.]

[The Presenters above speak.]

FIRST SERVANT.

My lord, you nod; you do not mind the play.



SLY.

Yes, by Saint Anne, I do. A good matter, surely: comes there any more of it?

PAGE.

My lord, 'tis but begun.

SLY.

'Tis a very excellent piece of work, madam lady: would 'twere done!

[They sit and mark.]

SCENE II. Padua. Before HORTENSIO'S house.

Enter Petruchio and his man Grumio.

PETRUCHIO.

Verona, for a while I take my leave,  
To see my friends in Padua; but of all  
My best beloved and approved friend,  
Hortensio; and I trow this is his house.  
Here, sirrah Grumio, knock, I say.

GRUMIO.

Knock, sir? Whom should I knock? Is there any man has rebused your worship?

PETRUCHIO.

Villain, I say, knock me here soundly.

GRUMIO.

Knock you here, sir? Why, sir, what am I, sir, that I should knock you here, sir?

PETRUCHIO.

Villain, I say, knock me at this gate;  
And rap me well, or I'll knock your knave's pate.

GRUMIO.

My master is grown quarrelsome. I should knock you first,  
And then I know after who comes by the worst.

PETRUCHIO.

Will it not be?  
Faith, sirrah, and you'll not knock, I'll ring it;  
I'll try how you can sol, fa, and sing it.

[He wrings Grumio by the ears.]

GRUMIO.

Help, masters, help! my master is mad.

PETRUCHIO.

Now, knock when I bid you, sirrah villain!

Enter Hortensio.

HORTENSIO.

How now! what's the matter? My old friend Grumio! and my good friend Petruchio! How do you all at Verona?

PETRUCHIO.

Signior Hortensio, come you to part the fray?  
Con tutto il cuore ben trovato, may I say.

HORTENSIO.

Alla nostra casa ben venuto; molto honorato signor mio Petruchio.  
Rise, Grumio, rise: we will compound this quarrel.

GRUMIO.

Nay, 'tis no matter, sir, what he 'leges in Latin. If this be not a lawful cause for me to leave his service, look you, sir, he bid me knock him and rap him soundly, sir: well, was it fit a servant to use his master so; being, perhaps, for aught I see two-and-thirty, a pip out? Whom would to God I had well knock'd at first, then had not Grumio come by the worst.

PETRUCHIO.

A senseless villain! Good Hortensio,  
I bade the rascal knock upon your gate,  
And could not get him for my heart to do it.

GRUMIO.

Knock at the gate! O heavens! Spake you not these words plain: 'Sirrah knock me here, rap me here, knock me well, and knock me soundly'? And come you now with 'knocking at the gate'?

PETRUCHIO.

Sirrah, be gone, or talk not, I advise you.

HORTENSIO.

Petruchio, patience; I am Grumio's pledge;  
Why, this's a heavy chance 'twixt him and you,  
Your ancient, trusty, pleasant servant Grumio.  
And tell me now, sweet friend, what happy gale  
Blows you to Padua here from old Verona?

PETRUCHIO.

Such wind as scatters young men through the world  
To seek their fortunes farther than at home,

Where small experience grows. But in a few,  
Signior Hortensio, thus it stands with me:  
Antonio, my father, is deceas'd,  
And I have thrust myself into this maze,  
Haply to wive and thrive as best I may;  
Crowns in my purse I have, and goods at home,  
And so am come abroad to see the world.

HORTENSIO.

Petruchio, shall I then come roundly to thee  
And wish thee to a shrewd ill-favour'd wife?  
Thou'dst thank me but a little for my counsel;  
And yet I'll promise thee she shall be rich,  
And very rich: but th'art too much my friend,  
And I'll not wish thee to her.

PETRUCHIO.

Signior Hortensio, 'twixt such friends as we  
Few words suffice; and therefore, if thou know  
One rich enough to be Petruchio's wife,  
As wealth is burden of my wooing dance,  
Be she as foul as was Florentius' love,  
As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrewd  
As Socrates' Xanthippe or a worse,  
She moves me not, or not removes, at least,  
Affection's edge in me, were she as rough  
As are the swelling Adriatic seas:  
I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;  
If wealthily, then happily in Padua.

GRUMIO.

Nay, look you, sir, he tells you flatly what his mind is: why,  
give him gold enough and marry him to a puppet or an  
aglet-baby; or an old trot with ne'er a tooth in her head, though  
she have as many diseases as two-and-fifty horses: why, nothing

comes amiss, so money comes withal.

HORTENSIO.

Petruchio, since we are stepp'd thus far in,  
I will continue that I broach'd in jest.  
I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife  
With wealth enough, and young and beauteous;  
Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman:  
Her only fault,—and that is faults enough,—  
Is, that she is intolerable curst,  
And shrewd and froward, so beyond all measure,  
That, were my state far worsen than it is,  
I would not wed her for a mine of gold.

PETRUCHIO.

Hortensio, peace! thou know'st not gold's effect:  
Tell me her father's name, and 'tis enough;  
For I will board her, though she chide as loud  
As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack.

HORTENSIO.

Her father is Baptista Minola,  
An affable and courteous gentleman;  
Her name is Katherine Minola,  
Renown'd in Padua for her scolding tongue.

PETRUCHIO.

I know her father, though I know not her;  
And he knew my deceased father well.  
I will not sleep, Hortensio, till I see her;  
And therefore let me be thus bold with you,  
To give you over at this first encounter,  
Unless you will accompany me thither.

GRUMIO.

I pray you, sir, let him go while the humour lasts. O' my word, and she knew him as well as I do, she would think scolding would do little good upon him. She may perhaps call him half a score knaves or so; why, that's nothing; and he begin once, he'll rail in his rope-tricks. I'll tell you what, sir, and she stand but a little, he will throw a figure in her face, and so disfigure her with it that she shall have no more eyes to see withal than a cat. You know him not, sir.

HORTENSIO.

Tarry, Petruchio, I must go with thee,  
For in Baptista's keep my treasure is:  
He hath the jewel of my life in hold,  
His youngest daughter, beautiful Bianca,  
And her withholds from me and other more,  
Suitors to her and rivals in my love;  
Supposing it a thing impossible,  
For those defects I have before rehears'd,  
That ever Katherine will be woo'd:  
Therefore this order hath Baptista ta'en,  
That none shall have access unto Bianca  
Till Katherine the curst have got a husband.

GRUMIO.

Katherine the curst!  
A title for a maid of all titles the worst.

HORTENSIO.

Now shall my friend Petruchio do me grace,  
And offer me disguis'd in sober robes,  
To old Baptista as a schoolmaster  
Well seen in music, to instruct Bianca;  
That so I may, by this device at least  
Have leave and leisure to make love to her,  
And unsuspected court her by herself.

GRUMIO.

Here's no knavery! See, to beguile the old folks, how the young folks lay their heads together!

Enter Gremio and Lucentio disguised, with books under his arm.

Master, master, look about you: who goes there, ha?

HORTENSIO.

Peace, Grumio! It is the rival of my love. Petruchio, stand by awhile.

GRUMIO.

A proper stripling, and an amorous!

GREMIO.

O! very well; I have perus'd the note.  
Hark you, sir; I'll have them very fairly bound:  
All books of love, see that at any hand,  
And see you read no other lectures to her.  
You understand me. Over and beside  
Signior Baptista's liberality,  
I'll mend it with a largess. Take your papers too,  
And let me have them very well perfum'd;  
For she is sweeter than perfume itself  
To whom they go to. What will you read to her?

LUCENTIO.

Whate'er I read to her, I'll plead for you,  
As for my patron, stand you so assur'd,  
As firmly as yourself were still in place;  
Yea, and perhaps with more successful words  
Than you, unless you were a scholar, sir.

GREMIO.

O! this learning, what a thing it is.

GRUMIO.

O! this woodcock, what an ass it is.

PETRUCHIO.

Peace, sirrah!

HORTENSIO.

Grumio, mum! God save you, Signior Gremio!

GREMIO.

And you are well met, Signior Hortensio.  
Trow you whither I am going? To Baptista Minola.  
I promis'd to enquire carefully  
About a schoolmaster for the fair Bianca;  
And by good fortune I have lighted well  
On this young man; for learning and behaviour  
Fit for her turn, well read in poetry  
And other books, good ones, I warrant ye.

HORTENSIO.

'Tis well; and I have met a gentleman  
Hath promis'd me to help me to another,  
A fine musician to instruct our mistress:  
So shall I no whit be behind in duty  
To fair Bianca, so belov'd of me.

GREMIO.

Belov'd of me, and that my deeds shall prove.

GRUMIO.

[Aside.] And that his bags shall prove.



HORTENSIO.

Gremio, 'tis now no time to vent our love:  
Listen to me, and if you speak me fair,  
I'll tell you news indifferent good for either.  
Here is a gentleman whom by chance I met,  
Upon agreement from us to his liking,  
Will undertake to woo curst Katherine;  
Yea, and to marry her, if her dowry please.

GREMIO.

So said, so done, is well.  
Hortensio, have you told him all her faults?

PETRUCHIO.

I know she is an irksome brawling scold;  
If that be all, masters, I hear no harm.

GREMIO.

No, say'st me so, friend? What countryman?

PETRUCHIO.

Born in Verona, old Antonio's son.  
My father dead, my fortune lives for me;  
And I do hope good days and long to see.

GREMIO.

O sir, such a life, with such a wife, were strange!  
But if you have a stomach, to't a God's name;  
You shall have me assisting you in all.  
But will you woo this wild-cat?

PETRUCHIO.

Will I live?

GRUMIO.

Will he woo her? Ay, or I'll hang her.

PETRUCHIO.

Why came I hither but to that intent?  
Think you a little din can daunt mine ears?  
Have I not in my time heard lions roar?  
Have I not heard the sea, puff'd up with winds,  
Rage like an angry boar chafed with sweat?  
Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,  
And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?  
Have I not in a pitched battle heard  
Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets' clang?  
And do you tell me of a woman's tongue,  
That gives not half so great a blow to hear  
As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire?  
Tush, tush! fear boys with bugs.

GRUMIO.

[Aside] For he fears none.

GREMIO.

Hortensio, hark:  
This gentleman is happily arriv'd,  
My mind presumes, for his own good and yours.

HORTENSIO.

I promis'd we would be contributors,  
And bear his charge of wooing, whatsoe'er.

GREMIO.

And so we will, provided that he win her.

GRUMIO.

I would I were as sure of a good dinner.

Enter Tranio brave, and Biondello.

TRANIO.

Gentlemen, God save you! If I may be bold,  
Tell me, I beseech you, which is the readiest way  
To the house of Signior Baptista Minola?

BIONDELLO.

He that has the two fair daughters; is't he you mean?

TRANIO.

Even he, Biondello!

GREMIO.

Hark you, sir, you mean not her to—

TRANIO.

Perhaps him and her, sir; what have you to do?

PETRUCHIO.

Not her that chides, sir, at any hand, I pray.

TRANIO.

I love no chiders, sir. Biondello, let's away.

LUCENTIO.

[Aside] Well begun, Tranio.

HORTENSIO.

Sir, a word ere you go.

Are you a suitor to the maid you talk of, yea or no?

TRANIO.

And if I be, sir, is it any offence?

GREMIO.

No; if without more words you will get you hence.

TRANIO.

Why, sir, I pray, are not the streets as free  
For me as for you?

GREMIO.

But so is not she.

TRANIO.

For what reason, I beseech you?

GREMIO.

For this reason, if you'll know,  
That she's the choice love of Signior Gremio.

HORTENSIO.

That she's the chosen of Signior Hortensio.

TRANIO.

Softly, my masters! If you be gentlemen,  
Do me this right; hear me with patience.  
Baptista is a noble gentleman,  
To whom my father is not all unknown;  
And were his daughter fairer than she is,  
She may more suitors have, and me for one.  
Fair Leda's daughter had a thousand wooers;  
Then well one more may fair Bianca have;  
And so she shall: Lucentio shall make one,  
Though Paris came in hope to speed alone.

GREMIO.

What, this gentleman will out-talk us all.

LUCENTIO.

Sir, give him head; I know he'll prove a jade.

PETRUCHIO.

Hortensio, to what end are all these words?

HORTENSIO.

Sir, let me be so bold as ask you,  
Did you yet ever see Baptista's daughter?

TRANIO.

No, sir, but hear I do that he hath two,  
The one as famous for a scolding tongue  
As is the other for beauteous modesty.

PETRUCHIO.

Sir, sir, the first's for me; let her go by.

GREMIO.

Yea, leave that labour to great Hercules,  
And let it be more than Alcides' twelve.

PETRUCHIO.

Sir, understand you this of me, in sooth:  
The youngest daughter, whom you hearken for,  
Her father keeps from all access of suitors,  
And will not promise her to any man  
Until the elder sister first be wed;  
The younger then is free, and not before.

TRANIO.

If it be so, sir, that you are the man  
Must stead us all, and me amongst the rest;  
And if you break the ice, and do this feat,

Achieve the elder, set the younger free  
For our access, whose hap shall be to have her  
Will not so graceless be to be ingrate.

HORTENSIO.

Sir, you say well, and well you do conceive;  
And since you do profess to be a suitor,  
You must, as we do, gratify this gentleman,  
To whom we all rest generally beholding.

TRANIO.

Sir, I shall not be slack; in sign whereof,  
Please ye we may contrive this afternoon,  
And quaff carouses to our mistress' health;  
And do as adversaries do in law,  
Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends.

GRUMIO, BIONDELLO.

O excellent motion! Fellows, let's be gone.

HORTENSIO.

The motion's good indeed, and be it so:—  
Petruchio, I shall be your ben venuto.

[Exeunt.]

ACT II

SCENE I. Padua. A room in BAPTISTA'S house.

Enter Katherina and Bianca.

BIANCA.

Good sister, wrong me not, nor wrong yourself,  
To make a bondmaid and a slave of me;  
That I disdain; but for these other gawds,  
Unbind my hands, I'll pull them off myself,  
Yea, all my raiment, to my petticoat;  
Or what you will command me will I do,  
So well I know my duty to my elders.

KATHERINA.

Of all thy suitors here I charge thee tell  
Whom thou lov'st best: see thou dissemble not.

BIANCA.

Believe me, sister, of all the men alive  
I never yet beheld that special face  
Which I could fancy more than any other.

KATHERINA.

Minion, thou liest. Is't not Hortensio?

BIANCA.

If you affect him, sister, here I swear  
I'll plead for you myself but you shall have him.

KATHERINA.

O! then, belike, you fancy riches more:  
You will have Gremio to keep you fair.

BIANCA.

Is it for him you do envy me so?  
Nay, then you jest; and now I well perceive  
You have but jested with me all this while:  
I prithee, sister Kate, untie my hands.

KATHERINA.

If that be jest, then all the rest was so.

[Strikes her.]

Enter Baptista.

BAPTISTA.

Why, how now, dame! Whence grows this insolence?  
Bianca, stand aside. Poor girl! she weeps.  
Go ply thy needle; meddle not with her.  
For shame, thou hilding of a devilish spirit,  
Why dost thou wrong her that did ne'er wrong thee?  
When did she cross thee with a bitter word?

KATHERINA.

Her silence flouts me, and I'll be reveng'd.

[Flies after Bianca.]

BAPTISTA.

What! in my sight? Bianca, get thee in.

[Exit Bianca.]

KATHERINA.

What! will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see  
She is your treasure, she must have a husband;  
I must dance bare-foot on her wedding-day,  
And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.  
Talk not to me: I will go sit and weep  
Till I can find occasion of revenge.

[Exit.]



BAPTISTA.

Was ever gentleman thus griev'd as I?  
But who comes here?

Enter Gremio, with Lucentio in the habit of a mean man;  
Petruchio, with Hortensio as a musician; and Tranio, with  
Biondello bearing a lute and books.

GREMIO.

Good morrow, neighbour Baptista.

BAPTISTA.

Good morrow, neighbour Gremio. God save you, gentlemen!

PETRUCHIO.

And you, good sir! Pray, have you not a daughter  
Call'd Katherina, fair and virtuous?

BAPTISTA.

I have a daughter, sir, call'd Katherina.

GREMIO.

You are too blunt: go to it orderly.

PETRUCHIO.

You wrong me, Signior Gremio: give me leave.  
I am a gentleman of Verona, sir,  
That, hearing of her beauty and her wit,  
Her affability and bashful modesty,  
Her wondrous qualities and mild behaviour,  
Am bold to show myself a forward guest  
Within your house, to make mine eye the witness  
Of that report which I so oft have heard.  
And, for an entrance to my entertainment,

I do present you with a man of mine,

[Presenting Hortensio.]

Cunning in music and the mathematics,  
To instruct her fully in those sciences,  
Whereof I know she is not ignorant.  
Accept of him, or else you do me wrong:  
His name is Licio, born in Mantua.

BAPTISTA.

Y'are welcome, sir, and he for your good sake;  
But for my daughter Katherine, this I know,  
She is not for your turn, the more my grief.

PETRUCHIO.

I see you do not mean to part with her;  
Or else you like not of my company.

BAPTISTA.

Mistake me not; I speak but as I find.  
Whence are you, sir? What may I call your name?

PETRUCHIO.

Petruchio is my name, Antonio's son;  
A man well known throughout all Italy.

BAPTISTA.

I know him well: you are welcome for his sake.

GREMIO.

