

**GREAT
LAKES
THEATER**

TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE



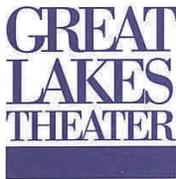
The Merry Wives of Windsor

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DIRECTED BY TRACY YOUNG

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Fall 2014

Producing Artistic Director
Charles Fee

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Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production of William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which will be performed in rotating repertory with *Les Misérables* in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from September 26 through November 2, 2014.

Meet the rotund rascal Sir John Falstaff and the wise wives of Windsor in one of Shakespeare's most raucous comedies. With an ego as big as his voracious appetite, Falstaff conspires to woo the two wealthiest married ladies in town and pocket their riches. However, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page devise a scheme of their own to teach him a well-deserved lesson in Wooing 101. Join us and feast on a hilariously magnificent treat of monogamously artful deceit.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. We offer special thanks to Jodi Kirk for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaffer Florian
Director of Educational Services
Kflorian@greatlakes theater.org

A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER



You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc., be completely powered off once you have entered the

theatre. Even the glow from a silent cell phone (used for text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as a camera and editor, choosing his or her personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there are design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE



Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in PlayhouseSquare, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the Company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The Company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square the home of the Company. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

“*Merry Wives* is about feeling like an outsider to a community and finding identity within it, and about how a community can support or inhibit self-expression.

”



Tracy Young

The end of the Second World War was a particularly galvanizing time in American history. The country as a whole shared great optimism about the future prosperity of the new “Baby Boomer” generation, and yet at the same time experienced a more complicated and darker awareness of humanity overall. America had strong regard for its moral fabric and also an increasing doubt about the durability of that fabric. Tensions between ideals of community and individualism, transformations of accepted notions of status, and evolving expectations of traditional gender roles introduced changes in American society that would unfold over the next fifty years. Soldiers returned home to spouses and both partners often struggled with the distance that had come between them, both literally and figuratively. Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* explores similar expectations and tensions, and this adaptation carries them into the period just after the war, when triumphant feeling struggled with the realities of a threatening world. “*Merry Wives*” is about feeling like an outsider to a community and finding identity within it, and about how a community can support or inhibit self-expression.

The play good-naturedly, but pointedly, skewers our weaknesses. Jealousy is represented in at least three other Shakespeare plays as a potentially destructive force, but in “*Merry Wives*,” we can recognize and grow from it. Lustfulness and a propensity for gossip and deceitfulness appear in this play as potentially but never quite destructive. The play is constructed to a human scale, and with a generosity towards the characters that inhabit its world. Shakespeare’s Falstaff is a paragon of human foibles, and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* he is the figure most alien to the play’s community.

What is it about Falstaff? Why is this larger-than-life figure so memorable and so prone to take up residence in our hearts and imaginations? Referred to as a “fat knight,” he embodies a laundry list of vices; he is lazy, slovenly, a drunkard, a womanizer, a thief, a braggart, a coward and a prevaricator. And yet, we can’t get enough of him. Perhaps it is because Falstaff represents the joy of freely following our impulses without concern for the

consequences. But then, inevitably, the consequences of hedonistic living come to pass—obesity, alcoholism, poverty, and perhaps most meaningfully the rejection of one’s community. Falstaff is brought down by his unbridled ways and rejected by the young king in the Henry plays. But there is no delight in watching Falstaff get his comeuppance there, for we still harbor a love for him and the way he mirrors us in our most childlike selves. Shakespeare is rumored to have been encouraged by Queen Elizabeth I to write a light hearted romp for Falstaff. In Shakespeare’s wisdom, this rollicking work framed Falstaff as an outsider who, by his very way of being, challenges the community to confront its notions about morality and acceptance of difference. Once again, Falstaff suffers rejection and humiliation for his shortcomings, but ultimately Shakespeare uses the community’s embracing of Falstaff as a symbol of enrichment and growth.

Lastly, though, it is useful to remember that Shakespeare titled this play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and for good reason. The play is centered not around Falstaff but around the women of the story, the “Merry Wives.” They are the engines that drive the action of the play, and they seem to relish their role. The ladies Ford and Page are fiercely intelligent, witty and yet also seem content to wield power within their proscribed roles as wives and mothers. These women provide a pointed contrast to other hyper-intelligent Shakespearean women who are often thwarted and limited by their gendered roles (Lady Macbeth and “shrewish” Kate come to mind). In “Merry Wives,” the women find ways to maneuver in their own, albeit limited, milieu. They mete out the standards around which the community rallies and establish the “rules of combat.” At the end of the play, Falstaff is welcomed into the community by one of the wives who can see past his limitations and embrace him with forgiveness that transcends his foolishness. It is ultimately that final grace note that offers the most stirring and heartfelt moment of the play, in recognizing that shortcomings are shared by everyone, and that forgiveness is always possible.

Dramatis Personae

Mr. John Falstaff, a raconteur

Mr. Frank Ford, a husband

Mrs. Alice Ford, a wife

Mr. George Page, a husband and father

Mrs. Margaret Page, a wife and mother

Miss Anne Page, a daughter

Mr. William Page, a son

Mr. Robert Shallow, a wealthy man

Mr. Hugh Evans, a scholar

Mr. Fenton, suitor to Miss Anne Page

Mr. Abraham Slender, nephew of Mr. Shallow &
suitor to Miss Anne Page

Dr. Caius, suitor to Miss Anne Page

Madame Quickly, a “housekeeper”

Host of the Garter, a theater owner

Bardolph, an associate of Mr. Falstaff

Pistol, an associate of Mr. Falstaff

Nym, an associate of Mr. Falstaff

Robin, assistant to Mr. Falstaff

Simple, assistant to Mr. Slender

Rugby, assistant to Dr. Caius

The Scene

Windsor, Wisconsin

SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Falstaff arrives in Windsor short on money. In an effort to solve his financial woes, he decides that he will court two wealthy married women, Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page. Falstaff sends the women identical love letters and asks his associates— Pistol and Nym – to deliver them to the wives. When they refuse, Falstaff sacks them, and in revenge, the men tell the husbands of Falstaff's intentions. Mr. Page is not concerned, but Mr. Ford's jealousy is inflamed.

Meanwhile, three different men are trying to win the hand of Mr. Page's daughter, Miss Anne Page. Mrs. Page would like her daughter to marry Doctor Caius, a physician, whereas the girl's father would like her to marry Mr. Slender, the nephew of the wealthy Mr. Shallow. Anne herself is in love with Mr. Fenton, but Page has rejected Fenton as a suitor due to his having squandered his fortune on extravagant living.

When the wives receive Falstaff's letters, each informs the other, and they discover that the letters are identical. For their own amusement and to gain revenge for his indecent assumptions, the wives pretend to respond to his advances.



Jodi Dominick and Laura Welsh Berg

Mr. Ford becomes suspicious of his wife's fidelity and poses as “Mr. Brook,” who offers to pay Falstaff to court her, saying that once she has lost her honor he will be able to tempt her himself. Falstaff cannot believe his luck, and tells “Mr. Brook” he has already arranged to meet Mrs. Ford while her husband is out.

When Falstaff arrives to meet Mrs. Ford, the wives trick him into hiding inside a basket to avoid discovery by the jealous husband. The wives then have the basket taken away and the contents (including Falstaff) dumped into the river. Although this affects Falstaff's pride, his ego is surprisingly resilient. He is convinced that the wives are just "playing hard to get," and so he continues his pursuit of them.

