

Shakespeare's Comedies

Three Basic Types of Shakespearean Plays

Tragedy

Comedy

History



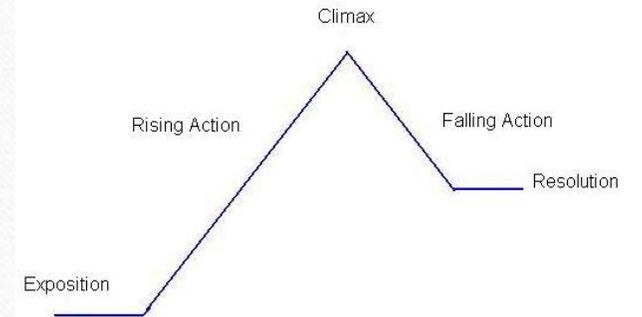
Comedy

- "Comedy", in its Elizabethan usage, had a very different meaning from modern comedy. A Shakespearean comedy is one that has a happy ending, usually involving marriages between the unmarried characters, and a tone and style that is more light-hearted than Shakespeare's other plays.
- A pattern in the comedies is movement to a "green world" – main characters escape the order of a city for a forested and wild setting adjacent to the city.

Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedies

- Shakespearean comedies tend to also include:
 - A greater emphasis on situations than characters
 - A struggle of young lovers to overcome difficulty, often presented by elders
 - Separation and re-unification
 - Deception of characters
 - A clever servant
 - Disputes between characters, often within a family
 - Multiple, intertwining plots

Basic 5 Act Structure



- **Act One:** The conflict and characters are established and the audience takes sides. It gives the rationale and emotional background of the coming action. World in Chaos. **(Exposition)**
- **Act Two:** Suspense builds up as the “good guys” and the “bad guys” make preliminary moves against one another. **(Rising Action)**
- **Act Three:** Things begin to look as if the bad guys are going to win, so the audience is interested to see if they actually do. **(Climax)**
- **Act Four:** The good guys rise up. The act ends at a point where the audience is ready for the final victory, but the play has not quite arrived there. **(Falling Action)**
- **Act Five:** The good guys win and although there could be a twist or turn that is not expected, the win is inevitable. **(Denouement)**

Setting

- Is often set in an imaginary country (ex. Illyria)
- Is similar to a fairy-tale
- Characters are true to life



Characters

- In Shakespeare's comedies female heroines are usually more important than male heroes
- But in Shakespearian time men played all the roles even female ones
- In characters we can see many mistakes and faults

- Shakespeare's comedies are accompanied by music and sometimes actors play music instruments by themselves
 - Songs are often sung by a jester or a fool; parallel the events of the plot.
-