Saving your tale, Petruchio, I pray,  
Let us, that are poor petitioners, speak too.  
Backare! you are marvellous forward.

PETRUCHIO.

O, pardon me, Signior Gremio; I would fain be doing.

GREMIO.

I doubt it not, sir; but you will curse your wooing.  
Neighbour, this is a gift very grateful, I am sure of it. To  
express the like kindness, myself, that have been more kindly  
beholding to you than any, freely give unto you this young  
scholar,

[Presenting Lucentio.]

that has been long studying at Rheims; as cunning in Greek,  
Latin, and other languages, as the other in music and  
mathematics. His name is Cambio; pray accept his service.

BAPTISTA.

A thousand thanks, Signior Gremio; welcome, good Cambio.

[To Tranio.]

But, gentle sir, methinks you walk like a stranger.  
May I be so bold to know the cause of your coming?

TRANIO.

Pardon me, sir, the boldness is mine own,  
That, being a stranger in this city here,  
Do make myself a suitor to your daughter,  
Unto Bianca, fair and virtuous.  
Nor is your firm resolve unknown to me,  
In the preferment of the eldest sister.  
This liberty is all that I request,  
That, upon knowledge of my parentage,  
I may have welcome 'mongst the rest that woo,  
And free access and favour as the rest:  
And, toward the education of your daughters,  
I here bestow a simple instrument,

And this small packet of Greek and Latin books:  
If you accept them, then their worth is great.

BAPTISTA.

Lucentio is your name, of whence, I pray?

TRANIO.

Of Pisa, sir; son to Vincentio.

BAPTISTA.

A mighty man of Pisa: by report  
I know him well: you are very welcome, sir.  
[To Hortensio.] Take you the lute,  
[To Lucentio.] and you the set of books;  
You shall go see your pupils presently.  
Holla, within!

Enter a Servant.

Sirrah, lead these gentlemen  
To my daughters, and tell them both  
These are their tutors: bid them use them well.

[Exeunt Servant with Hortensio, Lucentio and Biondello.]

We will go walk a little in the orchard,  
And then to dinner. You are passing welcome,  
And so I pray you all to think yourselves.

PETRUCHIO.

Signior Baptista, my business asketh haste,  
And every day I cannot come to woo.  
You knew my father well, and in him me,  
Left solely heir to all his lands and goods,

Which I have bettered rather than decreas'd:  
Then tell me, if I get your daughter's love,  
What dowry shall I have with her to wife?

BAPTISTA.

After my death, the one half of my lands,  
And in possession twenty thousand crowns.

PETRUCHIO.

And, for that dowry, I'll assure her of  
Her widowhood, be it that she survive me,  
In all my lands and leases whatsoever.  
Let specialities be therefore drawn between us,  
That covenants may be kept on either hand.

BAPTISTA.

Ay, when the special thing is well obtain'd,  
That is, her love; for that is all in all.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, that is nothing; for I tell you, father,  
I am as peremptory as she proud-minded;  
And where two raging fires meet together,  
They do consume the thing that feeds their fury:  
Though little fire grows great with little wind,  
Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all;  
So I to her, and so she yields to me;  
For I am rough and woo not like a babe.

BAPTISTA.

Well mayst thou woo, and happy be thy speed!  
But be thou arm'd for some unhappy words.

PETRUCHIO.

Ay, to the proof, as mountains are for winds,

That shake not though they blow perpetually.

Re-enter Hortensio, with his head broke.

BAPTISTA.

How now, my friend! Why dost thou look so pale?

HORTENSIO.

For fear, I promise you, if I look pale.

BAPTISTA.

What, will my daughter prove a good musician?

HORTENSIO.

I think she'll sooner prove a soldier:  
Iron may hold with her, but never lutes.

BAPTISTA.

Why, then thou canst not break her to the lute?

HORTENSIO.

Why, no; for she hath broke the lute to me.  
I did but tell her she mistook her frets,  
And bow'd her hand to teach her fingering;  
When, with a most impatient devilish spirit,  
'Frets, call you these?' quoth she 'I'll  
fume with them';  
And with that word she struck me on the head,  
And through the instrument my pate made way;  
And there I stood amazed for a while,  
As on a pillory, looking through the lute;  
While she did call me rascal fiddler,  
And twangling Jack, with twenty such vile terms,  
As had she studied to misuse me so.

PETRUCHIO.

Now, by the world, it is a lusty wench!  
I love her ten times more than e'er I did:  
O! how I long to have some chat with her!

BAPTISTA.

[To Hortensio.] Well, go with me, and be not so discomfited;  
Proceed in practice with my younger daughter;  
She's apt to learn, and thankful for good turns.  
Signior Petruchio, will you go with us,  
Or shall I send my daughter Kate to you?

PETRUCHIO.

I pray you do.

[Exeunt Baptista, Gremio, Tranio and Hortensio.]

I will attend her here,  
And woo her with some spirit when she comes.  
Say that she rail; why, then I'll tell her plain  
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale:  
Say that she frown; I'll say she looks as clear  
As morning roses newly wash'd with dew:  
Say she be mute, and will not speak a word;  
Then I'll commend her volubility,  
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence:  
If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,  
As though she bid me stay by her a week:  
If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day  
When I shall ask the banns, and when be married.  
But here she comes; and now, Petruchio, speak.

Enter Katherina.

Good morrow, Kate; for that's your name, I hear.

KATHERINA.

Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing:  
They call me Katherine that do talk of me.

PETRUCHIO.

You lie, in faith, for you are call'd plain Kate,  
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst;  
But, Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,  
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,  
For dainties are all Kates, and therefore, Kate,  
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation;  
Hearing thy mildness prais'd in every town,  
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded,—  
Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs,—  
Myself am mov'd to woo thee for my wife.

KATHERINA.

Mov'd! in good time: let him that mov'd you hither  
Remove you hence. I knew you at the first,  
You were a moveable.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, what's a moveable?

KATHERINA.

A joint-stool.

PETRUCHIO.

Thou hast hit it: come, sit on me.

KATHERINA.

Asses are made to bear, and so are you.



PETRUCHIO.

Women are made to bear, and so are you.

KATHERINA.

No such jade as bear you, if me you mean.

PETRUCHIO.

Alas! good Kate, I will not burden thee;  
For, knowing thee to be but young and light,—

KATHERINA.

Too light for such a swain as you to catch;  
And yet as heavy as my weight should be.

PETRUCHIO.

Should be! should buz!

KATHERINA.

Well ta'en, and like a buzzard.

PETRUCHIO.

O, slow-wing'd turtle! shall a buzzard take thee?

KATHERINA.

Ay, for a turtle, as he takes a buzzard.

PETRUCHIO.

Come, come, you wasp; i' faith, you are too angry.

KATHERINA.

If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

PETRUCHIO.

My remedy is then to pluck it out.

KATHERINA.

Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.

PETRUCHIO.

Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?

In his tail.

KATHERINA.

In his tongue.

PETRUCHIO.

Whose tongue?

KATHERINA.

Yours, if you talk of tales; and so farewell.

PETRUCHIO.

What! with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again,

Good Kate; I am a gentleman.

KATHERINA.

That I'll try.

[Striking him.]

PETRUCHIO.

I swear I'll cuff you if you strike again.

KATHERINA.

So may you lose your arms:

If you strike me, you are no gentleman;

And if no gentleman, why then no arms.

PETRUCHIO.

A herald, Kate? O! put me in thy books.

KATHERINA.

What is your crest? a coxcomb?

PETRUCHIO.

A combless cock, so Kate will be my hen.

KATHERINA.

No cock of mine; you crow too like a craven.

PETRUCHIO.

Nay, come, Kate, come; you must not look so sour.

KATHERINA.

It is my fashion when I see a crab.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, here's no crab, and therefore look not sour.

KATHERINA.

There is, there is.

PETRUCHIO.

Then show it me.

KATHERINA.

Had I a glass I would.

PETRUCHIO.

What, you mean my face?

KATHERINA.

Well aim'd of such a young one.

PETRUCHIO.

Now, by Saint George, I am too young for you.

KATHERINA.

Yet you are wither'd.

PETRUCHIO.

'Tis with cares.

KATHERINA.

I care not.

PETRUCHIO.

Nay, hear you, Kate: in sooth, you 'scape not so.

KATHERINA.

I chafe you, if I tarry; let me go.

PETRUCHIO.

No, not a whit; I find you passing gentle.

'Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,

And now I find report a very liar;

For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,

But slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-time flowers.

Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,

Nor bite the lip, as angry wenches will,

Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk;

But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers;

With gentle conference, soft and affable.

Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?

O sland'rous world! Kate like the hazel-twigg

Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue

As hazel-nuts, and sweeter than the kernels.

O! let me see thee walk: thou dost not halt.

KATHERINA.

Go, fool, and whom thou keep'st command.

PETRUCHIO.

Did ever Dian so become a grove  
As Kate this chamber with her princely gait?  
O! be thou Dian, and let her be Kate,  
And then let Kate be chaste, and Dian sportful!

KATHERINA.

Where did you study all this goodly speech?

PETRUCHIO.

It is extempore, from my mother-wit.

KATHERINA.

A witty mother! witless else her son.

PETRUCHIO.

Am I not wise?

KATHERINA.

Yes; keep you warm.

PETRUCHIO.

Marry, so I mean, sweet Katherine, in thy bed;  
And therefore, setting all this chat aside,  
Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented  
That you shall be my wife your dowry 'greed on;  
And will you, nill you, I will marry you.  
Now, Kate, I am a husband for your turn;  
For, by this light, whereby I see thy beauty,—  
Thy beauty that doth make me like thee well,—  
Thou must be married to no man but me;  
For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,

And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate  
Conformable as other household Kates.

Re-enter Baptista, Gremio and Tranio.

Here comes your father. Never make denial;  
I must and will have Katherine to my wife.

BAPTISTA.

Now, Signior Petruchio, how speed you with my daughter?

PETRUCHIO.

How but well, sir? how but well?  
It were impossible I should speed amiss.

BAPTISTA.

Why, how now, daughter Katherine, in your dumps?

KATHERINA.

Call you me daughter? Now I promise you  
You have show'd a tender fatherly regard  
To wish me wed to one half lunatic,  
A mad-cap ruffian and a swearing Jack,  
That thinks with oaths to face the matter out.

PETRUCHIO.

Father, 'tis thus: yourself and all the world  
That talk'd of her have talk'd amiss of her:  
If she be curst, it is for policy,  
For she's not froward, but modest as the dove;  
She is not hot, but temperate as the morn;  
For patience she will prove a second Grissel,  
And Roman Lucrece for her chastity;  
And to conclude, we have 'greed so well together

That upon Sunday is the wedding-day.

KATHERINA.

I'll see thee hang'd on Sunday first.

GREMIO.

Hark, Petruchio; she says she'll see thee hang'd first.

TRANIO.

Is this your speeding? Nay, then good-night our part!

PETRUCHIO.

Be patient, gentlemen. I choose her for myself;

If she and I be pleas'd, what's that to you?

'Tis bargain'd 'twixt us twain, being alone,

That she shall still be curst in company.

I tell you, 'tis incredible to believe

How much she loves me: O! the kindest Kate

She hung about my neck, and kiss on kiss

She vied so fast, protesting oath on oath,

That in a twink she won me to her love.

O! you are novices: 'tis a world to see,

How tame, when men and women are alone,

A meacock wretch can make the curstest shrew.

Give me thy hand, Kate; I will unto Venice,

To buy apparel 'gainst the wedding-day.

Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests;

I will be sure my Katherine shall be fine.

BAPTISTA.

I know not what to say; but give me your hands.

God send you joy, Petruchio! 'Tis a match.

GREMIO, TRANIO.

Amen, say we; we will be witnesses.

PETRUCHIO.

Father, and wife, and gentlemen, adieu.

I will to Venice; Sunday comes apace;

We will have rings and things, and fine array;

And kiss me, Kate; we will be married o' Sunday.

[Exeunt Petruchio and Katherine, severally.]

GREMIO.

Was ever match clapp'd up so suddenly?

BAPTISTA.

Faith, gentlemen, now I play a merchant's part,

And venture madly on a desperate mart.

TRANIO.

'Twas a commodity lay fretting by you;

'Twill bring you gain, or perish on the seas.

BAPTISTA.

The gain I seek is, quiet in the match.

GREMIO.

No doubt but he hath got a quiet catch.

But now, Baptista, to your younger daughter:

Now is the day we long have looked for;

I am your neighbour, and was suitor first.

TRANIO.

And I am one that love Bianca more

Than words can witness or your thoughts can guess.

GREMIO.

Youngling, thou canst not love so dear as I.



TRANIO.

Greybeard, thy love doth freeze.

GREMIO.

But thine doth fry.

Skipper, stand back; 'tis age that nourisheth.

TRANIO.

But youth in ladies' eyes that flourisheth.

BAPTISTA.

Content you, gentlemen; I'll compound this strife:

'Tis deeds must win the prize, and he of both

That can assure my daughter greatest dower

Shall have my Bianca's love.

Say, Signior Gremio, what can you assure her?

GREMIO.

First, as you know, my house within the city

Is richly furnished with plate and gold:

Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands;

My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry;

In ivory coffers I have stuff'd my crowns;

In cypress chests my arras counterpoints,

Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,

Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,

Valance of Venice gold in needlework;

Pewter and brass, and all things that belong

To house or housekeeping: then, at my farm

I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail,

Six score fat oxen standing in my stalls,

And all things answerable to this portion.

Myself am struck in years, I must confess;

And if I die tomorrow this is hers,

If whilst I live she will be only mine.

TRANIO.

That 'only' came well in. Sir, list to me:  
I am my father's heir and only son;  
If I may have your daughter to my wife,  
I'll leave her houses three or four as good  
Within rich Pisa's walls as anyone  
Old Signior Gremio has in Padua;  
Besides two thousand ducats by the year  
Of fruitful land, all which shall be her jointure.  
What, have I pinch'd you, Signior Gremio?

GREMIO.

Two thousand ducats by the year of land!  
My land amounts not to so much in all:  
That she shall have, besides an argosy  
That now is lying in Marseilles' road.  
What, have I chok'd you with an argosy?

TRANIO.

Gremio, 'tis known my father hath no less  
Than three great argosies, besides two galliasses,  
And twelve tight galleys; these I will assure her,  
And twice as much, whate'er thou offer'st next.

GREMIO.

Nay, I have offer'd all; I have no more;  
And she can have no more than all I have;  
If you like me, she shall have me and mine.

TRANIO.

Why, then the maid is mine from all the world,  
By your firm promise; Gremio is out-vied.

BAPTISTA.

I must confess your offer is the best;  
And let your father make her the assurance,  
She is your own; else, you must pardon me;  
If you should die before him, where's her dower?

TRANIO.

That's but a cavil; he is old, I young.

GREMIO.

And may not young men die as well as old?

BAPTISTA.

Well, gentlemen,  
I am thus resolv'd. On Sunday next, you know,  
My daughter Katherine is to be married;  
Now, on the Sunday following, shall Bianca  
Be bride to you, if you make this assurance;  
If not, to Signior Gremio.  
And so I take my leave, and thank you both.

GREMIO.

Adieu, good neighbour.

[Exit Baptista.]

Now, I fear thee not:

Sirrah young gamester, your father were a fool  
To give thee all, and in his waning age  
Set foot under thy table. Tut! a toy!  
An old Italian fox is not so kind, my boy.

[Exit.]

TRANIO.

A vengeance on your crafty wither'd hide!  
Yet I have fac'd it with a card of ten.  
'Tis in my head to do my master good:  
I see no reason but suppos'd Lucentio  
Must get a father, call'd suppos'd Vincentio;  
And that's a wonder: fathers commonly  
Do get their children; but in this case of wooing  
A child shall get a sire, if I fail not of my cunning.

[Exit.]

### ACT III

SCENE I. Padua. A room in BAPTISTA'S house.

Enter Lucentio, Hortensio and Bianca.

LUCENTIO.

Fiddler, forbear; you grow too forward, sir.  
Have you so soon forgot the entertainment  
Her sister Katherine welcome'd you withal?

HORTENSIO.

But, wrangling pedant, this is  
The patroness of heavenly harmony:  
Then give me leave to have prerogative;  
And when in music we have spent an hour,  
Your lecture shall have leisure for as much.

LUCENTIO.

Preposterous ass, that never read so far  
To know the cause why music was ordain'd!

Was it not to refresh the mind of man  
After his studies or his usual pain?  
Then give me leave to read philosophy,  
And while I pause serve in your harmony.

HORTENSIO.

Sirrah, I will not bear these braves of thine.

BIANCA.

Why, gentlemen, you do me double wrong,  
To strive for that which resteth in my choice.  
I am no breeching scholar in the schools,  
I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times,  
But learn my lessons as I please myself.  
And, to cut off all strife, here sit we down;  
Take you your instrument, play you the whiles;  
His lecture will be done ere you have tun'd.

HORTENSIO.

You'll leave his lecture when I am in tune?

[Retires.]

LUCENTIO.

That will be never: tune your instrument.

BIANCA.

Where left we last?

LUCENTIO.

Here, madam:—

Hic ibat Simois; hic est Sigeia tellus;  
Hic steterat Priami regia celsa senis.

BIANCA.

Construe them.

LUCENTIO.