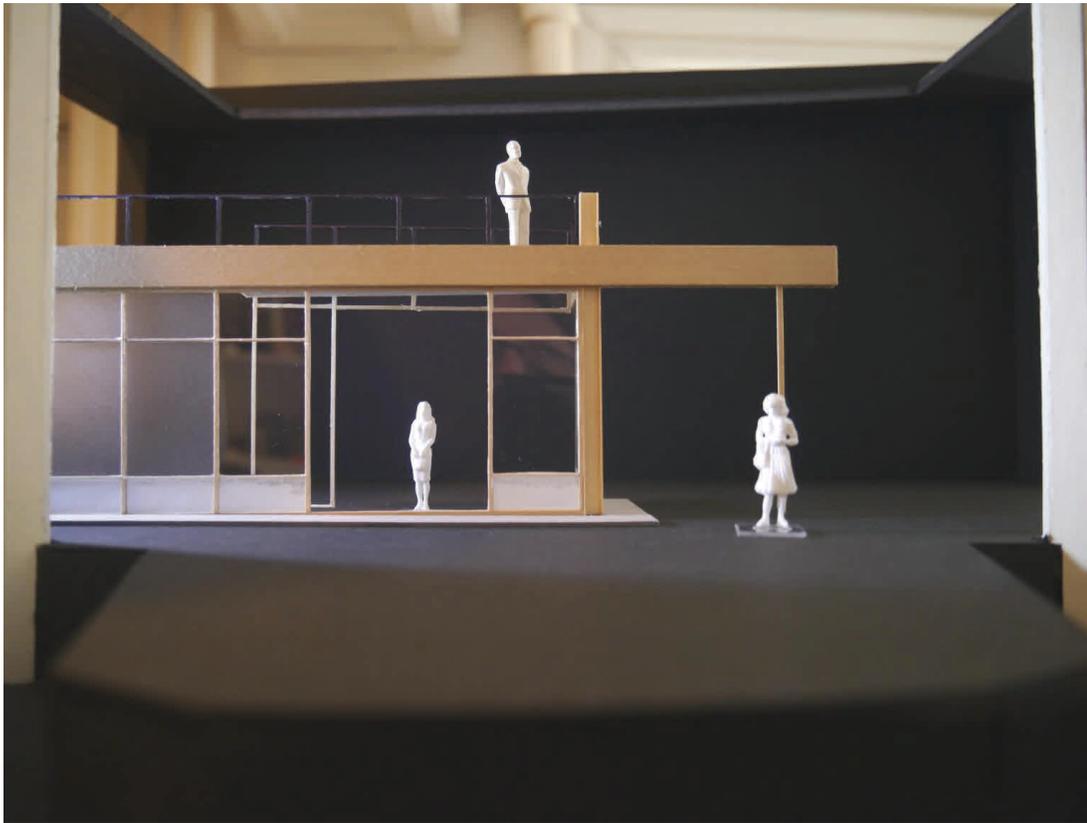
Again Falstaff goes to meet the women but Mrs. Page comes back and warns Mrs. Ford of her husband's approach again. This time they trick Falstaff into disguising himself as Mrs. Ford's aunt, but Mr. Ford ends up beating him anyway.

Eventually the wives tell their husbands about the series of jokes they have played on Falstaff, and together they devise one last public humiliation for Falstaff, involving a pageant being enacted by residents of the town. During the pageant, each of Miss Anne Page's suitors attempts to steal her away, with Mrs. Page aiding Dr. Caius and Mr. Page aiding Slender. However, Fenton escapes with Anne.

Once the joke is played out on Falstaff, he accepts his punishment surprisingly well, and sees it as deserved. Fenton and Anne return and announce they have been married. Fenton chides the parents for trying to force Anne to marry men she did not love and the parents accept the marriage and congratulate the young pair. A celebration begins and Mrs. Page happily invites Falstaff to join the festivities.

PRELIMINARY SCENIC DESIGN

BY RICK MARTIN

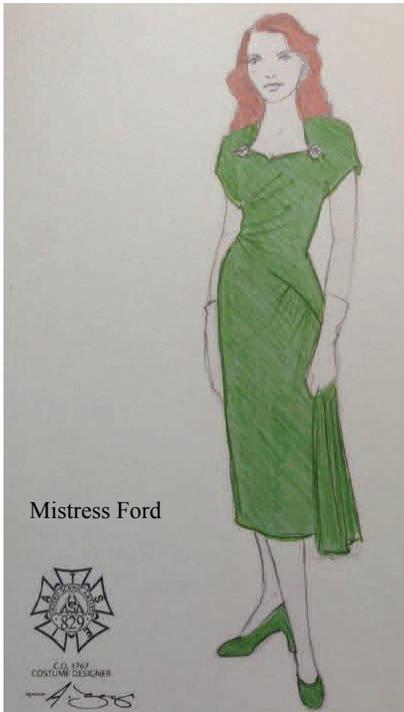


Photos of the model

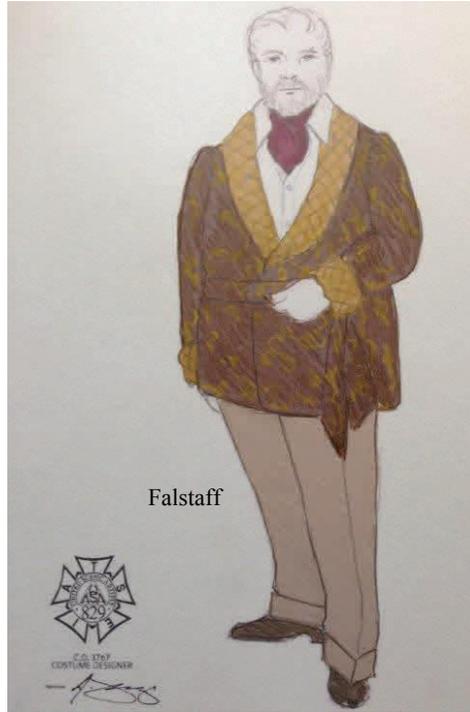


PRELIMINARY COSTUME DESIGN & RESEARCH

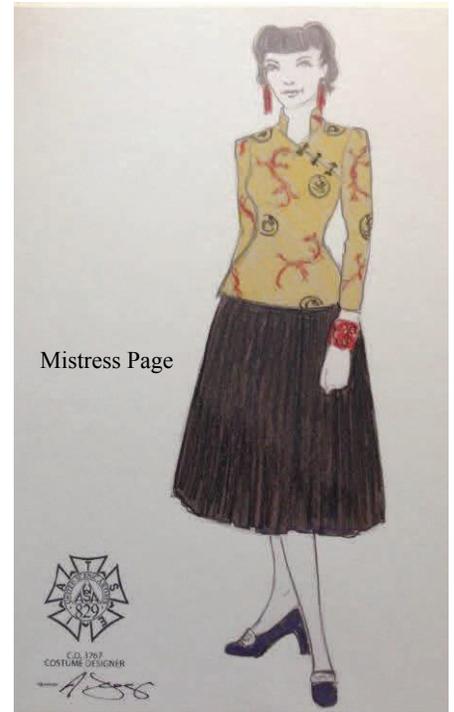
BY ALEX JAEGER



Mistress Ford



Falstaff

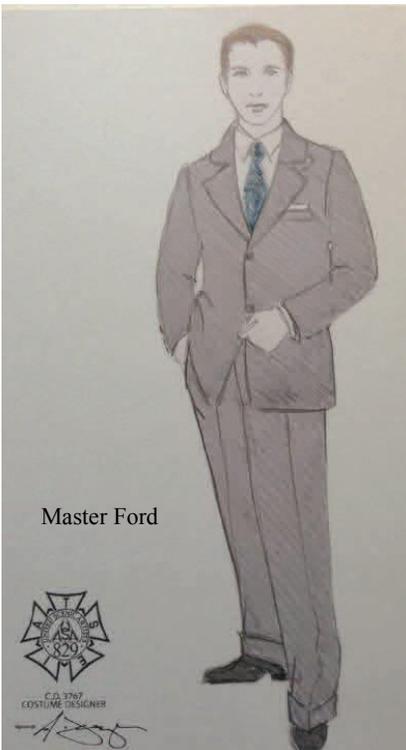


Mistress Page

Mistress Ford



Mistress Page

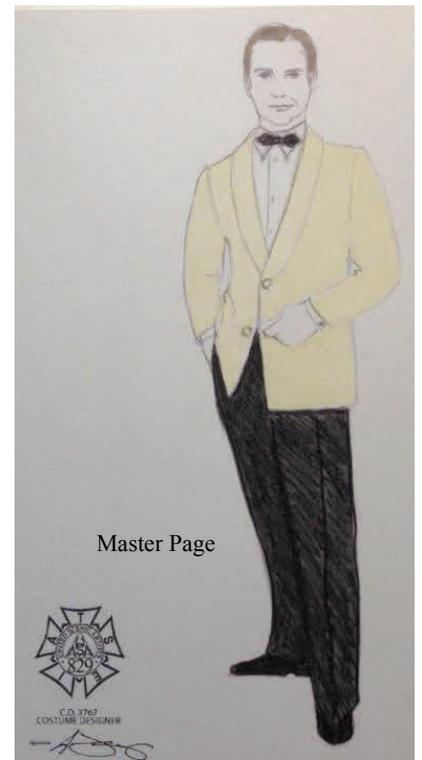


Master Ford

Master Ford as Master Brooke



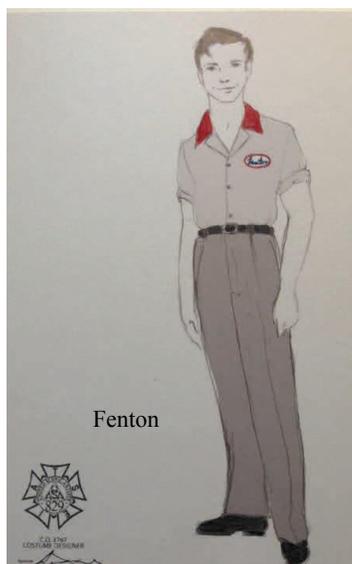
Falstaff



Master Page



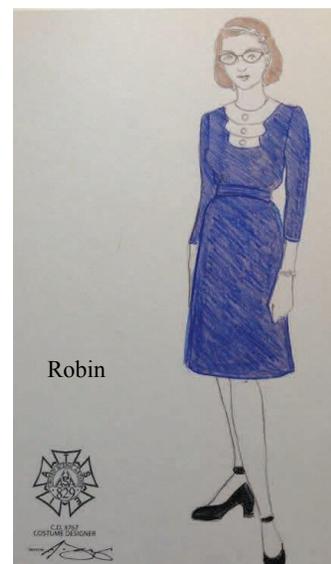
Anne Page



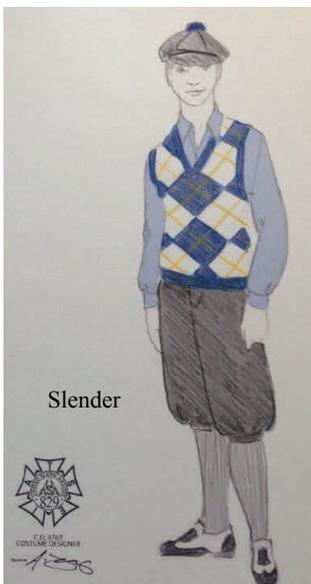
Fenton



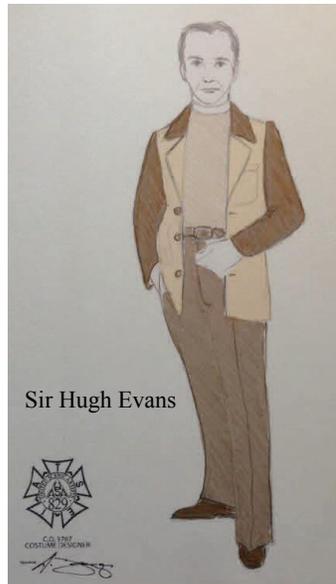
Mistress Quickly



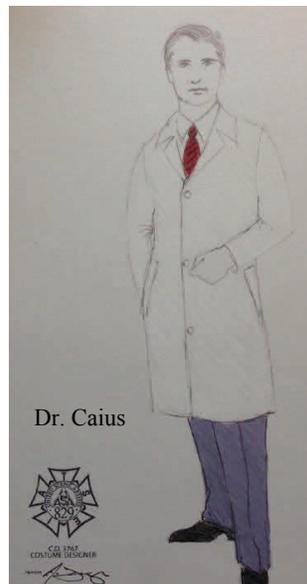
Robin



Slender



Sir Hugh Evans



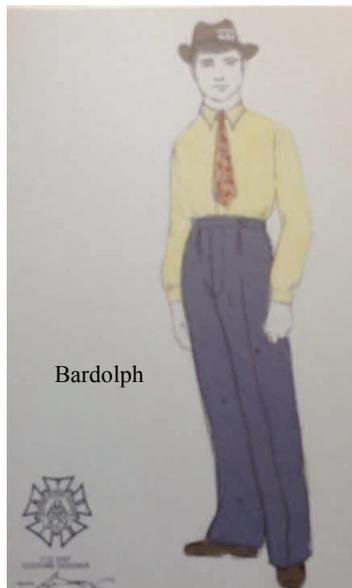
Dr. Caius



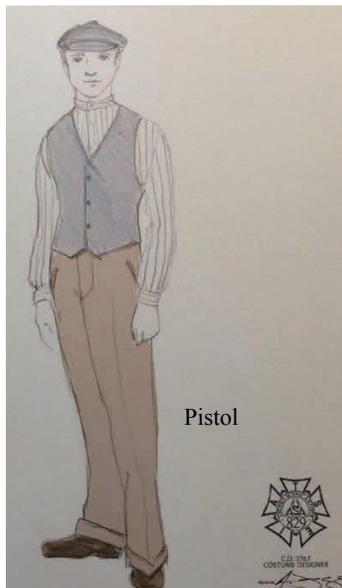
Justice Shallow



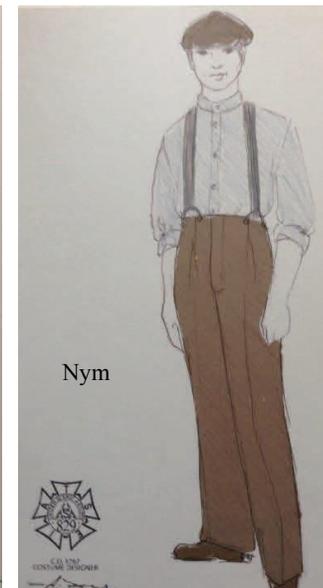
Host



Bardolph



Pistol



Nym

SCENIC ELEMENTS & PROPS CONSTRUCTION



Creation of the Garter sign.



Properties Master Terry Martin working on the projector.



Thomas Janzen works on the top of the magician's box.





Working on the Garter marquee.



Creating non-edible treats with Styrofoam and spray caulk.



Period-correct movie house candy.



IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL'S PRODUCTION OF *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*, NOW PLAYING AT GLT'S HANNA THEATRE





Page 14, clockwise from top left: Jodi Dominick & Laura Welsh Berg; Alex Syiek, Brandyn Day, Aled Davies, Stephen Mitchell Brown and Katie Proulx; Laura Berg & Aled Davies,; the company; Tom Ford & Kyle Jean Baptiste. Page 15, clockwise from top left: Tom Ford, M.A. Taylor, Brian Sutherland & Ian Gould; Aled Davies; Sam Wolf & Tracee Patterson; Aled Davies; Jodi Dominick, Aled Davies & Laura Welsh Berg; Lynn Robert Berg & Ian Gould. (Photo Credit: DKM Photography)

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF



Eduard von Grützner: *Falstaff mit großer Weinkanne und Becher* (1896) (Falstaff with big wine jar and cup, 1896)

Falstaff – physically huge, stunningly amoral, and outrageously funny – is generally regarded as one of the greatest characters in English literature. Lecherous, gluttonous, obese, cowardly, and a thief, he lies to the world but is honest with himself. His monumental presence, both literal and metaphoric, dominates the plays in which he appears, and he has become one of the most familiar of Shakespeare’s creations, having inspired work ranging to pub signs and ceramic mugs to operas and symphonic works.

The Merry Wives of Windsor was written before *Henry V*, probably during the creation of *2 Henry IV*, and here Falstaff is a less complex figure than the giant of the *Henry IV* plays. His function is more purely comic and stands at the center of the play rather than in contrast to the realities of history. He is more nearly a traditional character type, the comic villain whose downfall is obvious from the outset. He is also associated with another type, the foolish and boastful would-be lady’s man, although in attempting to seduce the wives to get at their husband’s money, Falstaff is not erotically inclined. However, he is thereby linked with the theme of the jealous husband, and the sexual side of his story links him with the subplots centered on the courting of Anne Page.

This aspect of the character is particularly evident in Falstaff’s apologetic confession following his final humiliation – often seen, in its “un-Falstaffian” quality of a lost source play. However, in the masquelike finale, where none of the characters represent their ordinary characteristics, symbolic expression is given to the play’s implicit moral – the triumph of domesticity. Here, then, Falstaff makes the formal surrender that his status as a traditional comic butt requires.

In this respect, Falstaff has been seen as a representation of an ancient fertility spirit in a tradition that in the playwright’s time was still alive in remote regions of Britain and was still generally understood. As such, his figurative role was that of the sacrificial victim punished for the sins of society in ancient religious practices. This image need not be taken literally to see that the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives* is identified with the common human foibles.



Falstaff and Mistress Quickly from The Merry Wives of Windsor, Francis Philip Stephanoff, circa 1840

Indeed, Falstaff has the same function in the *Henry IV* plays as well. He moves us, in a way that Hal or Hotspur or Anne Page cannot, because, like him, we all often feel irresponsible, dishonest, selfish inclinations. We know that Falstaff is part of us, like it or not. In the *Henry V* plays he represents a childish, self-centered universe of pleasure that adults are doomed to leave and that is defeated by a harsh and demanding political ideal, insistent on duty and order. In *The Merry Wives* Falstaff is again opposed by a triumphant principle, in this case the world of domestic security. In both cases, he embodies the need of each of us to rebel against the constraints of society and thus find our individual potential, and his defeat symbolizes the need to sublimate that rebellion in light of our innate dependence on each other.

— Charles Boyce, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Shakespeare*

LADY SHAKESPEARE’S LIFE LESSONS

“ ...this is not a play about love. It is a play about shame, and Falstaff reaps plenty of it.

”

By Lady Shakespeare



Lady Shakespeare, also known as Betsy Shevey, has been Great Lakes Theater’s professional development keynote speaker and featured educational scholar for over ten years.

WHAT IS HONOR? Notes on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

By Betsy Shevey

“Death is not due yet; I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with HIM that calls not on me? Well, ’tis no matter; HONOR pricks me on. Yea, but how if HONOR prick me off when I come on? How then? Can HONOR set to a leg? No: or an arm? No: or take away the grief of a wound? No. HONOR hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is HONOR? a word. What is in that word HONOR? What is HONOR? AIR! A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died on Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. ‘Tis insensible, then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I’ll none of it. HONOR is a mere gravestone: and so ends my catechism.” Falstaff, *Henry IV, Part 1*

Shame. *A person who fails to live up to the group’s code loses his honor — his right to the respect of the other honor group members as equals. A healthy feeling of shame, or the recognition that a person has failed to live up to the honor group’s code is necessary for honor to exist. When individuals stop caring whether they’ve lost their right to respect in the group (i.e. living without shame), honor loses its power to compel and check individuals’ behavior. While honor is universal to both men and women, its standards have historically been gendered. While codes of honor have varied across time and cultures, in its most primitive form, honor has meant chastity for women and courage for men.*

— The Art of Manliness, www.artofmanliness.com

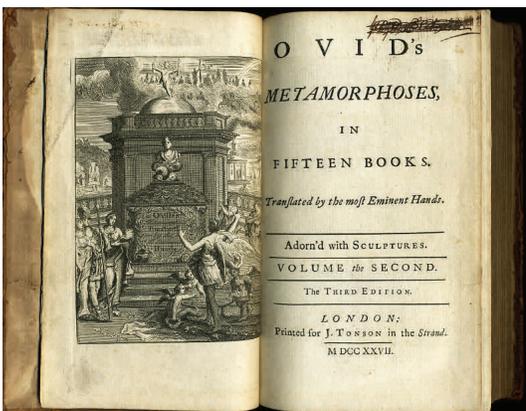
The Merry Wives of Windsor is often considered one of Shakespeare’s lesser plays. And indeed, it is not one of his “signature pieces.” That is to



Commedia dell'Arte Stock Characters



El Dia de los Muertos photograph by Denis Defibaugh from his book *The Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos*



Second Volume of a 1727 edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*



Illustration of Herne the Hunter by George Cruikshank

say, it lacks many of the elements that we have come to expect in Shakespeare's greatest plays. The most significant of these is poetry. *Merry Wives* is written practically totally in prose. Moreover, not only is it written in prose, but many of the characters like Dr. Caius the Frenchman, Sir Evans the Welsh Parson as well as Shallow and Simple, Mistress Quickly, and Falstaff's followers, Bardolph, Pistol and Nim all but butcher the Queen's English.

However, each character speaks in his or her own language that describes and defines who he/she is. For this reason, the comedy is more like Commedia dell'Arte than one of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. That is to say; the characters rely more on "type" than on individuality. Dr. Caius and Justice Shallow are the "types" we find in Commedia dell'Arte, the old "pantalones" who are in love with the young girl. The only couple who are reminiscent of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, Anne Page and Fenton, the lovers, we see very little of, and in fact, they could be visiting from another play.

So the play is really about Falstaff and the difference between Honor and Shame, reflecting the two quotes with which I open this essay. In *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, Falstaff serves as the Lord of Misrule, leading Prince Hal astray from his responsibilities as Prince into a life of drink and debauchery and disguise. In the carnivals and festivities of Shakespeare's times, celebrations, transformation and disguises were extremely important. It is like El Dia de los Muertos which is All Soul's Day in Mexico where partying while wearing masks of the dead honor the living and serve as charms to ward off and placate death. So in the carnivals of the Elizabethan age, the crowning of the Lord of Misrule, allowed reason and rule to predominate freely for the rest of the year. We see this philosophy in modern pop psychology, where we are advised to recognize and accept our "shadow side" so we do not live a life of depression or addiction that comes from ignoring and dismissing our shadow. The trick is to transform the shadow.