Hic ibat, as I told you before, Simois, I am Lucentio, hic est, son unto Vincentio of Pisa, Sigeia tellus, disguised thus to get your love, Hic steterat, and that Lucentio that comes a-wooing, Priami, is my man Tranio, regia, bearing my port, celsa senis, that we might beguile the old pantaloon.

HORTENSIO. [Returning.]

Madam, my instrument's in tune.

BIANCA.

Let's hear.—

[Hortensio plays.]

O fie! the treble jars.

LUCENTIO.

Spit in the hole, man, and tune again.

BIANCA.

Now let me see if I can construe it: Hic ibat Simois, I know you not; hic est Sigeia tellus, I trust you not; Hic steterat Priami, take heed he hear us not; regia, presume not; celsa senis, despair not.

HORTENSIO.

Madam, 'tis now in tune.

LUCENTIO.

All but the base.

HORTENSIO.

The base is right; 'tis the base knave that jars.  
[Aside] How fiery and forward our pedant is!  
Now, for my life, the knave doth court my love:  
Pedasculé, I'll watch you better yet.

BIANCA.

In time I may believe, yet I mistrust.

LUCENTIO.

Mistrust it not; for sure, Æacides  
Was Ajax, call'd so from his grandfather.

BIANCA.

I must believe my master; else, I promise you,  
I should be arguing still upon that doubt;  
But let it rest. Now, Licio, to you.  
Good master, take it not unkindly, pray,  
That I have been thus pleasant with you both.

HORTENSIO.

[To Lucentio] You may go walk and give me leave a while;  
My lessons make no music in three parts.

LUCENTIO.

Are you so formal, sir? Well, I must wait,  
[Aside] And watch withal; for, but I be deceiv'd,  
Our fine musician groweth amorous.

HORTENSIO.

Madam, before you touch the instrument,  
To learn the order of my fingering,  
I must begin with rudiments of art;  
To teach you gamut in a briefer sort,  
More pleasant, pithy, and effectual,  
Than hath been taught by any of my trade:

And there it is in writing, fairly drawn.

BIANCA.

Why, I am past my gamut long ago.

HORTENSIO.

Yet read the gamut of Hortensio.

BIANCA.

Gamut I am, the ground of all accord,  
A re, to plead Hortensio's passion;  
B mi, Bianca, take him for thy lord,  
C fa ut, that loves with all affection:  
D sol re, one clef, two notes have I  
E la mi, show pity or I die.

Call you this gamut? Tut, I like it not:  
Old fashions please me best; I am not so nice,  
To change true rules for odd inventions.

Enter a Servant.

SERVANT.

Mistress, your father prays you leave your books,  
And help to dress your sister's chamber up:  
You know tomorrow is the wedding-day.

BIANCA.

Farewell, sweet masters, both: I must be gone.

[Exeunt Bianca and Servant.]

LUCENTIO.

Faith, mistress, then I have no cause to stay.



[Exit.]

HORTENSIO.

But I have cause to pry into this pedant:  
Methinks he looks as though he were in love.  
Yet if thy thoughts, Bianca, be so humble  
To cast thy wand'ring eyes on every stale,  
Seize thee that list: if once I find thee ranging,  
Hortensio will be quit with thee by changing.

[Exit.]

SCENE II. The same. Before BAPTISTA'S house.

Enter Baptista, Gremio, Tranio, Katherine, Bianca, Lucentio and

BAPTISTA. [To Tranio.]

Signior Lucentio, this is the 'pointed day  
That Katherine and Petruchio should be married,  
And yet we hear not of our son-in-law.  
What will be said? What mockery will it be  
To want the bridegroom when the priest attends  
To speak the ceremonial rites of marriage!  
What says Lucentio to this shame of ours?

KATHERINA.

No shame but mine; I must, forsooth, be forc'd  
To give my hand, oppos'd against my heart,  
Unto a mad-brain rudesby, full of spleen;  
Who woo'd in haste and means to wed at leisure.  
I told you, I, he was a frantic fool,  
Hiding his bitter jests in blunt behaviour;

And to be noted for a merry man,  
He'll woo a thousand, 'point the day of marriage,  
Make friends, invite, and proclaim the banns;  
Yet never means to wed where he hath woo'd.  
Now must the world point at poor Katherine,  
And say 'Lo! there is mad Petruchio's wife,  
If it would please him come and marry her.'

TRANIO.

Patience, good Katherine, and Baptista too.  
Upon my life, Petruchio means but well,  
Whatever fortune stays him from his word:  
Though he be blunt, I know him passing wise;  
Though he be merry, yet withal he's honest.

KATHERINA.

Would Katherine had never seen him though!

[Exit weeping, followed by Bianca and others.]

BAPTISTA.

Go, girl, I cannot blame thee now to weep,  
For such an injury would vex a very saint;  
Much more a shrew of thy impatient humour.

Enter Biondello.

Master, master! News! old news, and such news as you never heard  
of!

BAPTISTA.

Is it new and old too? How may that be?

BIONDELLO.

Why, is it not news to hear of Petruchio's coming?

BAPTISTA.

Is he come?

BIONDELLO.

Why, no, sir.

BAPTISTA.

What then?

BIONDELLO.

He is coming.

BAPTISTA.

When will he be here?

BIONDELLO.

When he stands where I am and sees you there.

TRANIO.

But say, what to thine old news?

BIONDELLO.

Why, Petruchio is coming, in a new hat and an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches thrice turned; a pair of boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled, another laced; an old rusty sword ta'en out of the town armoury, with a broken hilt, and chapeless; with two broken points: his horse hipped with an old mothly saddle and stirrups of no kindred; besides, possessed with the glanders and like to mose in the chine; troubled with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of windgalls, spe with spavins, rayed with the yellows, past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers, begnawn with the bots, swayed the back and shoulder-shotten; near-legged before, and with a

half-checked bit, and a head-stall of sheep's leather, which, being restrained to keep him from stumbling, hath been often burst, and now repaired with knots; one girth six times pieced, and a woman's crupper of velure, which hath two letters for her name fairly set down in studs, and here and there pieced with pack-thread.

BAPTISTA.

Who comes with him?

BIONDELLO.

O, sir! his lackey, for all the world caparisoned like the horse; with a linen stock on one leg and a kersey boot-hose on the other, gartered with a red and blue list; an old hat, and the humour of forty fancies prick'd in't for a feather: a monster, a very monster in apparel, and not like a Christian footboy or a gentleman's lackey.

TRANIO.

'Tis some odd humour pricks him to this fashion;  
Yet oftentimes lie goes but mean-apparell'd.

BAPTISTA.

I am glad he's come, howsoe'er he comes.

BIONDELLO.

Why, sir, he comes not.

BAPTISTA.

Didst thou not say he comes?

BIONDELLO.

Who? that Petruchio came?

BAPTISTA.

Ay, that Petruchio came.

BIONDELLO.

No, sir; I say his horse comes, with him on his back.

BAPTISTA.

Why, that's all one.

BIONDELLO.

Nay, by Saint Jamy,  
I hold you a penny,  
A horse and a man  
Is more than one,  
And yet not many.

Enter Petruchio and Grumio.

PETRUCHIO.

Come, where be these gallants? Who is at home?

BAPTISTA.

You are welcome, sir.

PETRUCHIO.

And yet I come not well.

BAPTISTA.

And yet you halt not.

TRANIO.

Not so well apparell'd as I wish you were.

PETRUCHIO.

Were it better, I should rush in thus.

But where is Kate? Where is my lovely bride?  
How does my father? Gentles, methinks you frown;  
And wherefore gaze this goodly company,  
As if they saw some wondrous monument,  
Some comet or unusual prodigy?

BAPTISTA.

Why, sir, you know this is your wedding-day:  
First were we sad, fearing you would not come;  
Now sadder, that you come so unprovided.  
Fie! doff this habit, shame to your estate,  
An eye-sore to our solemn festival.

TRANIO.

And tell us what occasion of import  
Hath all so long detain'd you from your wife,  
And sent you hither so unlike yourself?

PETRUCHIO.

Tedious it were to tell, and harsh to hear;  
Sufficeth I am come to keep my word,  
Though in some part enforced to digress;  
Which at more leisure I will so excuse  
As you shall well be satisfied withal.  
But where is Kate? I stay too long from her;  
The morning wears, 'tis time we were at church.

TRANIO.

See not your bride in these unreverent robes;  
Go to my chamber, put on clothes of mine.

PETRUCHIO.

Not I, believe me: thus I'll visit her.

BAPTISTA.

But thus, I trust, you will not marry her.

PETRUCHIO.

Good sooth, even thus; therefore ha' done with words;  
To me she's married, not unto my clothes.  
Could I repair what she will wear in me  
As I can change these poor accoutrements,  
'Twere well for Kate and better for myself.  
But what a fool am I to chat with you  
When I should bid good morrow to my bride,  
And seal the title with a lovely kiss!

[Exeunt Petruchio, Grumio and Biondello.]

TRANIO.

He hath some meaning in his mad attire.  
We will persuade him, be it possible,  
To put on better ere he go to church.

BAPTISTA.

I'll after him and see the event of this.

[Exeunt Baptista, Gremio and Attendants.]

TRANIO.

But, sir, to love concerneth us to add  
Her father's liking; which to bring to pass,  
As I before imparted to your worship,  
I am to get a man,—whate'er he be  
It skills not much; we'll fit him to our turn,—  
And he shall be Vincentio of Pisa,  
And make assurance here in Padua,  
Of greater sums than I have promised.  
So shall you quietly enjoy your hope,  
And marry sweet Bianca with consent.

LUCENTIO.

Were it not that my fellow schoolmaster  
Doth watch Bianca's steps so narrowly,  
'Twere good, methinks, to steal our marriage;  
Which once perform'd, let all the world say no,  
I'll keep mine own despite of all the world.

TRANIO.

That by degrees we mean to look into,  
And watch our vantage in this business.  
We'll over-reach the greybeard, Gremio,  
The narrow-prying father, Minola,  
The quaint musician, amorous Licio;  
All for my master's sake, Lucentio.

Re-enter Gremio.

Signior Gremio, came you from the church?

GREMIO.

As willingly as e'er I came from school.

TRANIO.

And is the bride and bridegroom coming home?

GREMIO.

A bridegroom, say you? 'Tis a groom indeed,  
A grumbling groom, and that the girl shall find.

TRANIO.

Curster than she? Why, 'tis impossible.

GREMIO.



Why, he's a devil, a devil, a very fiend.

TRANIO.

Why, she's a devil, a devil, the devil's dam.

GREMIO.

Tut! she's a lamb, a dove, a fool, to him.  
I'll tell you, Sir Lucentio: when the priest  
Should ask if Katherine should be his wife,  
'Ay, by gogs-wouns' quoth he, and swore so loud  
That, all amaz'd, the priest let fall the book;  
And as he stoop'd again to take it up,  
The mad-brain'd bridegroom took him such a cuff  
That down fell priest and book, and book and priest:  
'Now take them up,' quoth he 'if any list.'

TRANIO.

What said the wench, when he rose again?

GREMIO.

Trembled and shook, for why, he stamp'd and swore  
As if the vicar meant to cozen him.  
But after many ceremonies done,  
He calls for wine: 'A health!' quoth he, as if  
He had been abroad, carousing to his mates  
After a storm; quaff'd off the muscadel,  
And threw the sops all in the sexton's face,  
Having no other reason  
But that his beard grew thin and hungerly  
And seem'd to ask him sops as he was drinking.  
This done, he took the bride about the neck,  
And kiss'd her lips with such a clamorous smack  
That at the parting all the church did echo.  
And I, seeing this, came thence for very shame;  
And after me, I know, the rout is coming.

Such a mad marriage never was before.  
Hark, hark! I hear the minstrels play.

[Music plays.]

Enter Petruchio, Katherine, Bianca, Baptista, Hortensio, Grumio

PETRUCHIO.

Gentlemen and friends, I thank you for your pains:  
I know you think to dine with me today,  
And have prepar'd great store of wedding cheer  
But so it is, my haste doth call me hence,  
And therefore here I mean to take my leave.

BAPTISTA.

Is't possible you will away tonight?

PETRUCHIO.

I must away today before night come.  
Make it no wonder: if you knew my business,  
You would entreat me rather go than stay.  
And, honest company, I thank you all,  
That have beheld me give away myself  
To this most patient, sweet, and virtuous wife.  
Dine with my father, drink a health to me.  
For I must hence; and farewell to you all.

TRANIO.

Let us entreat you stay till after dinner.

PETRUCHIO.

It may not be.

GREMIO.

Let me entreat you.

PETRUCHIO.

It cannot be.

KATHERINA.

Let me entreat you.

PETRUCHIO.

I am content.

KATHERINA.

Are you content to stay?

PETRUCHIO.

I am content you shall entreat me stay;  
But yet not stay, entreat me how you can.

KATHERINA.

Now, if you love me, stay.

PETRUCHIO.

Grumio, my horse!

GRUMIO.

Ay, sir, they be ready; the oats have eaten the horses.

KATHERINA.

Nay, then,

Do what thou canst, I will not go today;  
No, nor tomorrow, not till I please myself.  
The door is open, sir; there lies your way;  
You may be jogging whiles your boots are green;  
For me, I'll not be gone till I please myself.  
'Tis like you'll prove a jolly surly groom  
That take it on you at the first so roundly.

PETRUCHIO.

O Kate! content thee: prithee be not angry.

KATHERINA.

I will be angry: what hast thou to do?

Father, be quiet; he shall stay my leisure.

GREMIO.

Ay, marry, sir, now it begins to work.

KATHERINA.

Gentlemen, forward to the bridal dinner:

I see a woman may be made a fool,

If she had not a spirit to resist.

PETRUCHIO.

They shall go forward, Kate, at thy command.

Obey the bride, you that attend on her;

Go to the feast, revel and domineer,

Carouse full measure to her maidenhead,

Be mad and merry, or go hang yourselves:

But for my bonny Kate, she must with me.

Nay, look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret;

I will be master of what is mine own.

She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,

My household stuff, my field, my barn,

My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything;

And here she stands, touch her whoever dare;

I'll bring mine action on the proudest he

That stops my way in Padua. Grumio,

Draw forth thy weapon; we are beset with thieves;

Rescue thy mistress, if thou be a man.

Fear not, sweet wench; they shall not touch thee, Kate;

I'll buckler thee against a million.

[Exeunt Petrucio, Katherine and Grumio.]

BAPTISTA.

Nay, let them go, a couple of quiet ones.

GREMIO.

Went they not quickly, I should die with laughing.

TRANIO.

Of all mad matches, never was the like.

LUCENTIO.

Mistress, what's your opinion of your sister?

BIANCA.

That, being mad herself, she's madly mated.

GREMIO.

I warrant him, Petruchio is Kated.

BAPTISTA.

Neighbours and friends, though bride and bridegroom wants  
For to supply the places at the table,  
You know there wants no junkets at the feast.  
Lucentio, you shall supply the bridegroom's place;  
And let Bianca take her sister's room.

TRANIO.

Shall sweet Bianca practise how to bride it?

BAPTISTA.

She shall, Lucentio. Come, gentlemen, let's go.

[Exeunt.]

ACT IV

SCENE I. A hall in PETRUCHIO'S country house.

Enter Grumio.

GRUMIO.

Fie, fie on all tired jades, on all mad masters, and all foul ways! Was ever man so beaten? Was ever man so ray'd? Was ever man so weary? I am sent before to make a fire, and they are coming after to warm them. Now, were not I a little pot and so hot, my very lips might freeze to my teeth, my tongue to the roof of my mouth, my heart in my belly, ere I should come by a fire to thaw me. But I with blowing the fire shall warm myself; for, considering the weather, a taller man than I will take cold. Holla, ho! Curtis!

Enter Curtis.

CURTIS.

Who is that calls so coldly?

GRUMIO.

A piece of ice: if thou doubt it, thou mayst slide from my shoulder to my heel with no greater a run but my head and my neck. A fire, good Curtis.

CURTIS.

Is my master and his wife coming, Grumio?

GRUMIO.

O, ay! Curtis, ay; and therefore fire, fire; cast on no water.

CURTIS.

Is she so hot a shrew as she's reported?

GRUMIO.

She was, good Curtis, before this frost; but thou knowest winter tames man, woman, and beast; for it hath tamed my old master, and my new mistress, and myself, fellow Curtis.

CURTIS.

Away, you three-inch fool! I am no beast.

GRUMIO.

Am I but three inches? Why, thy horn is a foot; and so long am I at the least. But wilt thou make a fire, or shall I comply on thee to our mistress, whose hand,—she being now at hand,—thou shalt soon feel, to thy cold comfort, for being slow in this hot office?

CURTIS.

I prithee, good Grumio, tell me, how goes the world?

GRUMIO.

A cold world, Curtis, in every office but thine; and therefore fire. Do thy duty, and have thy duty, for my master and mistress are almost frozen to death.

CURTIS.

There's fire ready; and therefore, good Grumio, the news.

GRUMIO.

Why, 'Jack boy! ho, boy!' and as much news as wilt thou.

CURTIS.

Come, you are so full of cony-catching.

GRUMIO.

Why, therefore, fire; for I have caught extreme cold.

Where's the cook? Is supper ready, the house trimmed, rushes strewed, cobwebs swept, the servingmen in their new fustian, their white stockings, and every officer his wedding-garment on? Be the Jacks fair within, the Jills fair without, and carpets laid, and everything in order?