As in all Shakespeare comedies, derived from the Elizabethan festive tradition as well as from Shakespeare's reading and regular use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, disguise is the stand-in for transformation and transformation is the exchange between

gods and man. Remember, as a possible “recusant”; that is, a follower of the Catholic traditions, Shakespeare had to be very neutral in any and all of his religious connotations under Queen Elizabeth and the Anglican Church of England. For this reason, his use of carnival, references to the supernatural such as witches and transformations, as well as references to Greek and Roman gods, was a safe way to implicate religion in his plays, without implicating himself with a particular religious practice.

In *Merry Wives*, we see the carnivalesque transformation of Falstaff into the fat old witch of Brentford: “A witch, a queen, an old cozening queen. We are simple men; we do not know what’s brought to pass under the profession of fortune telling. She works by charms, by spells, by the figure and such daubery as this, beyond our element; we know nothing.” Act II Scene ii.

This is presumably a trick to evade the jealousy of the husbands of Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, both of whom Falstaff is hoping to seduce for money; especially the former. Master Ford, the paranoid husband of Mistress Ford, disguised as Master Brooke, has promised Falstaff a huge purse of gold if he can prove his wife unfaithful. These are the commedia dell’Arte aspects of the play: jealous husbands who serve as foils for the machinations of the “Arlechinno”, the Harlequin or Vice Figure of the play, who pulls all the strings to motivate the farce of the plot. But Falstaff is no Vice Figure in *Merry Wives*, as he was in *Henry IV*, and this goes back to the difference between honor and shame that I note at the beginning of this essay. In *Henry IV*, Falstaff is in control of the forces of chaos and misrule, in *Merry Wives*, they are in control of him. If shame is the opposite of honor; then honor is the subject of *Henry IV* and shame is the subject of *Merry Wives*.

Falstaff’s second transformation is into the ghost of Herne the Hunter who haunts Windsor Forest:

“There is an old tale goes that Herne the Hunter, sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest, Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight, Walk round about an oak, with great ragged horns; And there he blasts the trees, and takes the cattle, And makes cattle yield blood, and shakes a chain in a most hideous and dreadful manner. You have heard of such a spirit, and well you know the superstitious idle headed old received and did deliver to our age this tale of Herne the Hunter for a truth.”

- Act IV, Scene iv.

Here we have the prosaic version of the marvelous bit of magic in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* where Bottom is turned into an ass and he is nursed and nurtured, spoiled and loved by the Queen and all her fairies. Here it is exactly the opposite. Not only is Falstaff adorned with the cuckold’s horns and head of a buck, disguised as Herne the Hunter, but he will not be worshipped, spoiled and adored; not at all. The sons and daughters of the good middle class citizens of Windsor will also disguise themselves as “urchins, fairies and elves” and they will “pinch the unclean knight...and burn him with their tapers...and mock him home to Windsor.” There will be no Bottom’s dream of being beloved as an ass here; what will happen to Falstaff will be all too real and all too humiliating.

And yet, until he is properly pinched and burned and mocked, Falstaff, the former Lord of Misrule, still thinks he has the same power over his world that he had in *Henry IV*. In a speech that could be taken straight from

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he still thinks he is a god.

“Now the hot blooded gods assist me. Remember Jove, thou was a bull for thy Europa. Love set on thy horns. O powerful love that in some respect makes a beast a man, in some other man, a beast! You were also Jupiter, a swan for the love of Leda. O omnipotent love, how near the god drew to the complexion of a goose. A fault done first in the form of a beast...and then another fault in the semblance of a fowl...Jove a foul fault. When gods have hot backs what shall poor men do?”

- Act V, Scene iii

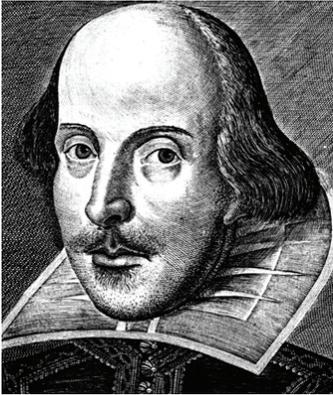
Here we see that even in his most base situation, Falstaff still sees himself as Jove falling in love with Leda, disguising/transforming into a swan or into a bull, ravishing Europa.

What gives Falstaff this illusion? Now I return again to the difference between honor and shame. Falstaff's famous “honor” speech which I have quoted above, has to do with “external” forces. It raises real questions, which gives Falstaff real power in the earlier plays. How are external conflicts resolved with honor? Is it always with war? Is that true of the ongoing Israeli and Palestinian conflict for example or would peace there be the more honorable course? These questions about “honor” can be asked about any external conflict between countries and kingdoms and governments. What are the best ways to solve these conflicts? In saving honor, must we lose lives? Falstaff's power in this quotation can still be felt today.

Shame on the other hand, as evidenced in the second quote, is different. Shame comes from an internal conflict. Here, in *Merry Wives*, Falstaff is intent on shame. He wants to shame the wives and betray their husbands. He is not in love. He makes that clear. Except for Anne Page and Fenton, minor characters, as I've said, this is not a play about love. It is a play about shame, and Falstaff reaps plenty of it; whether it's being dumped into a basket of filthy laundry, the river, being beaten for a witch or burned for a ghost. This is “internal” honor that Shakespeare is talking about here. This is the honor we owe our family, our friends, our teachers, our pastors, our community. In keeping these two types of honor separate, and presenting a “comic” view of shame as the opposite to honor, Shakespeare is actually making a very profound statement in a seemingly slight play. When we confuse the two, when we bully a student, shoot shoppers at a mall, cheat and rob our neighbors, we are trafficking in shame, not honor. When we chose to enter a war, we must consider our honor and what it is worth in terms of human lives, extremely carefully. These are the life lessons of the larger than life, Lord of Misrule, Sir John Falstaff.

Betsy Shevey has been producing, directing and teaching theater for over thirty years. She has chaired theater programs at Bennington College, Goodman Theater, NYU and was the producing director of CAPPS, Lehman Center, Lighthouse Theater, Performing Arts Foundation, Stage South and Teatro Latino.

ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



William Shakespeare (1564-1616), English playwright and poet, is recognized in much of the world as the greatest of all dramatists. Shakespeare's plays communicate a profound knowledge of the wellsprings of human behavior, revealed through portrayals of a wide variety of characters. His use of poetic and dramatic means to create a unified aesthetic effect out of a multiplicity of vocal expressions and actions is recognized as a singular achievement, and his use of poetry within his plays to express the deepest levels of human motivation in individual, social, and universal situations is considered one of the greatest accomplishments in literary history.

A complete, authoritative account of Shakespeare's life is lacking, and thus much supposition surrounds relatively few facts. It is commonly accepted that he was born in 1564, and it is known that he was baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. The third of eight children, he was probably educated at the local grammar school. As the eldest son, Shakespeare ordinarily would have been apprenticed to his father's shop so that he could learn and eventually take over the business, but according to one account he was apprenticed to a butcher because of declines in his father's financial situation. According to another account, he became a schoolmaster. In 1582 Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. He is supposed to have left Stratford after he was caught poaching in the deer park of Sir Thomas Lucy, a local justice of the peace. Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway had a daughter, Susanna, in 1583 and twins—Hamnet and Judith—in 1585. Hamnet did not survive childhood.

Shakespeare apparently arrived in London about 1588 and by 1592 had attained success as an actor and a playwright. Shortly thereafter he secured the patronage of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton. The publication of Shakespeare's two fashionably erotic narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and of his *Sonnets* (published 1609, but circulated previously in manuscript form) established his reputation as a gifted and popular poet of the Renaissance (14th century to 17th century). The *Sonnets* describe the devotion of a character, often identified as the poet himself, to a young man whose beauty and virtue he praises and to a mysterious and faithless dark lady with whom the poet is infatuated. The ensuing triangular situation, resulting from the attraction of the poet's friend to the dark lady, is treated with passionate intensity and psychological insight. Shakespeare's modern reputation, however, is based primarily on the 38 plays that he apparently wrote, modified, or collaborated on. Although generally popular in his time, these plays were frequently little esteemed by his educated contemporaries, who considered English plays of their own day to be only vulgar entertainment.

Shakespeare's professional life in London was marked by a number of financially advantageous arrangements that permitted him to share in the profits of his acting company, the Chamberlain's Men, later called the King's Men, and its two theaters, the Globe Theatre and the Blackfriars. His plays were given special presentation at the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James more frequently than those of any other contemporary dramatist. It is known that he risked losing royal favor only once, in 1599, when his company performed "the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard II" at the request of a group of conspirators against Elizabeth. In the subsequent inquiry, Shakespeare's company was absolved of complicity in the conspiracy.

After about 1608, Shakespeare's dramatic production lessened and it seems that he spent more time in Stratford, where he had established his family in an imposing house called New Place and had become a leading local citizen. He died in 1616, and was buried in the Stratford church.

Until the 18th century, Shakespeare was generally thought to have been no more than a rough and untutored genius. Theories were advanced that his plays had actually been written by someone more educated, perhaps statesman and philosopher Sir Francis Bacon or the Earl of Southampton, who was Shakespeare's patron. However, he was celebrated in his own time by English writer Ben Johnson and others who saw in him a brilliance that would endure. Since the 19th century, Shakespeare's achievements have been more consistently recognized, and throughout the Western world he has come to be regarded as the greatest dramatist ever.

Shakespeare, William, Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001

Contributed By: A. Kent Hieatt, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of English, University of Western Ontario. Author of *Chaucer, Spenser, Milton: Mythopoetic Continuities and Transformations*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What are the first thoughts and/or images that come to mind when you hear “Shakespeare.” Why do you think that his plays continue to be read and produced almost 400 years after his death? What makes his work relevant to a modern audience? What — if anything — prevents contemporary productions from being fully accessible? Be honest, what are some of your expectations about seeing Great Lake Theater's production of *Merry Wives of Windsor*?
2. Director, Tracy Young, has set GLT's current production in Windsor, Wisconsin in 1947 and has incorporated contemporary references in the script and peppered Shakespeare's original text with pop culture phrases that better serve her vision. She has changed the “Garter” saloon into a movie theater and has infused the entire production with the “feel” of Hollywood's golden age with a nod to the early television genius of Lucille Ball. Do you think that classic theater pieces, especially the masterworks of Shakespeare, need reinterpretation? Why? How do you think Shakespeare would feel about his works being adapted and altered in such a manner?
3. What “classic” Hollywood movies and/or actors and actresses come to mind when you think of this era in American film? What, in your opinion, makes them worth watching? What do they teach us about American culture – about who we were and how we lived? What, in particular, do the films and TV shows of the late 40s and early 50s say about the roles and societal expectations of women? Why do you think Tracy Young chose to set *Merry Wives of Windsor* in this period of history?
4. What makes a great comedy? Think of some of your favorite movies and TV shows...what moments of physical comedy never fail to make you laugh? What is it about a pratfall or an unexpected bash on the head or a predictable spit take or great food fight that adds hilarity to the moment? Who are the best physically comical actors/actresses in film and TV? What makes them so funny?
5. Although the play is truly a vehicle for one of the Bard's most beloved characters, Sir John Falstaff, Shakespeare honors the women of the play with his title — *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. What role does gender play in our understanding and appreciation of comedy? What can women comics get away with that are seemingly taboo for male comedians and visa versa? What accounts for the different standards? Can you think of a comedienne who breaks the mold? What makes her work unique and original? Who are the great comic duos, both male and female? What is it about their pairing that enriches the comedic experience?
6. What makes you laugh? Who is the funniest person you know? What makes them funny?
7. What is your favorite comedy? What draws you in, character, situation, physical antics or dialogue? What is the difference between wit, satire and farce?
8. In what way is social satire funny? When issues are presented in a comical or exaggerated way, do they land differently? Why? In what way does current social and political satire like the comedy sketches on SNL or the “news casts” of John Stewart and Stephen Colbert influence the way you think about a social issue or a politician? To what extent — if any — does the satire bring about positive changes? Give

examples.

9. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* features one of Shakespeare's greatest comic characters, Sir John Falstaff. Falstaff is paradoxical in nature – both jolly and full of melancholy, both a sage and a dupe, both honest and deceitful, as well larger than life. What current comic characters in TV or film are near iconic? What makes these characters both transcendent and current?
10. Who, in your world, plays the role of the clown? What attributes do they possess?
11. What is a malapropism? Can you think of an example where someone misused a phrase or word to comic effect? Please share. What makes malapropisms humorous? Have you ever unknowingly misused a word or phrase that resulted in laughter and/or embarrassment? How did it make you feel?
12. What makes pranks so innately funny? What is the allure of programs like *Candid Camera* and *Punked*? What is the greatest prank you ever pulled off? Have you ever been on the receiving end of a prank or the butt of a joke? How did it make you feel? In what ways can a prank teach a lesson? What happens when a joke or prank goes too far? What is the difference between a prank and bullying?
13. What do you believe is the purpose of comedy? How does it differ from tragedy? In your opinion, what is the purpose of art in general? What do you hope to experience and/or learn watching GLT's current production? In what ways does art imitate life and comment on society? Does art reflect nature or does nature reflect art? Discuss.
14. What do you imagine it takes to produce a successful production of a classic comedy, the scope of *Merry Wives of Windsor*? Do you believe that producing Shakespeare requires a different skill set from the actors, than a contemporary piece? What skills are required? What does it take for you to personally to lose yourself in the story and journey of the characters? Is this type of transcendence more difficult at a live performance? Why? How does the experience of witnessing live performance differ from going to the movie, renting a DVD, or sitting in front of the TV?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

THE ART OF DECEPTION

In homage to the comic and outlandish cleverness witnessed in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, have your students engage in the following exercises:

1. Talking your way out of any situation..

Have the class come up with a common “domestic” situations that *IF* were true, they *MIGHT* need to come up with an excuse to relieve themselves of responsibility.

Examples:

- explaining a missed homework assignment to your teacher...
- confronting your parent after staying out past curfew...
- getting caught in a compromising position (a kiss or embrace) with a member of the opposite sex by your mom or dad...
- defending a fender bender (your fault)...
- ruining a friend’s favorite article of clothing that you borrowed and now have to return
- trying to get out of date ...

As with a “story circle” in which each member of circle builds on the creation of a collective tale, have your students sit in a circle and build on a collective deception, adding details and/or topping each excuse as the cover up expands becoming more and more complicated and outrageous.

After the class has engaged in the creation of the various deceptions/excuses, discuss any comic elements that might have arisen from the exercise.

- Why is deception of any kind "funny?"
- What does it feel like to tell a fib to get out of a social or domestic situation?
- Is it important to recognize human behavior in order for something to be comical?
- Think of your favorite situation comedies on TV, and as a class come up with a few examples where a character's deception serves as the major plot device.

2. The white elephant in the room

One of the great comic moments in the play is when Mistress Ford tries to hide Falstaff’s presence from her husband, in either the trash car or through disguise. Divide the class in groups of three and have each group create an improvised scene in which they need to “hide” a character’s presence. Encourage creativity...let the situation and environment dictate the action. Groups may use props if needed.