CURTIS.

All ready; and therefore, I pray thee, news.

GRUMIO.

First, know my horse is tired; my master and mistress fallen out.

CURTIS.

How?

GRUMIO.

Out of their saddles into the dirt; and thereby hangs a tale.

CURTIS.

Let's ha't, good Grumio.

GRUMIO.

Lend thine ear.

CURTIS.

Here.

GRUMIO.

[Striking him.] There.



CURTIS.

This 'tis to feel a tale, not to hear a tale.

GRUMIO.

And therefore 'tis called a sensible tale; and this cuff was but to knock at your ear and beseech listening. Now I begin Imprimis, we came down a foul hill, my master riding behind my mistress,—

CURTIS.

Both of one horse?

GRUMIO.

What's that to thee?

CURTIS.

Why, a horse.

GRUMIO.

Tell thou the tale: but hadst thou not crossed me, thou shouldst have heard how her horse fell, and she under her horse thou shouldst have heard in how miry a place, how she was bemoiled; how he left her with the horse upon her; how he beat because her horse stumbled; how she waded through the dirt to pluck him off me: how he swore; how she prayed, that never pray before; how I cried; how the horses ran away; how her bridle w burst; how I lost my crupper; with many things of worthy memory which now shall die in oblivion, and thou return unexperienced thy grave.

CURTIS.

By this reckoning he is more shrew than she.

GRUMIO.

Ay; and that thou and the proudest of you all shall find

when he comes home. But what talk I of this? Call forth Nathaniel, Joseph, Nicholas, Philip, Walter, Sugarsop, and the rest; let their heads be sleekly combed, their blue coats brushed and their garters of an indifferent knit; let them curtsy with their left legs, and not presume to touch a hair of my master's horse-tail till they kiss their hands. Are they all ready?

CURTIS.

They are.

GRUMIO.

Call them forth.

CURTIS.

Do you hear? ho! You must meet my master to countenance my mistress.

GRUMIO.

Why, she hath a face of her own.

CURTIS.

Who knows not that?

GRUMIO.

Thou, it seems, that calls for company to countenance her.

CURTIS.

I call them forth to credit her.

GRUMIO.

Why, she comes to borrow nothing of them.

Enter four or five Servants.

NATHANIEL.

Welcome home, Grumio!

PHILIP.

How now, Grumio!

JOSEPH.

What, Grumio!

NICHOLAS.

Fellow Grumio!

NATHANIEL.

How now, old lad!

GRUMIO.

Welcome, you; how now, you; what, you; fellow, you;  
and thus much for greeting. Now, my spruce companions, is all  
ready, and all things neat?

NATHANIEL.

All things is ready. How near is our master?

GRUMIO.

E'en at hand, alighted by this; and therefore be not,—  
Cock's passion, silence! I hear my master.

Enter Petrucio and Katherina.

PETRUCHIO.

Where be these knaves? What! no man at door  
To hold my stirrup nor to take my horse?  
Where is Nathaniel, Gregory, Philip?—

ALL SERVANTS.

Here, here, sir; here, sir.

PETRUCHIO.

Here, sir! here, sir! here, sir! here, sir!

You logger-headed and unpolish'd grooms!

What, no attendance? no regard? no duty?

Where is the foolish knave I sent before?

GRUMIO.

Here, sir; as foolish as I was before.

PETRUCHIO.

You peasant swain! you whoreson malt-horse drudge!

Did I not bid thee meet me in the park,

And bring along these rascal knaves with thee?

GRUMIO.

Nathaniel's coat, sir, was not fully made,

And Gabriel's pumps were all unpink'd i' the heel;

There was no link to colour Peter's hat,

And Walter's dagger was not come from sheathing;

There was none fine but Adam, Ralph, and Gregory;

The rest were ragged, old, and beggarly;

Yet, as they are, here are they come to meet you.

PETRUCHIO.

Go, rascals, go and fetch my supper in.

[Exeunt some of the Servants.]

Where is the life that late I led?

Where are those—? Sit down, Kate, and welcome.

Food, food, food, food!

Re-enter Servants with supper.

Why, when, I say?—Nay, good sweet Kate, be merry.—  
Off with my boots, you rogues! you villains! when?

It was the friar of orders grey,

As he forth walked on his way:

Out, you rogue! you pluck my foot awry:

[Strikes him.]

Take that, and mend the plucking off the other.  
Be merry, Kate. Some water, here; what, ho!  
Where's my spaniel Troilus? Sirrah, get you hence  
And bid my cousin Ferdinand come hither:

[Exit Servant.]

One, Kate, that you must kiss and be acquainted with.  
Where are my slippers? Shall I have some water?  
Come, Kate, and wash, and welcome heartily.—

[Servant lets the ewer fall. Petruchio strikes him.]

You whoreson villain! will you let it fall?

KATHERINA.

Patience, I pray you; 'twas a fault unwilling.

PETRUCHIO.

A whoreson, beetle-headed, flap-ear'd knave!  
Come, Kate, sit down; I know you have a stomach.  
Will you give thanks, sweet Kate, or else shall I?—  
What's this? Mutton?

FIRST SERVANT.

Ay.

PETRUCHIO.

Who brought it?

PETER.

I.

PETRUCHIO.

'Tis burnt; and so is all the meat.

What dogs are these! Where is the rascal cook?

How durst you, villains, bring it from the dresser,

And serve it thus to me that love it not?

[Throws the meat, etc., at them.]

There, take it to you, trenchers, cups, and all.

You heedless joltheads and unmanner'd slaves!

What! do you grumble? I'll be with you straight.

KATHERINA.

I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet;

The meat was well, if you were so contented.

PETRUCHIO.

I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away,

And I expressly am forbid to touch it;

For it engenders choler, planteth anger;

And better 'twere that both of us did fast,

Since, of ourselves, ourselves are choleric,

Than feed it with such over-roasted flesh.

Be patient; tomorrow 't shall be mended.

And for this night we'll fast for company:

Come, I will bring thee to thy bridal chamber.

[Exeunt Petruchio, Katherina and Curtis.]

NATHANIEL.

Peter, didst ever see the like?

PETER.

He kills her in her own humour.

Re-enter Curtis.

GRUMIO.

Where is he?

CURTIS.

In her chamber, making a sermon of continency to her;  
And rails, and swears, and rates, that she, poor soul,  
Knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak,  
And sits as one new risen from a dream.  
Away, away! for he is coming hither.

[Exeunt.]

Re-enter Petruchio.

PETRUCHIO.

Thus have I politicly begun my reign,  
And 'tis my hope to end successfully.  
My falcon now is sharp and passing empty.  
And till she stoop she must not be full-gorg'd,  
For then she never looks upon her lure.  
Another way I have to man my haggard,  
To make her come, and know her keeper's call,  
That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites

That bate and beat, and will not be obedient.  
She eat no meat today, nor none shall eat;  
Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not;  
As with the meat, some undeserved fault  
I'll find about the making of the bed;  
And here I'll fling the pillow, there the bolster,  
This way the coverlet, another way the sheets;  
Ay, and amid this hurly I intend  
That all is done in reverend care of her;  
And, in conclusion, she shall watch all night:  
And if she chance to nod I'll rail and brawl,  
And with the clamour keep her still awake.  
This is a way to kill a wife with kindness;  
And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour.  
He that knows better how to tame a shrew,  
Now let him speak; 'tis charity to show.

[Exit.]

SCENE II. Padua. Before BAPTISTA'S house.

Enter Tranio and Hortensio.

TRANIO.

Is 't possible, friend Licio, that Mistress Bianca  
Doth fancy any other but Lucentio?  
I tell you, sir, she bears me fair in hand.

HORTENSIO.

Sir, to satisfy you in what I have said,  
Stand by and mark the manner of his teaching.



[They stand aside.]

Enter Bianca and Lucentio.

LUCENTIO.

Now, mistress, profit you in what you read?

BIANCA.

What, master, read you? First resolve me that.

LUCENTIO.

I read that I profess, The Art to Love.

BIANCA.

And may you prove, sir, master of your art!

LUCENTIO.

While you, sweet dear, prove mistress of my heart.

[They retire.]

HORTENSIO.

Quick proceeders, marry! Now tell me, I pray,  
You that durst swear that your Mistress Bianca  
Lov'd none in the world so well as Lucentio.

TRANIO.

O despiteful love! unconstant womankind!  
I tell thee, Licio, this is wonderful.

HORTENSIO.

Mistake no more; I am not Licio.  
Nor a musician as I seem to be;  
But one that scorn to live in this disguise  
For such a one as leaves a gentleman

And makes a god of such a cullion:  
Know, sir, that I am call'd Hortensio.

TRANIO.

Signior Hortensio, I have often heard  
Of your entire affection to Bianca;  
And since mine eyes are witness of her lightness,  
I will with you, if you be so contented,  
Forswear Bianca and her love for ever.

HORTENSIO.

See, how they kiss and court! Signior Lucentio,  
Here is my hand, and here I firmly vow  
Never to woo her more, but do forswear her,  
As one unworthy all the former favours  
That I have fondly flatter'd her withal.

TRANIO.

And here I take the like unfeigned oath,  
Never to marry with her though she would entreat;  
Fie on her! See how beastly she doth court him!

HORTENSIO.

Would all the world but he had quite forsworn!  
For me, that I may surely keep mine oath,  
I will be married to a wealthy widow  
Ere three days pass, which hath as long lov'd me  
As I have lov'd this proud disdainful haggard.  
And so farewell, Signior Lucentio.  
Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks,  
Shall win my love; and so I take my leave,  
In resolution as I swore before.

[Exit Hortensio. Lucentio and Bianca advance.]

TRANIO.

Mistress Bianca, bless you with such grace  
As 'longeth to a lover's blessed case!  
Nay, I have ta'en you napping, gentle love,  
And have forsworn you with Hortensio.

BIANCA.

Tranio, you jest; but have you both forsworn me?

TRANIO.

Mistress, we have.

LUCENTIO.

Then we are rid of Licio.

TRANIO.

I' faith, he'll have a lusty widow now,  
That shall be woo'd and wedded in a day.

BIANCA.

God give him joy!

TRANIO.

Ay, and he'll tame her.

BIANCA.

He says so, Tranio.

TRANIO.

Faith, he is gone unto the taming-school.

BIANCA.

The taming-school! What, is there such a place?

TRANIO.

Ay, mistress; and Petruchio is the master,  
That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long,  
To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue.

Enter Biondello, running.

BIONDELLO.

O master, master! I have watch'd so long  
That I am dog-weary; but at last I spied  
An ancient angel coming down the hill  
Will serve the turn.

TRANIO.

What is he, Biondello?

BIONDELLO.

Master, a mercatante or a pedant,  
I know not what; but formal in apparel,  
In gait and countenance surely like a father.

LUCENTIO.

And what of him, Tranio?

TRANIO.

If he be credulous and trust my tale,  
I'll make him glad to seem Vincentio,  
And give assurance to Baptista Minola,  
As if he were the right Vincentio.  
Take in your love, and then let me alone.

[Exeunt Lucentio and Bianca.]

Enter a Pedant.

PEDANT.

God save you, sir!

TRANIO.

And you, sir! you are welcome.

Travel you far on, or are you at the farthest?

PEDANT.

Sir, at the farthest for a week or two;

But then up farther, and as far as Rome;

And so to Tripoli, if God lend me life.

TRANIO.

What countryman, I pray?

PEDANT.

Of Mantua.

TRANIO.

Of Mantua, sir? Marry, God forbid,

And come to Padua, careless of your life!

PEDANT.

My life, sir! How, I pray? for that goes hard.

TRANIO.

'Tis death for anyone in Mantua

To come to Padua. Know you not the cause?

Your ships are stay'd at Venice; and the Duke,—

For private quarrel 'twixt your Duke and him,—

Hath publish'd and proclaim'd it openly.

'Tis marvel, but that you are but newly come

You might have heard it else proclaim'd about.

PEDANT.

Alas, sir! it is worse for me than so;  
For I have bills for money by exchange  
From Florence, and must here deliver them.

TRANIO.

Well, sir, to do you courtesy,  
This will I do, and this I will advise you:  
First, tell me, have you ever been at Pisa?

PEDANT.

Ay, sir, in Pisa have I often been,  
Pisa renowned for grave citizens.

TRANIO.

Among them know you one Vincentio?

PEDANT.

I know him not, but I have heard of him,  
A merchant of incomparable wealth.

TRANIO.

He is my father, sir; and, sooth to say,  
In countenance somewhat doth resemble you.

BIONDELLO.

[Aside.] As much as an apple doth an oyster, and all one.

TRANIO.

To save your life in this extremity,  
This favour will I do you for his sake;  
And think it not the worst of all your fortunes  
That you are like to Sir Vincentio.  
His name and credit shall you undertake,  
And in my house you shall be friendly lodg'd;  
Look that you take upon you as you should!

You understand me, sir; so shall you stay  
Till you have done your business in the city.  
If this be courtesy, sir, accept of it.

PEDANT.

O, sir, I do; and will repute you ever  
The patron of my life and liberty.

TRANIO.

Then go with me to make the matter good.  
This, by the way, I let you understand:  
My father is here look'd for every day  
To pass assurance of a dower in marriage  
'Twixt me and one Baptista's daughter here:  
In all these circumstances I'll instruct you.  
Go with me to clothe you as becomes you.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE III. A room in PETRUCHIO'S house.

Enter Katherina and Grumio.

GRUMIO.

No, no, forsooth; I dare not for my life.

KATHERINA.

The more my wrong, the more his spite appears.  
What, did he marry me to famish me?  
Beggars that come unto my father's door  
Upon entreaty have a present alms;  
If not, elsewhere they meet with charity;

But I, who never knew how to entreat,  
Nor never needed that I should entreat,  
Am starv'd for meat, giddy for lack of sleep;  
With oaths kept waking, and with brawling fed.  
And that which spites me more than all these wants,  
He does it under name of perfect love;  
As who should say, if I should sleep or eat  
'Twere deadly sickness, or else present death.  
I prithee go and get me some repast;  
I care not what, so it be wholesome food.

GRUMIO.

What say you to a neat's foot?

KATHERINA.

'Tis passing good; I prithee let me have it.

GRUMIO.

I fear it is too choleric a meat.  
How say you to a fat tripe finely broil'd?

KATHERINA.

I like it well; good Grumio, fetch it me.

GRUMIO.

I cannot tell; I fear 'tis choleric.  
What say you to a piece of beef and mustard?

KATHERINA.

A dish that I do love to feed upon.

GRUMIO.

Ay, but the mustard is too hot a little.

KATHERINA.



Why then the beef, and let the mustard rest.

GRUMIO.

Nay, then I will not: you shall have the mustard,  
Or else you get no beef of Grumio.

KATHERINA.

Then both, or one, or anything thou wilt.

GRUMIO.

Why then the mustard without the beef.

KATHERINA.

Go, get thee gone, thou false deluding slave,

[Beats him.]

That feed'st me with the very name of meat.  
Sorrow on thee and all the pack of you  
That triumph thus upon my misery!  
Go, get thee gone, I say.

Enter Petruchio with a dish of meat; and Hortensio.

PETRUCHIO.

How fares my Kate? What, sweeting, all amot?

HORTENSIO.

Mistress, what cheer?

KATHERINA.

Faith, as cold as can be.

PETRUCHIO.

Pluck up thy spirits; look cheerfully upon me.  
Here, love; thou seest how diligent I am,  
To dress thy meat myself, and bring it thee:

[Sets the dish on a table.]

I am sure, sweet Kate, this kindness merits thanks.  
What! not a word? Nay, then thou lov'st it not,  
And all my pains is sorted to no proof.  
Here, take away this dish.

KATHERINA.

I pray you, let it stand.

PETRUCHIO.

The poorest service is repaid with thanks;  
And so shall mine, before you touch the meat.

KATHERINA.

I thank you, sir.

HORTENSIO.

Signior Petruchio, fie! you are to blame.  
Come, Mistress Kate, I'll bear you company.

PETRUCHIO.

[Aside.] Eat it up all, Hortensio, if thou lovest me.  
Much good do it unto thy gentle heart!  
Kate, eat apace: and now, my honey love,  
Will we return unto thy father's house  
And revel it as bravely as the best,  
With silken coats and caps, and golden rings,  
With ruffs and cuffs and farthingales and things;  
With scarfs and fans and double change of bravery,  
With amber bracelets, beads, and all this knavery.

What! hast thou din'd? The tailor stays thy leisure,  
To deck thy body with his ruffling treasure.

Enter Tailor.

Come, tailor, let us see these ornaments;  
Lay forth the gown.—

Enter Haberdasher.

What news with you, sir?

HABERDASHER.

Here is the cap your worship did bespeak.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, this was moulded on a porringer;  
A velvet dish: fie, fie! 'tis lewd and filthy:  
Why, 'tis a cockle or a walnut-shell,  
A knack, a toy, a trick, a baby's cap:  
Away with it! come, let me have a bigger.

KATHERINA.

I'll have no bigger; this doth fit the time,  
And gentlewomen wear such caps as these.

PETRUCHIO.

When you are gentle, you shall have one too,  
And not till then.

HORTENSIO.

[Aside] That will not be in haste.

KATHERINA.

Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak;  
And speak I will. I am no child, no babe.  
Your betters have endur'd me say my mind,  
And if you cannot, best you stop your ears.  
My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,  
Or else my heart, concealing it, will break;  
And rather than it shall, I will be free  
Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, thou say'st true; it is a paltry cap,  
A custard-coffin, a bauble, a silken pie;  
I love thee well in that thou lik'st it not.

KATHERINA.

Love me or love me not, I like the cap;  
And it I will have, or I will have none.

[Exit Haberdasher.]

PETRUCHIO.

Thy gown? Why, ay: come, tailor, let us see't.  
O mercy, God! what masquing stuff is here?  
What's this? A sleeve? 'Tis like a demi-cannon.  
What, up and down, carv'd like an apple tart?  
Here's snip and nip and cut and slish and slash,  
Like to a censer in a barber's shop.  
Why, what i' devil's name, tailor, call'st thou this?

HORTENSIO.

[Aside] I see she's like to have neither cap nor gown.

TAILOR.

You bid me make it orderly and well,

According to the fashion and the time.

PETRUCHIO.

Marry, and did; but if you be remember'd,  
I did not bid you mar it to the time.  
Go, hop me over every kennel home,  
For you shall hop without my custom, sir.  
I'll none of it: hence! make your best of it.

KATHERINA.

I never saw a better fashion'd gown,  
More quaint, more pleasing, nor more commendable;  
Belike you mean to make a puppet of me.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, true; he means to make a puppet of thee.

TAILOR.

She says your worship means to make a puppet of her.

PETRUCHIO.

O monstrous arrogance! Thou liest, thou thread,  
Thou thimble,  
Thou yard, three-quarters, half-yard, quarter, nail!  
Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket thou!  
Brav'd in mine own house with a skein of thread!  
Away! thou rag, thou quantity, thou remnant,  
Or I shall so be-mete thee with thy yard  
As thou shalt think on prating whilst thou liv'st!  
I tell thee, I, that thou hast marr'd her gown.

TAILOR.

Your worship is deceiv'd: the gown is made  
Just as my master had direction.  
Grumio gave order how it should be done.

GRUMIO.

I gave him no order; I gave him the stuff.

TAILOR.

But how did you desire it should be made?

GRUMIO.

Marry, sir, with needle and thread.

TAILOR.

But did you not request to have it cut?

GRUMIO.

Thou hast faced many things.

TAILOR.

I have.

GRUMIO.

Face not me. Thou hast braved many men; brave not me: I will neither be fac'd nor brav'd. I say unto thee, I bid thy master cut out the gown; but I did not bid him cut it to pieces ergo, thou liest.

TAILOR.

Why, here is the note of the fashion to testify.

PETRUCHIO.

Read it.

GRUMIO.

The note lies in 's throat, if he say I said so.

TAILOR.

'Imprimis, a loose-bodied gown.'

GRUMIO.

Master, if ever I said loose-bodied gown, sew me in the skirts  
beat me to death with a bottom of brown thread; I said, a gown.

PETRUCHIO.

Proceed.

TAILOR.

'With a small compassed cape.'

GRUMIO.

I confess the cape.

TAILOR.

'With a trunk sleeve.'

GRUMIO.

I confess two sleeves.

TAILOR.

'The sleeves curiously cut.'

PETRUCHIO.

Ay, there's the villainy.

GRUMIO.

Error i' the bill, sir; error i' the bill. I commanded the  
sleeves should be cut out, and sew'd up again; and that I'll  
prove upon thee, though thy little finger be armed in a thimble.

TAILOR.

This is true that I say; and I had thee in place where thou  
shouldst know it.

GRUMIO.

I am for thee straight; take thou the bill, give me thy mete-yard, and spare not me.

HORTENSIO.

God-a-mercy, Grumio! Then he shall have no odds.

PETRUCHIO.

Well, sir, in brief, the gown is not for me.

GRUMIO.

You are i' the right, sir; 'tis for my mistress.

PETRUCHIO.

Go, take it up unto thy master's use.

GRUMIO.

Villain, not for thy life! Take up my mistress' gown for thy master's use!

PETRUCHIO.

Why, sir, what's your conceit in that?

GRUMIO.

O, sir, the conceit is deeper than you think for.  
Take up my mistress' gown to his master's use!  
O fie, fie, fie!

PETRUCHIO.

[Aside] Hortensio, say thou wilt see the tailor paid.  
[To Tailor.] Go take it hence; be gone, and say no more.

HORTENSIO.

[Aside to Tailor.] Tailor, I'll pay thee for thy gown tomorrow;



Take no unkindness of his hasty words.  
Away, I say! commend me to thy master.

[Exit Tailor.]

PETRUCHIO.

Well, come, my Kate; we will unto your father's  
Even in these honest mean habiliments.  
Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor  
For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich;  
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,  
So honour peereth in the meanest habit.  
What, is the jay more precious than the lark  
Because his feathers are more beautiful?  
Or is the adder better than the eel  
Because his painted skin contents the eye?  
O no, good Kate; neither art thou the worse  
For this poor furniture and mean array.  
If thou account'st it shame, lay it on me;  
And therefore frolic; we will hence forthwith,  
To feast and sport us at thy father's house.  
Go call my men, and let us straight to him;  
And bring our horses unto Long-lane end;  
There will we mount, and thither walk on foot.  
Let's see; I think 'tis now some seven o'clock,  
And well we may come there by dinner-time.

KATHERINA.

I dare assure you, sir, 'tis almost two,  
And 'twill be supper-time ere you come there.

PETRUCHIO.

It shall be seven ere I go to horse.  
Look what I speak, or do, or think to do,  
You are still crossing it. Sirs, let 't alone:

I will not go today; and ere I do,  
It shall be what o'clock I say it is.

HORTENSIO.

Why, so this gallant will command the sun.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE IV. Padua. Before BAPTISTA'S house.

Enter Tranio and the Pedant dressed like Vincentio

TRANIO.

Sir, this is the house; please it you that I call?

PEDANT.

Ay, what else? and, but I be deceived,  
Signior Baptista may remember me,  
Near twenty years ago in Genoa,  
Where we were lodgers at the Pegasus.

TRANIO.

'Tis well; and hold your own, in any case,  
With such austerity as 'longeth to a father.

PEDANT.

I warrant you. But, sir, here comes your boy;  
'Twere good he were school'd.

Enter Biondello.

TRANIO.

Fear you not him. Sirrah Biondello,  
Now do your duty thoroughly, I advise you.  
Imagine 'twere the right Vincentio.

BIONDELLO.

Tut! fear not me.

TRANIO.

But hast thou done thy errand to Baptista?

BIONDELLO.

I told him that your father was at Venice,  
And that you look'd for him this day in Padua.

TRANIO.

Th'art a tall fellow; hold thee that to drink.  
Here comes Baptista. Set your countenance, sir.

Enter Baptista and Lucentio.

Signior Baptista, you are happily met.

[To the Pedant] Sir, this is the gentleman I told you of;  
I pray you stand good father to me now;  
Give me Bianca for my patrimony.

PEDANT.

Soft, son!

Sir, by your leave: having come to Padua  
To gather in some debts, my son Lucentio  
Made me acquainted with a weighty cause  
Of love between your daughter and himself:  
And,—for the good report I hear of you,  
And for the love he beareth to your daughter,

And she to him,—to stay him not too long,  
I am content, in a good father's care,  
To have him match'd; and, if you please to like  
No worse than I, upon some agreement  
Me shall you find ready and willing  
With one consent to have her so bestow'd;  
For curious I cannot be with you,  
Signior Baptista, of whom I hear so well.

BAPTISTA.

Sir, pardon me in what I have to say.  
Your plainness and your shortness please me well.  
Right true it is your son Lucentio here  
Doth love my daughter, and she loveth him,  
Or both dissemble deeply their affections;  
And therefore, if you say no more than this,  
That like a father you will deal with him,  
And pass my daughter a sufficient dower,  
The match is made, and all is done:  
Your son shall have my daughter with consent.

TRANIO.

I thank you, sir. Where then do you know best  
We be affied, and such assurance ta'en  
As shall with either part's agreement stand?

BAPTISTA.

Not in my house, Lucentio, for you know  
Pitchers have ears, and I have many servants;  
Besides, old Gremio is hearkening still,  
And happily we might be interrupted.

TRANIO.

Then at my lodging, and it like you:  
There doth my father lie; and there this night

We'll pass the business privately and well.  
Send for your daughter by your servant here;  
My boy shall fetch the scrivener presently.  
The worst is this, that at so slender warning  
You are like to have a thin and slender pittance.

BAPTISTA.

It likes me well. Cambio, hie you home,  
And bid Bianca make her ready straight;  
And, if you will, tell what hath happened:  
Lucentio's father is arriv'd in Padua,  
And how she's like to be Lucentio's wife.

LUCENTIO.

I pray the gods she may, with all my heart!

TRANIO.

Dally not with the gods, but get thee gone.  
Signior Baptista, shall I lead the way?  
Welcome! One mess is like to be your cheer;  
Come, sir; we will better it in Pisa.

BAPTISTA.

I follow you.

[Exeunt Tranio, Pedant and Baptista.]

BIONDELLO.

Cambio!

LUCENTIO.

What say'st thou, Biondello?

BIONDELLO.

You saw my master wink and laugh upon you?

LUCENTIO.

Biondello, what of that?

BIONDELLO.

Faith, nothing; but has left me here behind to expound the meaning or moral of his signs and tokens.

LUCENTIO.

I pray thee moralize them.

BIONDELLO.

Then thus: Baptista is safe, talking with the deceiving father of a deceitful son.

LUCENTIO.

And what of him?

BIONDELLO.

His daughter is to be brought by you to the supper.

LUCENTIO.

And then?

BIONDELLO.

The old priest at Saint Luke's church is at your command at all hours.

LUCENTIO.

And what of all this?

BIONDELLO.

I cannot tell, except they are busied about a counterfeit assurance of your assurance of her, cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum; to the priest, clerk, and some sufficient honest witnesses.

If this be not that you look for, I have more to say,  
But bid Bianca farewell for ever and a day.

[Going.]

LUCENTIO.

Hear'st thou, Biondello?

BIONDELLO.

I cannot tarry: I knew a wench married in an afternoon  
as she went to the garden for parsley to stuff a rabbit; and so  
may you, sir; and so adieu, sir. My master hath appointed me to  
go to Saint Luke's to bid the priest be ready to come against y  
come with your appendix.

[Exit.]

LUCENTIO.

I may, and will, if she be so contented.  
She will be pleas'd; then wherefore should I doubt?  
Hap what hap may, I'll roundly go about her;  
It shall go hard if Cambio go without her:

[Exit.]

SCENE V. A public road.

Enter Petruchio, Katherine, Hortensio and Servants.

PETRUCHIO.

Come on, i' God's name; once more toward our father's.  
Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!

KATHERINA.

The moon! The sun; it is not moonlight now.

PETRUCHIO.

I say it is the moon that shines so bright.

KATHERINA.

I know it is the sun that shines so bright.

PETRUCHIO.

Now by my mother's son, and that's myself,  
It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,  
Or ere I journey to your father's house.  
Go on and fetch our horses back again.  
Evermore cross'd and cross'd; nothing but cross'd!

HORTENSIO.

Say as he says, or we shall never go.

KATHERINA.

Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,  
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please;  
And if you please to call it a rush-candle,  
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

PETRUCHIO.

I say it is the moon.

KATHERINA.

I know it is the moon.

PETRUCHIO.

Nay, then you lie; it is the blessed sun.



KATHERINA.

Then, God be bless'd, it is the blessed sun;  
But sun it is not when you say it is not,  
And the moon changes even as your mind.  
What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,  
And so it shall be so for Katherine.

HORTENSIO.

Petruchio, go thy ways; the field is won.

PETRUCHIO.

Well, forward, forward! thus the bowl should run,  
And not unluckily against the bias.  
But, soft! Company is coming here.

Enter Vincentio, in a travelling dress.

[To Vincentio] Good morrow, gentle mistress; where away?  
Tell me, sweet Kate, and tell me truly too,  
Hast thou beheld a fresher gentlewoman?  
Such war of white and red within her cheeks!  
What stars do spangle heaven with such beauty  
As those two eyes become that heavenly face?  
Fair lovely maid, once more good day to thee.  
Sweet Kate, embrace her for her beauty's sake.

HORTENSIO.

A will make the man mad, to make a woman of him.

KATHERINA.

Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet,  
Whither away, or where is thy abode?  
Happy the parents of so fair a child;  
Happier the man whom favourable stars

Allot thee for his lovely bedfellow.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, how now, Kate! I hope thou art not mad:  
This is a man, old, wrinkled, faded, wither'd,  
And not a maiden, as thou sayst he is.

KATHERINA.

Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes,  
That have been so bedazzled with the sun  
That everything I look on seemeth green:  
Now I perceive thou art a reverend father;  
Pardon, I pray thee, for my mad mistaking.

PETRUCHIO.

Do, good old grandsire, and withal make known  
Which way thou travellest: if along with us,  
We shall be joyful of thy company.

VINCENTIO.

Fair sir, and you my merry mistress,  
That with your strange encounter much amaz'd me,  
My name is called Vincentio; my dwelling Pisa;  
And bound I am to Padua, there to visit  
A son of mine, which long I have not seen.

PETRUCHIO.

What is his name?

VINCENTIO.

Lucentio, gentle sir.

PETRUCHIO.

Happily met; the happier for thy son.  
And now by law, as well as reverend age,

I may entitle thee my loving father:  
The sister to my wife, this gentlewoman,  
Thy son by this hath married. Wonder not,  
Nor be not griev'd: she is of good esteem,  
Her dowry wealthy, and of worthy birth;  
Beside, so qualified as may beseem  
The spouse of any noble gentleman.  
Let me embrace with old Vincentio;  
And wander we to see thy honest son,  
Who will of thy arrival be full joyous.

VINCENTIO.

But is this true? or is it else your pleasure,  
Like pleasant travellers, to break a jest  
Upon the company you overtake?

HORTENSIO.

I do assure thee, father, so it is.

PETRUCHIO.

Come, go along, and see the truth hereof;  
For our first merriment hath made thee jealous.

[Exeunt all but Hortensio.]

HORTENSIO.

Well, Petruchio, this has put me in heart.  
Have to my widow! and if she be froward,  
Then hast thou taught Hortensio to be untoward.

[Exit.]

ACT V

SCENE I. Padua. Before LUCENTIO'S house.

Enter on one side Biondello, Lucentio and Bianca; Gremio walking

BIONDELLO.

Softly and swiftly, sir, for the priest is ready.

LUCENTIO.

I fly, Biondello; but they may chance to need thee at home, therefore leave us.

BIONDELLO.

Nay, faith, I'll see the church o' your back; and then come back to my master's as soon as I can.

[Exeunt Lucentio, Bianca and Biondello.]

GREMIO.

I marvel Cambio comes not all this while.

Enter Petruchio, Katherine, Vincentio and Attendants.

PETRUCHIO.

Sir, here's the door; this is Lucentio's house:  
My father's bears more toward the market-place;  
Thither must I, and here I leave you, sir.

VINCENTIO.

You shall not choose but drink before you go.  
I think I shall command your welcome here,  
And by all likelihood some cheer is toward.

[Knocks.]

GREMIO.

They're busy within; you were best knock louder.

Enter Pedant above, at a window.

PEDANT.

What's he that knocks as he would beat down the gate?

VINCENTIO.

Is Signior Lucentio within, sir?

PEDANT.

He's within, sir, but not to be spoken withal.

VINCENTIO.

What if a man bring him a hundred pound or two to make merry withal?

PEDANT.

Keep your hundred pounds to yourself: he shall need none so long as I live.

PETRUCHIO.

Nay, I told you your son was well beloved in Padua. Do you hear, sir? To leave frivolous circumstances, I pray you tell Signior Lucentio that his father is come from Pisa, and is here at the door to speak with him.

PEDANT.

Thou liest: his father is come from Padua, and here looking out at the window.

VINCENTIO.

Art thou his father?

PEDANT.

Ay, sir; so his mother says, if I may believe her.

PETRUCHIO.

[To Vincentio] Why, how now, gentleman! why, this is flat knavery to take upon you another man's name.

PEDANT.

Lay hands on the villain: I believe a means to cozen somebody in this city under my countenance.

Re-enter Biondello.

BIONDELLO.

I have seen them in the church together: God send 'em good shipping! But who is here? Mine old master, Vincentio! Now we are undone and brought to nothing.

VINCENTIO.

[Seeing Biondello.] Come hither, crack-hemp.

BIONDELLO.

I hope I may choose, sir.

VINCENTIO.

Come hither, you rogue. What, have you forgot me?

BIONDELLO.

Forgot you! No, sir: I could not forget you, for I never saw you before in all my life.

VINCENTIO.

What, you notorious villain! didst thou never see thy master's father, Vincentio?

BIONDELLO.

What, my old worshipful old master? Yes, marry, sir; see where he looks out of the window.

VINCENTIO.

Is't so, indeed?

[He beats Biondello.]

BIONDELLO.

Help, help, help! here's a madman will murder me.

[Exit.]

PEDANT.

Help, son! help, Signior Baptista!

[Exit from the window.]

PETRUCHIO.

Prithee, Kate, let's stand aside and see the end of this controversy.

[They retire.]

Re-enter Pedant, below; Baptista, Tranio and Servants.

TRANIO.

Sir, what are you that offer to beat my servant?