Student “A” hiding student “B” from student “C” because....

Make sure that each group gives each player a specific role/character and that each “character” is invested in both the situation and outcome.

Examples:

-
- Student A (daughter/son) hiding Student B (boyfriend/girl friend) from Student C (A’s mom/dad) who comes into their bedroom to tuck them in.
 - Student A (student) hiding Student B (their math tutor) from Student C (distracted math teacher) who returns to classroom to proctor a make-up test.
 - Student A (guy/girl) hiding Student B (his/her prom date) from Student C (his/her second prom date) because he/she double booked prom.
 - Student A (mom/dad) hiding Student B (lover – not husband/wife) from Student C (young son/daughter) who comes home early from ballet rehearsal or little league practice.

Have each group share their improvisations. What, if any, moments of physical comedy developed from the need to hide and cover-up? What tactics were used to “not be seen?” In what ways desperation lead to absurdity? What is the most ridiculous thing you have ever done to avoid getting caught doing something (or being with someone) that was bound to get you in trouble?

LEARN MORE AND EXPLORE!

Orson Wells as Falstaff in *Chimes at Midnight*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf6fxz1mI6g>

Orson Welles on the *Dean Martin Show* (A must-see. Welles *becomes* Falstaff on stage!)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJ6v7GHYDbM>

Orson Wells on the *Dean Martin Show* (Welles does a monologue from *The Merchant of Venice*)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59sNCF80C70>

SHAKESPEAREAN INSULTS

Give students this list of Shakespearean words. (You might want to cut it up and just give a few to each student.) Have them stand in a circle and take turns hurling insults — in as an insulting a voice as possible, complete with gestures!

Combine one word from each of the three columns below, prefaced with “Thou.”

Column 1

artless
bawdy
beslubbering
bootless
churlish
cockered
clouted
craven
currish
dankish
dissembling
droning
errant
fawning
fobbing
froward
frothy
gleeking
goatish
gorbellied
impertinent
infectious
jarring
loggerheaded
lumpish
mammering
mangled
mewling

Column 2

base-court
bat-fowling
beef-witted
beetle-headed
boil-brained
clapper-clawed
clay-brained
common-kissing
crook-pated
dismal-dreaming
dizzy-eyed
doghearted
dread-bolted
earth-vexing
elf-skinned
fat-kidneyed
fen-sucked
flap-mouthed
fly-bitten
folly-fallen
fool-born
full-gorged
guts-gripping
half-faced
hasty-witted
hedge-born
hell-hated
idle-headed

Column 3

apple-john
baggage
barnacle
bladder
boar-pig
bugbear
bum-bailey
canker-blossom
clack-dish
clotpole
coxcomb
codpiece
death-token
dewberry
flap-dragon
flax-wench
flirt-gill
foot-licker
fustilarian
giglet
gudgeon
haggard
harpy
hedge-pig
horn-beast
hugger-mugger
joithead
lewdster

paunchy	ill-breeding	lout
pribbling	ill-nurtured	maggot-pie
puking	knotty-pated	malt-worm
puny	milk-livered	mammet
qualling	motley-minded	measle
rank	onion-eyed	minnow
reeky	plume-plucked	miscreant
roguish	pottle-deep	moldwarp
ruttish	pox-marked	mumble-news
saucy	reeling-ripe	nut-hook
spleeny	rough-hewn	pigeon-egg
spongy	rude-growing	pignut
surly	rump-fed	puttock
tottering	shard-borne	pumpion
unmuzzled	sheep-biting	ratsbane
vain	spur-galled	scut
venomed	swag-bellied	skainsmate
villainous	tardy-gaited	strumpet
warped	tickle-brained	varlot
wayward	toad-spotted	vassal
weedy	unchin-snouted	whey-face
yeasty	weather-bitten	wagtail
cullionly	whoreson	knave
fusty	malmsey-nosed	blind-worm
caluminous	rampallian	popinjay
wimpled	lily-livered	scullian
burly-boned	scurvy-valiant	jolt-head
misbegotten	brazen-faced	malcontent
odiferous	unwash'd	devil-monk
poisonous	bunch-back'd	toad
fishified	leaden-footed	rascal
Wart-necked	muddy-mettled	Basket-Cockle

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

One of the reasons that Shakespeare continues to be produced is that his plays examine the fullness of the human condition. Themes of love, revenge, greed and mistaken identity are universal. Many of the circumstances in his plays deal with powerful feelings and emotions. The idea of meeting your soul mate and experiencing "love at first sight" is the stuff that poems and songs are made of because the feeling is so huge that ordinary words can not possibly express the fullness of emotion. Have your students find a partner and with the following text have them try to illuminate the sense of falling in love at first sight. All of the feelings, the character wants and needs must lie beneath the surface - the feeling and subsequent desires are the "subtext." Make sure that each set determine who and where they are (i.e. two 6th graders at their first Middle School dance, or an elderly woman and gentleman who spot each other over the frozen food section at the grocery store...)

A: Hello

B: Hello

A: Nice Day

B: Yes

A: Are you?

B: No

A: Oh

B: But

A: What?

B: I

A: Me too

B: Really?

A: Yes

B: Oh

West Side Story, Act 1, Scene V

TONY: You're not thinking I'm someone else?

MARIE: I know you are not.

TONY: Or that we have met before?

MARIA: I know we have not.

TONY: I felt, I know something-never-before was going to happen, had to happen. But this is—

MARIA: *(Interrupting)* My hands are cold. *(He takes them in his.)* Yours, too. *(He moves her hands to his face.)* So warm. *(She moves his hands to her face.)*

TONY: Yours, too.

MARIA: But of course. They are the same.

TONY: It's so much to believe – you're not joking me?

MARIA: I have not yet learned how to joke that way. I think now I never will.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

When Falstaff first arrives in Windsor, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford perceive that he is a war hero. The following exercise examines how we are perceived by those who know us, and those who assume they know us. Have students stand in a circle and allow each of them to take in their classmates. As they look around the circle ask them to examine what they perceive about their fellow classmates (this process is non-verbal!!). Tell the students that you will be reading from a list of activities and/or personality traits. Once a trait or activity has been announced, everyone in the circle should select a person with whom they instinctively associate with that quality or action. They must find a way to physically connect themselves to that person. Once again this is a silent exercise. After each citation and group shift, ask the following questions: Note who you are connected to, note who is connected to you, note where the source of the group power lies, note the shift in the group dynamic. Have the students return to their place in the circle and repeat. You may use the following questions or come up with your own.

The person you would want to or trust to:

study for a math test with	be your chemistry lab partner
swing on the swings	give advice on love
bake you a special birthday cake	cover for you
talk to on the phone	invite to a wild, all-night bash
share a secret	stop a fight from getting out of hand
keep a secret	introduce to your parents
protect you	be a faculty representative
go to a movie at Cedar Lee	go to for fashion advice
go shopping at Nordstroms	kick around a soccer ball
write you a poem	invite to a formal gathering
help with your final research paper	babysit your newborn brother or sister
cheer on the Indians	date your younger brother/sister
go for a walk in the park	represent you at a college interview
fly to the moon	hang out with
seek revenge	hang out and philosophize about life
fix a flat tire	start a riot
write your speech	drive you home in a blizzard

Make sure the list is somewhat lengthy and covers a variety of topics so that students are moving quickly from one dynamic to the next. Encourage them to make eye contact as they are passing through the circle and encourage them to follow their gut impulses. This is not something that anyone should over-think, as it is based on perceptions and general impressions. After the exercise have students sit in the circle and process what they discovered about themselves and their classmates.

Does the overall perception everyone receives and/or acknowledge match a true sense of who you are? Do perceptions and impressions vary based on the group and circumstance? Have you ever been falsely judged based on a first impression? What does that feel like? What does it take for you to be truly known?

HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

— *David Hansen, Education Outreach Associate*

A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

"Gambit": More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/WRITING PROMPTS:

AFTER ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What were your favorite aspects of this production? How did the visual elements — the set, costume and lighting design — aid in the telling of this classic work? How were the characters personality displayed through costume? What actor do you believe had the most fully realized characterization? What was it about it about his or her performance that drew you in? What moment was the most memorable? Why?
2. Track each character's transformation from the beginning to the end of the play. What discoveries are made by the characters? Which character, if any, do you think grows the most? Why? How is that growth manifested in performance? Which character did you most relate to or identify with? Why?
3. What moment in Great Lakes current production stood out? Why? How did the director/adapter's choice to set the production in the 1940's aid in your overall enjoyment and Shakespeare's original intent. Discuss.
4. What was your first impression of Sir John Falstaff? Why do you think that he is one of Shakespeare's most beloved comic characters? In what ways did the current production's take of Falstaff as a fading Hollywood icon add to the fullness of his portrayal? What did you aspect of his persona did you find most appealing? Did you feel ever feel sorry for him? Why? Did Falstaff get his just dessert?
5. What makes the wives of Windsor so "merry?" What limitations and freedoms are the wives given? In this play, how do the women differ from the men? In what way does the chosen time period showcase the delicate balance of power and autonomy that was afforded to women right after World War II? In what way may your understanding of the role of women been altered had the production been set in Shakespeare's time? What about Cleveland in 2014?
6. Do you feel that Mistress Page and Mistress Ford's antics to teach Falstaff a lesson are warranted? How would the story have changed if they let their husbands in on their comedic attempts to make amends? What might you have done if you and your best friend received identical propositions from a "would be suitor?" What is the perfect pay back for a "playa" who gets caught?
7. In your experience, what are the qualities of a good love letter? In what ways does Falstaff's missives to Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, *letter for letter but the name of Page and Ford differs*, miss the mark? He begins his plea somewhat indelicately:

'Ask me no reason why I love you. You are not young, no more am I; go to then, there's sympathy: you are merry, so am I; ha ha! Then there's more sympathy: you love to drink, and so do I; would you desire better sympathy?

What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of a back handed compliment? How do you imagine the wives would have received Falstaff's invitation individually had Nym and Pistol simply delivered the letters and not betrayed their master's trust?

8. Both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are dumb struck by the audacity of Falstaff's indelicate proposition and have a few choice word in describing Falstaff, including:

MISTRESS PAGE:
*What unweighed behavior hath this **chunky drunkard** picked out of my conversation*

that he dares in this manner appraise me?

And

MISTRESS FORD:

*What tempest, I trow, threw this **whale, with so many tons of oil in his belly**, ashore at Windsor?*

What, do you suppose, gives Falstaff the nerve to approach not one but two married women in such a bold manner? In what ways, if any, does Falstaff display a false sense of importance and self knowledge? Have you ever met someone who had little or no idea how idea of who they were or how they were perceived by others, especially the opposite sex? What does it feel like when someone misconstrues your actions or intentions? How do you know when someone is flirting with you? Have you ever misread signals or had someone misread yours? How can Falstaff be so clueless?

9. Falstaff does not pursue Mistress Page or Mistress Ford out of lust or love but in hopes of getting money to underwrite his film. In your opinion, what is Falstaff’s driving force in this production? How does his resemblance to the great Orson Welles and the reliving of his Hollywood glory days, activate this purpose and or contribute to the essence of his character?
10. Why do you think Ford is suspicious of his wife and is worried about her “alliance” with Falstaff? How does he differ from Page? Ford states:

What a damned debauched scoundrel is this! My heart is ready to crack with impatience. Who says this is improvident jealousy? My wife hath sent to him; the hour is fixed; the match is made. See the hell of having a false woman! My bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at: and I shall stand under the name of Cuckold! The devil himself has not such a name. Page is an ass, a secure ass: he will trust his wife; he will not be jealous. I will rather trust an Irishman with my whiskey bottle, than my wife with herself.

Do you think some people are naturally more jealous and mistrustful than others? Why? What is truly at stake for Ford? How is it that your reputation and character are suspect when you are the victim of cheating/infidelity? Where do you fall on the jealousy/trust scale? What does it take for you to fully trust someone?

11. Although the accusation is not true, Ford’s hurt, fear and jealousy is very real. What makes even the thought of adultery so hurtful? Is fidelity in a relationship and marriage truly possible? Explain. Why do people betray their lovers? Is it possible to forgive this type of betrayal? How do you move forward if you are beset with doubt?
12. How does hurt, perceived and real, lead to betrayal and deception in the play? What role does hurt and disappointment play in your personal life?
13. What purpose does revenge serve? Revenge and jealousy are such powerful emotions, once fully tapped, can you ever stop the flow? How? Do the schemes and pranks in the play *feel* different because they are comic in nature? How do you know if a prank has gone too far? Is the public humiliation of Falstaff justified? What do you think Falstaff is thinking and feeling during his gala performance that goes so terribly wrong? Did you feel sorry for him? Why? What, if any, lessons were learned and by who?

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14. What are your impressions of the exaggerated characterizations of Dr. Caius, Hugh Evans, Mistress Quickly and Brooks, the disguised Ford? How do their accents add to the hilarity of their antics? What, if any, social commentary is being made by the choice of flaunting heavy French and German accents in Midwest American so soon after the conclusion of World War II?
 15. What role does social class and status play in the production? How does the issue of being an outsider — not from Windsor, Wisconsin — help shape the story? Is there an innate mistrust of people who have different backgrounds and origins? Why?
 16. Who do you believe is the best match for Anne Page? What attributes does her father see in Slender? Why does Dr. Caius Mistress Page’s choice for her daughter? How does Anne know that Fenton is “the one?”
 17. At the end of the play, upon learning of Anne and Fenton’s union, Ford states:
*In love, the stars themselves do guide the state;
Money buys love, but wives are sold by fate*

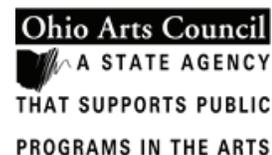
What do you think he means? What role does fate play in love and romance? Does money buy love? Are love and happiness always within our grasp? Is love a choice? Explain.

18. The production concludes with an abundance of laughter and a plethora of newly paired and “re”paired couples: the Ford’s, the Page’s, Dr. Caius and Mistress Quickly, Slender and Pistol, and Simple and Nurse Rigby. How would you characterize the relationships between Shakespeare’s list of would be ‘lovers? What is chemistry? In what ways did the actors portraying these couples demonstrate ‘stage’ chemistry? In what way did their connections, or lack thereof, seem believable? What — if anything — did not ring true?
19. Do you believe that there is a match for everyone? What is required of both parties to form a healthy and happy relationship? What qualities and/or attributes are essential? What is over rated? In what ways, if any, do you believe that the marriages of the Ford’s and Page’s have been altered because of Falstaff’s proposition to the “merry” wives and their subsequent actions?
20. In the end, only Falstaff is left alone. What does his joining or not joining the group say about his character and/or the weight of their final prank? What does it take to be a good sport? What, if anything, has Falstaff learned about himself and his transgressions during the course of the play?

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ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

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