VINCENTIO.

What am I, sir! nay, what are you, sir? O immortal gods!

O fine villain! A silken doublet, a velvet hose, a scarlet cloak and a copatain hat! O, I am undone! I am undone! While I play the good husband at home, my son and my servant spend all at the university.

TRANIO.

How now! what's the matter?

BAPTISTA.

What, is the man lunatic?

TRANIO.

Sir, you seem a sober ancient gentleman by your habit, but your words show you a madman. Why, sir, what 'cerns it you if I wear pearl and gold? I thank my good father, I am able to maintain it.

VINCENTIO.

Thy father! O villain! he is a sailmaker in Bergamo.

BAPTISTA.

You mistake, sir; you mistake, sir. Pray, what do you think is his name?

VINCENTIO.

His name! As if I knew not his name! I have brought him up ever since he was three years old, and his name is Tranio.

PEDANT.

Away, away, mad ass! His name is Lucentio; and he is mine only son, and heir to the lands of me, Signior Vincentio.

VINCENTIO.

Lucentio! O, he hath murdered his master! Lay hold on him, I charge you, in the Duke's name. O, my son, my son! Tell



me, thou villain, where is my son, Lucentio?

TRANIO.

Call forth an officer.

Enter one with an Officer.

Carry this mad knave to the gaol. Father Baptista, I charge you see that he be forthcoming.

VINCENTIO.

Carry me to the gaol!

GREMIO.

Stay, officer; he shall not go to prison.

BAPTISTA.

Talk not, Signior Gremio; I say he shall go to prison.

GREMIO.

Take heed, Signior Baptista, lest you be cony-catched in this business; I dare swear this is the right Vincentio.

PEDANT.

Swear if thou darest.

GREMIO.

Nay, I dare not swear it.

TRANIO.

Then thou wert best say that I am not Lucentio.

GREMIO.

Yes, I know thee to be Signior Lucentio.

BAPTISTA.

Away with the dotard! to the gaol with him!

VINCENTIO.

Thus strangers may be haled and abus'd: O monstrous villain!

Re-enter Biondello, with Lucentio and Bianca.

BIONDELLO.

O! we are spoiled; and yonder he is: deny him, forswear him, or else we are all undone.

LUCENTIO.

[Kneeling.] Pardon, sweet father.

VINCENTIO.

Lives my sweetest son?

[Biondello, Tranio and Pedant run out.]

BIANCA.

[Kneeling.] Pardon, dear father.

BAPTISTA.

How hast thou offended?

Where is Lucentio?

LUCENTIO.

Here's Lucentio,

Right son to the right Vincentio;

That have by marriage made thy daughter mine,

While counterfeit supposes blear'd thine eyne.

GREMIO.

Here 's packing, with a witness, to deceive us all!

VINCENTIO.

Where is that damned villain, Tranio,  
That fac'd and brav'd me in this matter so?

BAPTISTA.

Why, tell me, is not this my Cambio?

BIANCA.

Cambio is chang'd into Lucentio.

LUCENTIO.

Love wrought these miracles. Bianca's love  
Made me exchange my state with Tranio,  
While he did bear my countenance in the town;  
And happily I have arriv'd at the last  
Unto the wished haven of my bliss.  
What Tranio did, myself enforc'd him to;  
Then pardon him, sweet father, for my sake.

VINCENTIO.

I'll slit the villain's nose that would have sent me to  
the gaol.

BAPTISTA.

[To Lucentio.] But do you hear, sir? Have you married my  
daughter without asking my good will?

VINCENTIO.

Fear not, Baptista; we will content you, go to: but I  
will in, to be revenged for this villainy.

[Exit.]

BAPTISTA.

And I to sound the depth of this knavery.

[Exit.]

LUCENTIO.

Look not pale, Bianca; thy father will not frown.

[Exeunt Lucentio and Bianca.]

GREMIO.

My cake is dough, but I'll in among the rest;  
Out of hope of all but my share of the feast.

[Exit.]

Petruchio and Katherine advance.

KATHERINA.

Husband, let's follow to see the end of this ado.

PETRUCHIO.

First kiss me, Kate, and we will.

KATHERINA.

What! in the midst of the street?

PETRUCHIO.

What! art thou ashamed of me?

KATHERINA.

No, sir; God forbid; but ashamed to kiss.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, then, let's home again. Come, sirrah, let's away.

KATHERINA.

Nay, I will give thee a kiss: now pray thee, love, stay.

PETRUCHIO.

Is not this well? Come, my sweet Kate:

Better once than never, for never too late.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II. A room in LUCENTIO'S house.

Enter Baptista, Vincentio, Gremio, the  
Pedant, Lucentio, Bianca, Petruchio, Katherina, Hortensio and  
Widow. Tranio, Biondello and Grumio  
and Others, attending.

LUCENTIO.

At last, though long, our jarring notes agree:  
And time it is when raging war is done,  
To smile at 'scapes and perils overblown.  
My fair Bianca, bid my father welcome,  
While I with self-same kindness welcome thine.  
Brother Petruchio, sister Katherina,  
And thou, Hortensio, with thy loving widow,  
Feast with the best, and welcome to my house:  
My banquet is to close our stomachs up,  
After our great good cheer. Pray you, sit down;  
For now we sit to chat as well as eat.

[They sit at table.]

PETRUCHIO.

Nothing but sit and sit, and eat and eat!

BAPTISTA.

Padua affords this kindness, son Petruchio.

PETRUCHIO.

Padua affords nothing but what is kind.

HORTENSIO.

For both our sakes I would that word were true.

PETRUCHIO.

Now, for my life, Hortensio fears his widow.

WIDOW.

Then never trust me if I be afeard.

PETRUCHIO.

You are very sensible, and yet you miss my sense:  
I mean Hortensio is afeard of you.

WIDOW.

He that is giddy thinks the world turns round.

PETRUCHIO.

Roundly replied.

KATHERINA.

Mistress, how mean you that?

WIDOW.

Thus I conceive by him.

PETRUCHIO.

Conceives by me! How likes Hortensio that?

HORTENSIO.

My widow says thus she conceives her tale.

PETRUCHIO.

Very well mended. Kiss him for that, good widow.

KATHERINA.

'He that is giddy thinks the world turns round':  
I pray you tell me what you meant by that.

WIDOW.

Your husband, being troubled with a shrew,  
Measures my husband's sorrow by his woe;  
And now you know my meaning.

KATHERINA.

A very mean meaning.

WIDOW.

Right, I mean you.

KATHERINA.

And I am mean, indeed, respecting you.

PETRUCHIO.

To her, Kate!

HORTENSIO.

To her, widow!

PETRUCHIO.

A hundred marks, my Kate does put her down.

HORTENSIO.

That's my office.

PETRUCHIO.

Spoke like an officer: ha' to thee, lad.

[Drinks to Hortensio.]

BAPTISTA.

How likes Gremio these quick-witted folks?

GREMIO.

Believe me, sir, they butt together well.

BIANCA.

Head and butt! An hasty-witted body

Would say your head and butt were head and horn.

VINCENTIO.

Ay, mistress bride, hath that awaken'd you?

BIANCA.

Ay, but not frighted me; therefore I'll sleep again.

PETRUCHIO.

Nay, that you shall not; since you have begun,

Have at you for a bitter jest or two.

BIANCA.

Am I your bird? I mean to shift my bush,

And then pursue me as you draw your bow.

You are welcome all.

[Exeunt Bianca, Katherine and Widow.]



PETRUCHIO.

She hath prevented me. Here, Signior Tranio;  
This bird you aim'd at, though you hit her not:  
Therefore a health to all that shot and miss'd.

TRANIO.

O, sir! Lucentio slipp'd me like his greyhound,  
Which runs himself, and catches for his master.

PETRUCHIO.

A good swift simile, but something currish.

TRANIO.

'Tis well, sir, that you hunted for yourself:  
'Tis thought your deer does hold you at a bay.

BAPTISTA.

O ho, Petruchio! Tranio hits you now.

LUCENTIO.

I thank thee for that gird, good Tranio.

HORTENSIO.

Confess, confess; hath he not hit you here?

PETRUCHIO.

A has a little gall'd me, I confess;  
And as the jest did glance away from me,  
'Tis ten to one it maim'd you two outright.

BAPTISTA.

Now, in good sadness, son Petruchio,  
I think thou hast the veriest shrew of all.

PETRUCHIO.

Well, I say no; and therefore, for assurance,  
Let's each one send unto his wife,  
And he whose wife is most obedient,  
To come at first when he doth send for her,  
Shall win the wager which we will propose.

HORTENSIO.

Content. What's the wager?

LUCENTIO.

Twenty crowns.

PETRUCHIO.

Twenty crowns!

I'll venture so much of my hawk or hound,  
But twenty times so much upon my wife.

LUCENTIO.

A hundred then.

HORTENSIO.

Content.

PETRUCHIO.

A match! 'tis done.

HORTENSIO.

Who shall begin?

LUCENTIO.

That will I.

Go, Biondello, bid your mistress come to me.

BIONDELLO.

I go.

[Exit.]

BAPTISTA.

Son, I'll be your half, Bianca comes.

LUCENTIO.

I'll have no halves; I'll bear it all myself.

Re-enter Biondello.

How now! what news?

BIONDELLO.

Sir, my mistress sends you word  
That she is busy and she cannot come.

PETRUCHIO.

How! She's busy, and she cannot come!  
Is that an answer?

GREMIO.

Ay, and a kind one too:  
Pray God, sir, your wife send you not a worse.

PETRUCHIO.

I hope better.

HORTENSIO.

Sirrah Biondello, go and entreat my wife  
To come to me forthwith.

[Exit Biondello.]

PETRUCHIO.

O, ho! entreat her!

Nay, then she must needs come.

HORTENSIO.

I am afraid, sir,

Do what you can, yours will not be entreated.

Re-enter Biondello.

Now, where's my wife?

BIONDELLO.

She says you have some goodly jest in hand:

She will not come; she bids you come to her.

PETRUCHIO.

Worse and worse; she will not come! O vile,

Intolerable, not to be endur'd!

Sirrah Grumio, go to your mistress,

Say I command her come to me.

[Exit Grumio.]

HORTENSIO.

I know her answer.

PETRUCHIO.

What?

HORTENSIO.

She will not.

PETRUCHIO.

The fouler fortune mine, and there an end.

Re-enter Katherina.

BAPTISTA.

Now, by my holidame, here comes Katherina!

KATHERINA.

What is your will sir, that you send for me?

PETRUCHIO.

Where is your sister, and Hortensio's wife?

KATHERINA.

They sit conferring by the parlour fire.

PETRUCHIO.

Go fetch them hither; if they deny to come,  
Swinge me them soundly forth unto their husbands.  
Away, I say, and bring them hither straight.

[Exit Katherina.]

LUCENTIO.

Here is a wonder, if you talk of a wonder.

HORTENSIO.

And so it is. I wonder what it bodes.

PETRUCHIO.

Marry, peace it bodes, and love, and quiet life,  
An awful rule, and right supremacy;  
And, to be short, what not that's sweet and happy.

BAPTISTA.

Now fair befall thee, good Petruchio!  
The wager thou hast won; and I will add  
Unto their losses twenty thousand crowns;  
Another dowry to another daughter,  
For she is chang'd, as she had never been.

PETRUCHIO.

Nay, I will win my wager better yet,  
And show more sign of her obedience,  
Her new-built virtue and obedience.  
See where she comes, and brings your froward wives  
As prisoners to her womanly persuasion.

Re-enter Katherina with Bianca and Widow.

Katherine, that cap of yours becomes you not:  
Off with that bauble, throw it underfoot.

[Katherina pulls off her cap and throws it down.]

WIDOW.

Lord, let me never have a cause to sigh  
Till I be brought to such a silly pass!

BIANCA.

Fie! what a foolish duty call you this?

LUCENTIO.

I would your duty were as foolish too;  
The wisdom of your duty, fair Bianca,  
Hath cost me a hundred crowns since supper-time!

BIANCA.

The more fool you for laying on my duty.

PETRUCHIO.

Katherine, I charge thee, tell these headstrong women  
What duty they do owe their lords and husbands.

WIDOW.

Come, come, you're mocking; we will have no telling.

PETRUCHIO.

Come on, I say; and first begin with her.

WIDOW.

She shall not.

PETRUCHIO.

I say she shall: and first begin with her.

KATHERINA.

Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow,  
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes  
To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor:  
It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,  
Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,  
And in no sense is meet or amiable.  
A woman mov'd is like a fountain troubled,  
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty;  
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty  
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.  
Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,  
And for thy maintenance commits his body  
To painful labour both by sea and land,  
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,

Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;  
And craves no other tribute at thy hands  
But love, fair looks, and true obedience;  
Too little payment for so great a debt.  
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  
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.  
Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,  
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,  
But that our soft conditions and our hearts  
Should well agree with our external parts?  
Come, come, you froward and unable worms!  
My mind hath been as big as one of yours,  
My heart as great, my reason haply more,  
To bandy word for word and frown for frown;  
But now I see our lances are but straws,  
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,  
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.  
Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,  
And place your hands below your husband's foot:  
In token of which duty, if he please,  
My hand is ready; may it do him ease.

PETRUCHIO.

Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate.

LUCENTIO.

Well, go thy ways, old lad, for thou shalt ha't.



VINCENTIO.

'Tis a good hearing when children are toward.

LUCENTIO.

But a harsh hearing when women are froward.

PETRUCHIO.

Come, Kate, we'll to bed.

We three are married, but you two are sped.

'Twas I won the wager,

[To Lucentio.] though you hit the white;

And being a winner, God give you good night!

[Exeunt Petrucio and Katherine.]

HORTENSIO.

Now go thy ways; thou hast tam'd a curst shrew.

LUCENTIO.

'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tam'd so.

[Exeunt.]

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The Taming of the Shrew (UAA Theatre & Dance 2011 Performance)



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PART VIII

# WEEK 12: THE AMERICAN MUSICAL



## 20. Part Three: Special Topics, Chapter 9 “The American Musical”

This content can be found in its entirety with images by [clicking here for the pdf](#).

The American MusicalMargaret R. Butler

What is the American musical? It is many things: a fusion of song, dance, spoken and sung dialogue, and visual elements; an essential form of entertainment in popular culture; a venue for expression of political and social themes that have shaped the American experience; a money-making enterprise, with big-budget productions requiring enormous outlay of funds from wealthy sponsors; and a genre that both shapes and has been shaped by American culture. For many, it is synonymous with Broadway, hence the moniker “the Broadway musical.” But the musical is not just on Broadway. It is everywhere, in every major city in America and many smaller ones. Musicals are performed by professional touring companies and amateur community theatre groups and by young people in secondary schools, and they represent an area of study at colleges and universities.

Musicals are increasingly available to larger audiences through films with performances by major stars: Johnny Depp, Renée Zellweger, Matthew Broderick, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Kevin Kline, Richard Gere, Neil Patrick Harris, and many others. Marquee stars such as Harry Potter’s Daniel Radcliffe routinely perform in live award-winning Broadway musicals. Popular television shows even occasionally spoof or pay homage to the musical; memorable episodes of *Scrubs*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *Flight of the Conchords* have featured production numbers in which the lead characters sing and dance.

The musical is a living genre, one whose history is still developing. And as with any history that is still taking shape, scholars who study the musical disagree on important questions and issues, ones as basic as the following: What was the very first musical? What features define different genres? What factors were most significant in the musical's development? Which works and which people were most influential? Which works are most representative of their time? And many others.

Early Musical Theatre: Entertainments and GenresMusicals throughout history can be said to represent many different generic designations; one way to study the musical is to look at them in terms of these categories. Genre names applied to the musical have come from various sources: some came from the creators themselves, others came from critics, and still others came from specialists who study the musical. Some of these genre names indicate important features of form and structure; others are tied to a work's function in society.

The musical's origins lie in a fusion of different entertainment genres from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are traditionally called precursors, forerunners, or antecedents of the musical. Such labels imply a bias toward an organic unity that is the result of an anachronistic view. Sometimes the "early genres" are described in terms of what they are not: they are not **book musicals**, the genre that eventually displaced all of them, and one that privileges a traditional, forward-moving narrative, usually serious in tone. Book musicals (also called *musical plays*) are shows generally based on some kind of literary source with a story line that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. This genre came to dominate the history of musical theatre and is still the most popular category today.

Since the entertainments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not view themselves as forerunners to anything, we will not do that either. These entertainments represent a rich



variety of generic types, the defining characteristics of which are not always clear. Many genres overlapped, coexisted with, and borrowed elements from one another.

Perhaps one of the most difficult genres for us to understand today involved white performers “blacking up”—coloring their skin with burnt cork—and imitating black Americans. Over the course of its complicated history, blacks eventually performed it as well. The tradition of both groups is known as **minstrelsy**. What today seems like the pinnacle of prejudice and offensiveness was a form of entertainment that offered black performers an entrée into what was then an all-white world. In fact, during its heyday, it was considered a source of pride.

An example of typical minstrel makeup, 1900. As late as 1978, blackface was used for a longrunning BBC show titled *The Black and White Minstrel Show*. Courtesy Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-5698.

Blackface minstrelsy started becoming popular around 1843, eventually coming to rival melodrama in popularity. Early troupes comprised between four and six members who were all white males. Their comic skits involved stereotypes of blacks, dealing with plantation life or other situations, and songs with accompaniments by a minstrel band, in what were essentially variety shows. The so-called golden era was the 1840s to the 1870s. Black Americans started performing in troupes regularly after the abolition of slavery; eventually the troupes grew larger and were transformed—some were all female; some were all black.

*In Dahomey* (1903) by Will Marion Cook and Paul Dunbar is an early musical comedy drawing on the tradition of blackface minstrelsy. As we will see when we get to musical comedy, its elements are more integrated than in other genres and it has a more continuous narrative structure. An important black performer appearing in this work was Bert Williams. He was hired by Florenz Ziegfeld, an influential figure in the genre of the revue. Williams’s participation integrated the revue as a genre.

Several genres in particular exhibit a great deal of overlap in their distinguishing characteristics. They commingled and cross-fertilized each other during the second half of the nineteenth century. **Pantomime** refers to theatrical presentations that used gestures done in silence. It featured *underscoring*, or instrumental music that occurred during the performance of the gestures and that helped create a particular mood. **Ballet**, in the early history of the musical, simply refers to classical dance with a story line. **Spectacles** featured dance, elaborate scenery and costumes, sets, and sophisticated stage machinery. **Extravaganzas** had all of those components in addition to elements of melodrama and fantasy.

*The Black Crook* (1866) was an important extravaganza. Frequently cited as the first real precursor to the twentieth-century musical, it was a blockbuster hit. Lasting five and a half hours, it had little innovation but enjoyed great commercial success. With preexisting numbers by other composers (related to the operatic genre of the *pasticcio*), it offered lots of visual appeal and stage spectacle, complete with a chorus line with more than one hundred dancers. It ran for more than four hundred performances and was revived many times. Agnes de Mille made her debut as a choreographer in the 1929 revival.

Illustration of *The Black Crook* (1866). The title refers to a sorcerer who makes a deal with the devil to deliver souls in exchange for everlasting life. The play was a tired melodrama; its success was a result of interpolated popular songs, dance numbers, and immense spectacle. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ds-04512.

**Burlesque** emphasized broad comedy and sexual content. Its texts were full of puns, innuendos, and topical references and spoofed aspects of contemporary society. *Evangeline* (1874) was the

first burlesque for which the music was newly written. Based on a narrative poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (*Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie*, 1847), it featured music by Edward Everett Rice and text by John Cheever Goodwin. This show is one of the first among several to be called a “musical comedy,” again reinforcing the general disagreement on this point as well as the overlap in characteristics of the early genres. *Extravaganza*, *burlesque*, and *spectacle* in particular were terms used interchangeably or in combination in the midnineteenth century.

**Melodrama**, popular by the last third of the nineteenth century, represents the use of short musical passages to heighten affect in drama, either in alternation with or underlying spoken dialogue. Coming from British popular theatre, it eventually developed into full-length melodramatic plays. Underscoring, a significant element in the later musical, grew out of this technique.

A burlesque theatre in Baltimore, one of many in the neighborhood called “the Bawdy Block.”

The **revue** emerged in the 1890s and remained popular to late 1930s. A style of entertainment that had become popular in Paris, the revue featured elements loosely related by an overarching theme. It had elements of vaudeville, with which it coexisted, but those elements were more integrated. They combined the components of the *extravaganza*—fantasy, ballet, spectacular scenery and costumes, and sophisticated stage machinery—with an emphasis on beautiful girls performing skits, solo numbers, and choruses. *Tableaux vivants*—still bodies (usually scantily clad and sometimes partially nude) arranged in attractive formations—lent the revue a sensuousness not seen in other genres from around the same time. Important composers such as Irving Berlin, Cole

Porter, Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin, and Harold Arlen (who wrote “Somewhere over the Rainbow”) got their start in the revue. Flexible in types of presentation style, revues could be either single-shot (performed just once) or multiple, annual editions on Broadway. *The Passing Show* (1894) was the first successful American revue. Recurring revues had consistent visions that were determined by an impresario—a producer, director, or theatre manager—and were named for that person; the *Ziegfeld Follies*, for example, was a series of revues sponsored by the great impresario Florenz

Sheet music for a song included in the *Ziegfeld Follies* of 1917. The theme of Flo Ziegfeld’s revues was “glorifying the American girl,” and this was often accomplished through seminudity. Unlike the women in burlesque shows frequently raided by police, Ziegfeld girls did not sing or dance. Instead, they paraded in expensive costumes with dispassionate expressions. Although Ziegfeld spent extravagantly on his productions, all made a profit.

Ziegfeld. Members of his chorus lines were known as Ziegfeld showgirls and represented a romantic model of the ultimate in femininity.

**Variety**, emerging around the 1850s, had little of the luxury and romance of the revue. Featuring skits, gags, and specialized acts, it was entertainment that was considered highly disreputable. Concert saloons were important venues for variety in the first decade of the genre’s popularity. They were patronized exclusively by men who bought drinks and watched the entertainments. Variety theatres began to develop during the 1880s and 1890s; these became the central venues for vaudeville.

**Vaudeville** might be thought of as variety without alcohol, in a theatre rather than a saloon. Theatre managers invented the term,

changing the name of the entertainment in an attempt to attract family audiences (in

other words, women) and, in general, to clean up the form and render it more professional in tone and content. (Vaudeville was a term long used in French popular theatre, which bore close resemblances to variety.) Vaudeville shows featured skits, gags, and specialized acts like those found in variety but placed a greater emphasis on individual performers and independent acts, with no plot tying things together. Its heyday was the decades of the 1890s and 1910s.

George M. Cohan's *Little Johnny Jones* (1904) is considered the first American musical. Cohan's vaudeville roots led to his rise to stardom. Coming from a family of vaudeville performers, Cohan was the composer, lyricist, producer, director, and choreographer of his shows. His songs, such as "Yankee Doodle Boy" and "Give My Regards to Broadway," became emblematic of vaudeville. Jimmy Cagney immortalized Cohan in the film *Yankee Doodle Boy* in the 1940s, and the vaudeville world forms the backdrop for the musical *Gypsy*, one of the most popular shows in the late 1950s.

**Tin Pan Alley** is neither a genre nor a real place, but it is important for understanding the musical side of the early musical theatrical genres. It is a nickname both for the area around 28th Street in Manhattan, where many early sheet music publishers were located from the 1880s to the 1950s, and for the type of music they published. Tin Pan Alley songs were the popular songs of America, and many were big hits. Tin Pan Alley helped to publicize the music of American musical theatre in two

George M. Cohan in one of his patriotic musicals.

Cast and dedicated in 1959, this Times Square statue of George M. Cohan came into being through a memorial committee that included composers Irving Berlin and Oscar Hammerstein II. Photo by Stephanie Lynge.

important ways: people either wanted the music that they heard at the shows they saw, or they heard the songs and then wanted to see the shows from which those songs were drawn. In music

stores, *song pluggers*, musicians who worked for a publishing firm, played songs on a piano to interest customers in buying the sheet music. Many composers of early musicals became known to the general public thanks to their talents. George Gershwin and Irving Berlin both started out as song pluggers. In terms of general form and structure, most songs took the form of AABA, with a repeating section, followed by a contrasting section, and a return

to the familiar material, over the course of thirty-two measures, yielding what came to be known as *song form*.

European opera was of great significance in the development of the

musical. American audiences at the end of the nineteenth century loved opera, and elements of opera's music and dramatic language gradually carried over into **operetta**, or light opera. The first of the American musical's great creative teams were the British creators of some of the world's best-known operettas: William Schwenk Gilbert (lyricist) and Arthur Sullivan (composer). Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas feature comic stories that spoof nineteenth-century British society's morals and behavior. Their *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), and *The Mikado* (1885), to name a few, are considered staples of the musical theatre repertory and are still widely performed today. *Pinafore* in particular took America by storm, becoming immensely popular. In 1879, Gilbert and Sullivan traveled to the United States with the D'Oyly Carte company, and their performances influenced later ones by American

The 2009 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, Hirsch Theatre, Jerusalem. Presented by Encore! Educational Theatre Company (directed by Robert Binder). Photo by Brian Negin.

companies. The colorful film *Topsy-Turvy* tells the story of Gilbert and Sullivan's long and sometimes difficult collaboration.

Operetta in America was also strongly influenced by Americans' passion for the Viennese waltz. Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* (1907) and Victor Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* (1910) with its romantic song, "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life" (famously parodied in the film *Young Frankenstein*), recreate a glamorous world with lyrical waltzes as an important

Sheet music from Victor Herbert's operetta *The Fortune Teller*.

element. These and other works evoke the sights and sounds of Viennese operetta, such as *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss II, known as "the waltz king." Other important contributions to operetta are Sigmund Romberg's *The Student Prince* (1924), *The Desert Song* (1926), and *The New Moon* (1928), as well as Rudolf Friml's *Rose-Marie* (1924). The continuous narrative that would become an integral part of the book musical is central to the operetta and is possibly among that genre's most important contributions to the development of the American musical.

Musical Comedies of the 1920s and 1930s Musical theatre in the 1920s and 1930s was all about entertainment. Dance—particularly tap dance—was a crucial element in the early musical comedies popular during these decades. The plots of musical comedies are usually considered frivolous, a result of viewing them through the lens of today's book musicals. Musical comedies of the 1920s and 1930s, like any other genre, need to be understood in their own time, place, and context. They do have narratives, but they stand apart from book musicals because their emphasis is more on comedy and dance than on drama and character development. The musical language of jazz and other types of American popular music greatly influenced musical theatre of this era.



The brothers George and Ira Gershwin (composer and lyricist, respectively) created many of this era's most popular works. Songs from some of their musicals took on lives of their own, becoming popular in their own right, independent of the shows in which they had their premieres. At the same time, many of the era's big stars had their debuts in Gershwin shows. The title song of *Strike Up the Band* (1927) was the Gershwins' first hit of the 1930s. The catchy tune "Fascinatin' Rhythm" with its driving syncopations was first heard in *Lady Be Good* (1924), the show in which siblings Fred and Adele Astaire made their debut as dancers. The lovely ballad "Someone to Watch over Me" was first heard in *Oh, Kay!* (1926). *Girl Crazy* (1930) introduced Ethel Merman to the theatregoing public. Her performance of "I Got Rhythm," and Ginger Rogers's of "Embraceable You," helped to popularize these songs. The show spawned the partnership of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, one of the greatest dance teams in the history of musicals. Although the show itself, like many of the musical comedies of these decades, did not enjoy lasting

Composer George Gershwin. Photo © Lebrecht Music and Arts/Corbis.

popularity, it took on new life much later, being revamped as *Crazy for You* in 1992. The Gershwins' *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) was the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize for drama and the first show to have its **book**—the spoken dialogue apart from the song lyrics—published separately.

The best known musical of this era is decidedly not a comedy. *Show Boat* (1927), by composer Jerome Kern and librettist Oscar Hammerstein II, is an actual book musical, widely considered the very first in the genre's history. With its serious tone and treatment of controversial issues of race, this work stands apart from the

popular emphasis on comic entertainment that characterized shows from around its time. Based on a 1926 novel by Edna Ferber with the same title, the show deals with issues of race and class, demonstrating the controversy surrounding miscegenation (interracial marriage). Another innovation concerns the integration of the songs into the plot. *Show Boat*'s songs are more central to the narrative than those of earlier (and later) musical comedies. This element would become a defining characteristic of the later book musical. Some of *Show Boat*'s songs are related to each other through similarity of their musical material. For instance, the famous song "Ol' Man River" (in the familiar song form, AABA) is linked to "Cotton Blossom" through inversion of melodic material: the first few notes of the opening of the melody of "Ol' Man River" are the same as that of "Cotton Blossom" when the

The 2013 production of *Show Boat*, produced jointly by the San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, and Houston Grand Opera. Photo by Dan Rest.

This 2011 Portland Center Stage production of *Oklahoma!* was performed by an all-black cast. Traditionally, this story of love in a farming community in 1906 is done with white actors. However, director Chris Coleman discovered through his research that at one point, one third of cowboys in the West were black, and during the time of the play, there were fifty all-black towns in Oklahoma. Photo by Patrick Weishampel.

tune is run backward. Unfortunately, *Show Boat* did not inspire a

trend. The work and its innovations would not be influential in the development of the musical until the 1940s, when *Oklahoma!*, the next great book musical and the one to usher in the tradition of greater emphasis on dramatic content, had its premiere. Instead, musical comedies continued to dominate.

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, the first composer-lyricist team to attain recognition as such, had a hit with *On Your Toes* (1936). The great choreographer George Balanchine created the dances, which were central to the plot, and Rodgers and Hart wrote the book together, in a partnership that would span twenty-four years.

Irving Berlin is known better today for a show that came much later in his career: *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946). His reputation in the 1930s was built on the strength of his songs, many of which were wildly popular, such as “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” “God Bless America,” “White Christmas,” “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” and “Blue Skies,” to name a few. Berlin wrote both the music and lyrics for his songs, as did Cole Porter, one of the most important figures from around this time. Porter, like Berlin, was classically trained in music, and like Berlin, Porter also had a hit later in his career with *Kiss Me Kate* (1948). Porter’s songs have a technical complexity unmatched by those of any of his contemporaries. Porter’s lyrics are witty and suggestive and often exhibit a sophisticated use of rhyme. His *Anything Goes* (1934) was a vehicle for Ethel Merman (it highlighted her as the star); the title song is typical of Porter’s style. Again, dance is a central element in the narrative. The show’s recent successful Broadway revival demonstrates its popularity with modern audiences. Porter’s turbulent career and personal life is the subject of *De-Lovely*, a biopic with Kevin Kline and Ashley Judd, which presents an intriguing montage of many of Porter’s songs (and is named for one of his best-known ones).

The Rise and Dominance of the Book Musical in the 1940s and 1950s  
The 1940s and 1950s were dominated by the book musical.

Creators and audiences increasingly favored shows that were based on some sort of literary source (such a book, play, novel, or story), many of which were serious in tone and content. They typically featured down-to-earth, realistic

characters with whom people could identify and had a recognizable story line. The songs in works during this period were part of the dramatic fabric and essential to the narrative, a result of the close collaboration between the members of the creative teams who conceived the works. In contrast to earlier shows, the musicals of the 1940s and 1950s combined lighthearted and comic elements with those of a greater depth and weight, with characters that are more complex as individuals and in relation to each other. A sense of unity pervades the shows of these decades, with an emphasis on a smooth integration of all the elements.

The musicals of the two great teams of the 1940s and 1950s are the “meat and potatoes” of the genre, classics that are still popular today; many are given regular productions in community theatres around the country as well as revivals on Broadway. The formula they created was expanded upon by their successors, and elements of it are evident in shows throughout the remaining decades of the twentieth century. Shows from this era are sometimes called “symphonic musicals” because they are symphonic in conception and execution, calling for the resources of a full classical orchestra. The composers of these partnerships carefully utilized particular instrumental colors in composing their musical scores, and professional orchestral musicians played in pit orchestras on Broadway.

Richard Rodgers (composer) and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyricist) began to collaborate after Rodgers’s partnership with Lorenz Hart came to an end. *Oklahoma!* (1943), based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs, was their first collaboration. It was immensely popular, one of most successful musicals ever on Broadway. It broke the record for the show with the longest run, with more than two

thousand performances (a record it would hold for fifteen years), and won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Its choreographer was Agnes de Mille, whose balletic style transformed theatrical dance and who originated the dream ballet (an extended sequence in which a character's dream is acted out by dancers). The original cast recording helped make the show famous nationally. *Carousel* (1945) dealt with the somber theme of spousal abuse and featured an onstage death. Again, Agnes de Mille's choreography was, like the songs, an essential component of the storytelling. One of the songs, "What's the Use of Wond'rin?" is an example of Rodgers and Hammerstein's expansion of the classic song form, in which a reprise (a vocal coda, which repeats some of the music from earlier) enlarges the scope

of the song and broadens it to include participation by the chorus. *South Pacific* (1949) and *The King and I* (1951) share some common features. Both are based on novels, are set in exotic locales, and deal with issues of racism and ethnic prejudice—how it is both created and overcome. *South Pacific's* "You Have to Be Carefully Taught" addressed this issue explicitly. Both shows also centered on unusual love interests represented by lead characters from different cultural traditions and have many memorable songs that became associated with the music of the era ("Some Enchanted Evening" from *South Pacific*; "Shall We Dance?" and "Getting to Know You" from *The King and I*). *The Sound of Music* (1959) is perhaps their most famous show, known to family audiences through the well-loved film version from 1965 starring Julie Andrews.

Frederick Loewe (composer) and Alan Jay Lerner (lyricist) built successfully on the Rodgers and Hammerstein model. Lerner, unlike most lyricists, had musical training. The two began collaborating in the early 1940s. Their *Brigadoon* (1947), set in a mystical land in the highlands of Scotland, appealed to audiences for its elements of fantasy and exoticism. Their greatest hit, *My Fair Lady* (1956), was based on George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Against a backdrop

of class conflict in nineteenth-century Britain, it introduced lively and lovable characters and situations. *Camelot* (1960) recreated the medieval world of King Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere, retelling the story of their love triangle. The film versions of these shows brought them to a broad audience. These were often heavily revised versions of the originals, with nonsinging film actors whose voices were dubbed (Audrey Hepburn's portrayal of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* is a classic example). These musicals thus developed a national following that shows from the early years of the century never had. The existence of these shows as films contributed greatly to their status as classics that they enjoy today.

## Varieties of Nostalgia in the 1950s

The shows of these two towering creative teams were not the only ones to receive acclaim or to introduce innovations. Musicals carried different meanings for different audiences. The themes of the stories and situations dealt with many different issues and topics that were both appealing and thought-provoking in diverse ways and in varying degrees. Several important shows by other composers evoked a nostalgic view of America. They are known as works by their composers alone, rather than as ones

that represent a partnership. *Guys and Dolls* (1950), by Frank Loesser, was based on characters from stories by Damon Runyon set in the New York underworld of the 1920s and 1930s (which became known as "Runyonland"). *The Music Man* (1957), by Meredith Willson, another classically trained musician, is the love story of a librarian and a traveling salesman set in small-town Iowa. Audiences loved the sweet, romantic view of urban and rural surroundings depicted by these two shows. *Gypsy* (1959), by Jule (pronounced

JOO-lie) Styne, can be viewed as representing nostalgia of a very different type. Set during the vaudeville era, it was based on the autobiography of the stripper Gypsy Rose Lee. Dealing with hard-edged subject matter, it was among the first shows to reveal the unpleasant side of human relationships, with several emotionally wrenching scenes and songs for Gypsy's strong-willed mother, Mama Rose. The collaboration among members of the personnel was complex and is a good example of the strong influence performers could exert in the creation of a musical. Ethel Merman was engaged to play Mama Rose and was brought into the planning stages early on. She insisted that Styne was a better choice as composer than Stephen Sondheim, who had made his mark as lyricist for *West Side Story* two years earlier. In the end, Sondheim, who was slated to compose the music and lyrics for Gypsy, partnered with Styne, creating many of the songs and retaining his role as lyricist. Gypsy featured other *West Side Story* collaborators as well: Arthur

A 2011 national tour of *West Side Story*. The choreography, a blend of modern dance and ballet styles, uses dance as a means of expressing territoriality and violence in much the same way as modern “dance battles” depicted in movies. Photo by Carol Rosegg.

Laurents, who wrote the book, and Jerome Robbins, a significant figure in theatrical dance in later decades, who created the choreography.

## Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein is a towering figure in the history of American

music. His contributions to the musical world as composer, conductor, and educator are unsurpassed by those of any other artist in America in the second half of the twentieth century. Bernstein composed concert works in various genres and film scores as well as musicals. *On the Town* (1944), his first musical, took its inspiration from a ballet he and Robbins had created called *Fancy Free*. It exhibits the thorough integration of book, music, and dance so important to Bernstein's creative vision and that would become essential to the musical's later development.

*West Side Story* (1957) epitomizes Bernstein's genius as a craftsman of musical theatre and has earned its place as a classic in the genre. Opening the same year as *The Music Man* (demonstrating contemporary audiences' widely ranging tastes), it involved the collaboration of the era's leading artists: Sondheim as lyricist, Laurents as author of the book, and Robbins as choreographer. Themes of discrimination, racism, and love play out in a retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* set in 1950s New York highlighting the relationships between members of rival gangs and their families. The film version of 1961 won the Academy Award for Best Picture. The show's music is rich in melodic and harmonic invention. The ensembles are particularly challenging to coordinate, with dense textures and complex rhythms. The "Tonight" ensemble is operatic in conception, with energetic interplay between individual lines as well as choral groups. Like the best opera composers, Bernstein portrays characters and their contrasting emotions through the changing qualities of the music they sing. "America," with its driving rhythms and shifting accents, is another high point of the show; both ensembles require performers who are skilled dancers as well as exceptional singers.

Expansions of and Alternatives to the Book Musical in the 1960s–1980s Starting in the 1960s, creators of the musical began to experiment with new ways of telling stories, exploring new narrative structures that did not rely as greatly on the book musical's plot-oriented approach. The book



musical never disappeared or went out of style, however, and is still the most prevalent genre in popular shows of today. But certain aspects of its conventions have been influenced by stylistic developments that started to occur in the second half of the twentieth century. Some of the categories we will explore here are not actually different genres, but are ones that place different amounts and kinds of emphasis on the traditional musical's various components.

## Breaking the Mold

Perhaps the most significant change to occur in the book musical's development around this time is the continued broadening of the types of subject matter that came to be considered acceptable for presentation on the musical stage. *Gypsy*, with its gritty realism, might be considered the first show to have initiated this trend and achieved success. Three shows of the 1960s and 1970s—musicals with strong dramatic subjects by new creative teams—stand out as examples: Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Cabaret* (1966), and *Chicago* (1985). *Fiddler* and *Cabaret* were directed by Hal Prince, whose later collaborations with Sondheim would continue transforming the genre. Both shows deal with ethnic prejudice and discrimination, exploring issues of Jewish cultural identity in different times and places. *Fiddler* set a new record, garnering more than three thousand performances and winning many awards. Jerome Robbins choreographed the dances, which were increasingly important to the action, figuring even more greatly into the plot than those of earlier decades. The film version featuring Zero Mostel is now considered a classic.

*Cabaret* plays with generic convention perhaps more than any of its predecessors, the role of the narrator (the emcee of the Kit Kat Klub, originated by Joel Grey) playing an important part in that process. In addition, many of the songs are commentaries on the events in the plot. Based on Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories*, its serious subject—the encroachment of Nazism in 1930s Germany—was given a darkly ironic treatment. Kander and Ebb had another hit with *Chicago*. Against the backdrop of prohibition and Al Capone's crime world, *Chicago* integrated vaudeville-influenced songs and images with the edgy choreography of Bob Fosse. The recent movie version with performances by film stars Richard Gere, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Renée Zellweger, and John C. Reilly gave the show new life.

The most important alternative to the book musical to emerge in the 1970s was the **concept musical**. Shows in this genre are more nonlinear meditations on various themes—explorations of concepts—than unified stories. *A Chorus Line* (1975) is perhaps the first concept musical to gain critical acclaim, winning nine Tony awards. It is also called a “fully integrated” musical, a reference to the prominence of dance in the action. Bob Fosse created the dances, continuing his rise to prominence as the leading choreographer/director of the decade. The experiences of dancers auditioning for a place in a chorus line, and their individual stories, form the dramatic material. Two songs from the show in particular became well known: “One” and “What I Did for Love.”

## Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim, arguably the most significant composer in the history of American musical theatre, is truly in a class by himself. His

eclectic works exhibit a dazzlingly broad range of styles and types of dramatic and musical expression. His shows dominated Broadway during the 1970s and much of the 1980s, garnering numerous awards including six Tonys for Best Broadway Musical. Sondheim was classically trained in music, having studied with the modernist composer Milton Babbitt, but his true mentor was Oscar Hammerstein II. After he collaborated in *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, Sondheim's first show for which he composed all the music was *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), a hilarious throwback to the tradition of musical comedy. A recurring theme in his subsequent shows is the many different ways people communicate with each other—or do not—in relationships. He creates complex characters who feel deeply. His shows not only explore his characters' inner lives but address basic, larger questions about what motivates people to do the things they do. The complex psychological portraits he creates emerge as a central feature of his dramatic language. Sondheim's shows often defy categorization because of his innovative approaches to form and structure and his tireless search for new ways to manipulate generic conventions.

*Company* (1970) was the first of Sondheim's collaborations with director Hal Prince, a partnership that would last about a decade and result in *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures*, and *Sweeney Todd*. *Company* is a concept musical exploring the theme of communication; its action centers on the lead character, a single man named Bobby, and his

relationships to his married friends and girlfriends. Sondheim both links him with and sets him apart from the other characters through the use of a particular musical motive—a short two-pitch unit that is repeated and transformed throughout the course of the show. The motive is manipulated in specific ways to reflect Bobby's relationships with the characters, and theirs with each other. *Follies* (1971) recreates the lavish world of the Ziegfeld Follies, within which

characters reexamine their life choices and the consequences of those choices. One of several of Sondheim's shows to play with time and its passing in intriguing ways, *Follies* uses flashbacks to the characters' youth as a central feature of the narrative. A *Little Night Music* (1973) is sometimes referred to as an operetta for the central role played by the waltz as its predominant musical style; its heartfelt ballad "Send In the Clowns" was made famous by the 1970s pop singer Judy Collins.

*Sweeney Todd* (1979) has been described as a musical thriller. Its subject matter—a deranged barber who kills his customers and sends them to his neighbor, who then turns them into meat pies to be eaten by the unsuspecting public—is at once disturbing and irresistible. The story's passion, tragedy, fascinating characters, and suspenseful situations have made it a modern classic that is both hair-raising and heartbreaking. Inspired by melodrama and British lore of the nineteenth century, it is an adaptation of the story *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. In contrast to conventional musicals, *Sweeney Todd* is almost entirely sung throughout (like many operas) with very little spoken dialogue and extensive underscoring. The original cast included Angela Lansbury and Len Cariou, and in a creative recent revival featuring Patti LuPone, the cast played all the instruments onstage (an approach also taken with the revival of *Company*). The movie version with Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter highlighted the plot's elements of horror.

Sondheim's prominence lasted into the 1980s and 1990s, during which he continued to experiment with form and nonlinear ways of storytelling. In *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981) everything runs backward, but audiences found this reverse narrative structure hard to follow (and consequently the show was later revised). *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (one of the few musicals to do so), ushered in the era of partnership with James Lapine, the writer-director who wrote the book. Sondheim and Lapine also created *Into the Woods* and *Pas-sion* and revised *Merrily We Roll Along*. Based on the famous painting

The 2003 production of *Sweeney Todd*, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, London. Photo © Robbie Jack/ Corbis.

of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* by the pointillist painter Georges Seurat, *Sunday in the Park* explores the nature of the creative process, playing with time and dramatic structure in new ways.

*Into the Woods* (1987) exhibits still more innovation. Lapine and Sondheim won Tony Awards for best book and best musical score. The show is about community responsibility, as characters in

different fairy tales gradually begin to interact with and learn from each other in how to live life. One excerpt in particular stands out for its role in the creation of musical and dramatic structure. Sondheim rarely used reprises—repeats of pieces or sections of them—in his shows, believing that if characters grow and develop emotionally, it doesn't make sense for them to sing the same music over again. The first-act duet, “Agony,” sung by Cinderella's and Rapunzel's princes, presents interesting and effective characterization, as they try to outdo each other with descriptions of each maiden's beauty and inaccessibility. But when the duet is presented as a reprise in

the second act, another layer to the men's emotional development, or lack thereof, is revealed: they reprise their earlier music to demonstrate that they have indeed not grown or matured—and they go on just as they have before.

*Assassins* (1991) is a concept musical and a pastiche—an eclectic mix of musical styles drawn from diverse sources and influences. Presidential assassins (both actual and would-be) from different periods of history tell their stories and reveal their motivations and goals, reflecting on their shared experiences as alienated outsiders. *Passion* (1994) represents in some ways a return to more traditional storytelling and musical language. The show is based on the Italian film *Passione d'amore*, and its musical style is overtly romantic, with lush harmonies and soaring melodies. Its use of flashback recalls *Follies*. It is perhaps the most sensuous of Sondheim's musicals.

New Developments from the 1980s and Beyond: Diversity Continues  
The development of musical theatre from the 1980s to the present has seen a proliferation of new genres as well as an ever-increasing overlap among the characteristics that define them. Questions as to what constitutes the major new trends and how musical theatre will develop in the future continue to occupy creators, critics, and audiences. Important genres taking shape

since the 1980s are based on factors such as dimensions and scope, musical style, reuse of earlier music, and relation to film. And many shows belong to more than one genre.

## New Genres and Approaches

**Megamusicals** are those in which the visual spectacle is the main emphasis and is larger than life. Many have enjoyed widespread popular appeal. *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables* are classic examples, shows that are known to audiences worldwide. *Cats* (1982), which is also a concept musical, can also be added to the list. *Phantom* and *Cats*, both by British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, are among Broadway's longest-running shows, and songs from them have become known to the point of becoming clichés ("Memory" from *Cats* and "Music of the Night" from *Phantom*, among others). *Cats* closed in 2000; *Phantom*, still running on Broadway, opened in London in 1986 and New York

Anne Hathaway and Hugh Jackman in the Universal Pictures film *Les Misérables* (2012). Photo © Universal Pictures.

in 1988. *Les Misérables* (1987), by the French team of Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, won eight Tonys, running from 1987 to 2003. These works are sometimes called *poperas*, with music that is influenced by popular idioms and is continuously sung throughout, with no spoken dialogue.

Many successful shows are based on musical styles from past decades for which their genres are named. The **rock musical** is one of the most difficult genres to define, primarily because rock-

influenced music has been part of the musical since at least the 1950s. It is a category that is still in flux, with the boundaries of its definition still being formulated by specialists. Those who define the rock musical's parameters are concerned with the use of rock as a musical language (whether as the show's primary one or as one style among many) and whether a show is or is not called a "rock musical" by its creators or commentators, among other considerations. *Hair* (1967), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970), *Godspell* (1971), *The Wiz* (1975), and *Rent* (1996) are generally considered to be rock musicals. Subcategories based on specific popular musical styles have also emerged: *Dreamgirls* (1981) is a Motown musical, and *City of Angels* (1989) represents the jazz musical. The pervasiveness of popular musical idioms in musical theatre is one factor in the development of a related genre, the **jukebox musical**. Shows in this genre, also sometimes called "compilation shows," consist of existing pop songs, whether by a single

group or artist or by different ones from a particular era: *Mamma Mia!* (2001), *Movin' Out* (2002), *Jersey Boys* (2005), and *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (2011) belong to this category.

## Intersections with Film

The musical's relationship with film has been a significant part of its history since the 1930s. Many of the great shows of the 1940s and 1950s were made into well-known films, some of which won Oscars for Best Picture and have become known as classics (such as *West Side Story*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The Sound of Music*). And some musicals that began life as films were produced on the stage, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *State Fair*, Lerner and Loewe's *Gigi*, and *Singin' in the Rain*. The Disney variety, such as *The Lion King* and



*Beauty and the Beast*, represents particularly interesting crossovers from screen to stage. (These are sometimes called “movicals”; they also qualify as megamusicals.) Different kinds of crossovers are stage shows that are adaptations of nonmusical films, of which *The Producers* represents a recent success. Setting a record in 2001 for winning a total of twelve Tony Awards, Mel Brooks’s show, starring Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, started out as his 1968 film, which starred Gene Wilder and Zero Mostel. The movie version featuring the original Broadway duo (joined by Will Ferrell and Uma Thurman) came out in 2006. Another show with a similarly circuitous route is the campy *Little Shop of Horrors*: the popular stage show of 1980, based on a bizarre science-fiction movie from 1960, was made into a movie featuring Rick Moranis and Steve Martin in 1986 (newly released on DVD in 2000). The aforementioned *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* is similarly based on a nonmusical film, as is *Billy Elliott* (2008).

## Revivals, Reworkings, and New Shows

Many of the best-loved shows from the past have enjoyed successful recent Broadway revivals: *Oklahoma!*, *Anything Goes* (with Sutton Foster), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (with Daniel Radcliffe), and *Annie Get Your Gun* (with Bernadette Peters) are a few examples. Some revivals represent reworkings, such as the recent production of *West Side Story* in which some of the dialogue was sung in Spanish. But many newly created shows are being offered regularly, and many of these represent the enduring tradition of the book musical. Some of the most original and exciting new works draw upon tried-and-true elements

Creators of musicals continue to push the envelope of what is considered acceptable subject matter for musicals. In *Avenue Q* (music and lyrics by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx), a familiar children's puppet show is used as a vehicle to discuss adult themes. 2013 production, Hippodrome Theatre, Gainesville, FL (featuring Michael Hull, Marissa Toogood, and Jennifer Lauren Brown; directed by Lauren Caldwell and Charlie Mitchell).

of the familiar structure of traditional narrative but offer exciting new opportunities for its expansion and elaboration. These include the wildly successful *Wicked* (2003), the frank and energetic *In the Heights* (2008), and the emotionally wrenching *Next to Normal* (2009), to name a few. *Wicked*, with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz (the creator of *Godspell* and *Pippin*, popular shows from the 1970s), is based on Gregory Maguire's novel of the same name, in which L. Frank Baum's fantasy *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is retold from the Wicked Witch of the West's point of view. *Wicked*, still running since its opening in 2003, won numerous Tony Awards including Best Musical, and hit upon what seems to be the modern formula for success: a familiar story (but one that offers a new twist); strong dramatic situations with complex characters who wrestle with conflicting emotions (Elphaba and Glinda's relationship); larger-than-life spectacular moments that are integrated into the drama (Elphaba's thrilling ascent in "Defying Gravity"); big stars with name recognition (Joel Grey, Kristin Chenoweth, Idina Menzel); and affecting music in a range of styles that creates a broad array of contrasting moods.

## 2I. Early Vaudeville Comedy Routines

[“Happy Hooligan” \(1903\)](#)

[“Levi & Cohen, the Irish Comedians” \(1903\)](#)

[“Alphonse and Gaston” \(1903\)](#)



PART IX

WEEKS 13, 14, AND 15:  
MODERN MUSICALS



## 22. Phantom of the Opera (1925)

[Click here to view.](#)

## 23. (Optional) Phantom of the Opera Film

[Phantom Of The Opera at the Royal Albert Hall-25th Anniversary Celebration](#)