Shakespeare's Comedy

Conventions

Air of Optimism



Festive Endings



Youthful Main Characters



Lack of True Evil



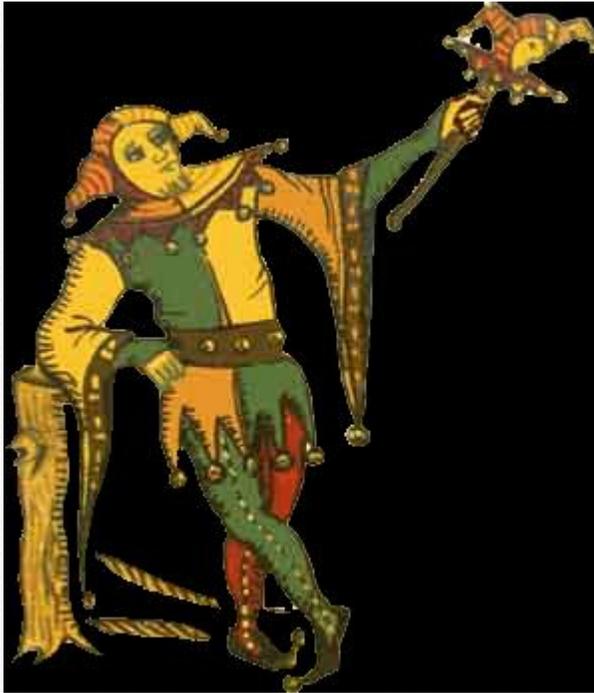
Mistaken Identities/Disguises



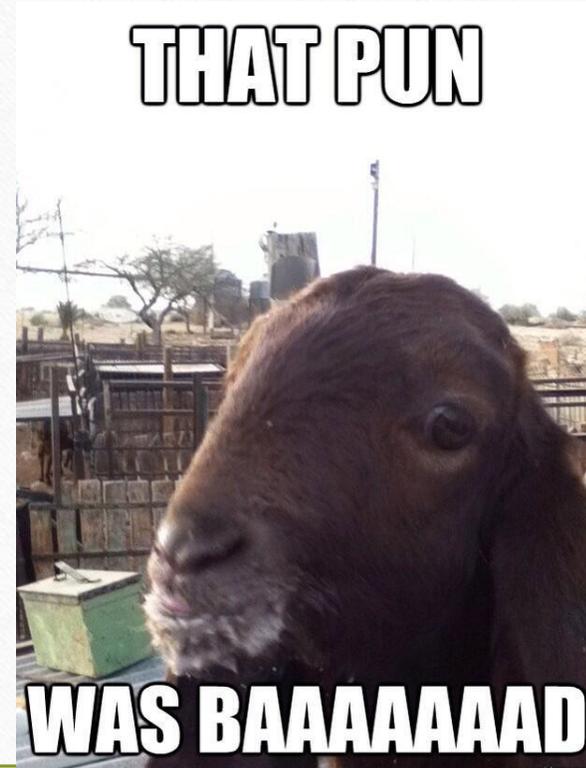
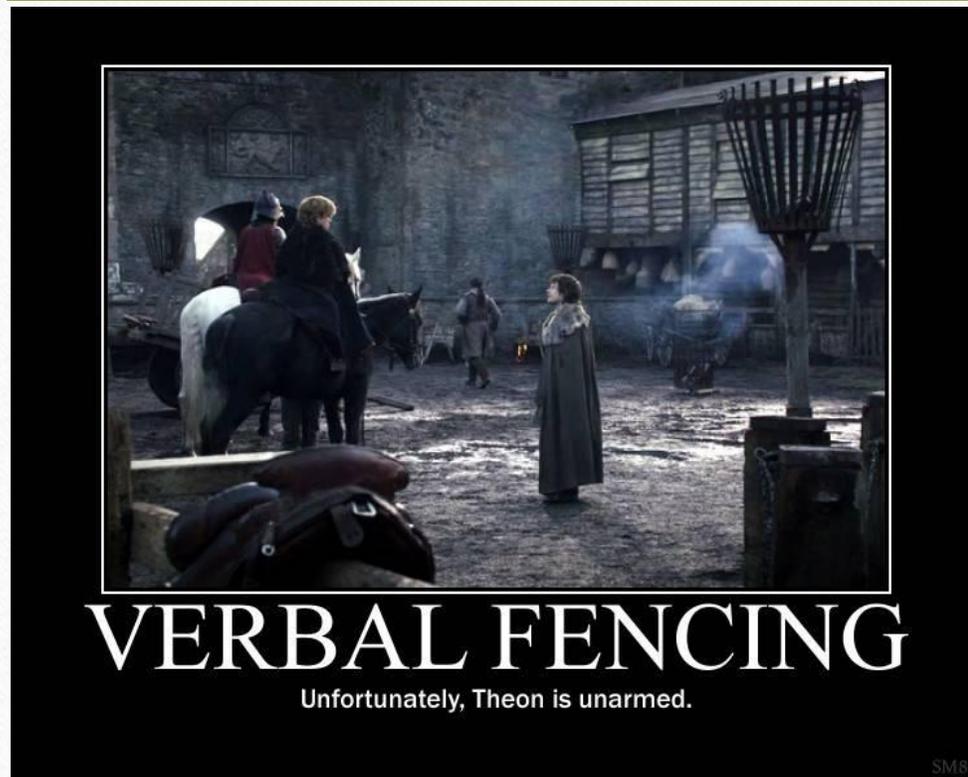
Messengers / Letters



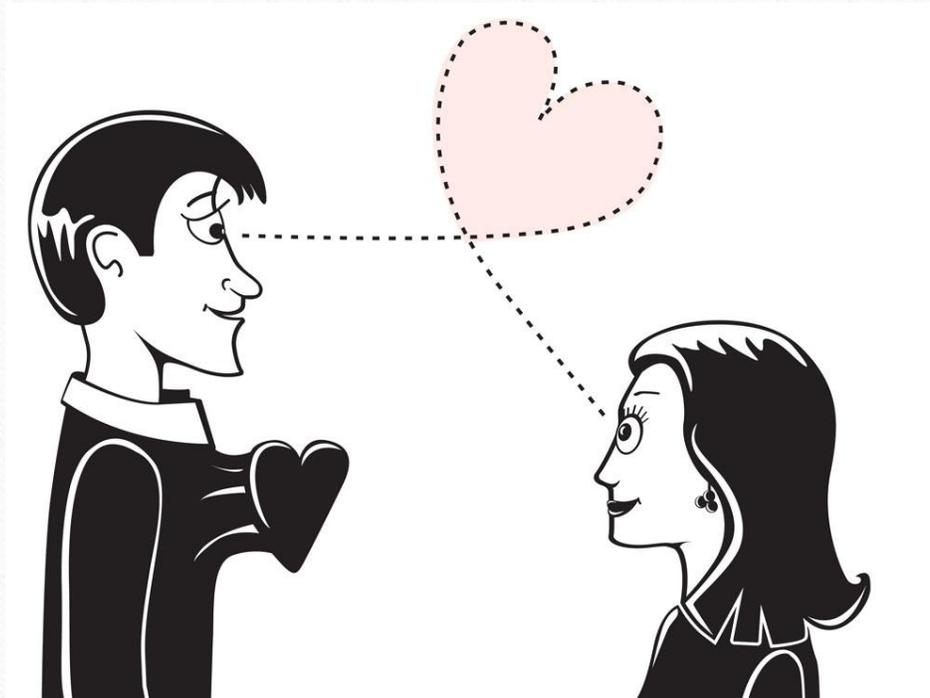
Clowns and Fools



Verbal Fencing/Punning



Love at First Sight



Eavesdropping



Foolish Officials



Upstairs/Downstairs Plots



*Twelfth Night; or,
What You Will*

Twelfth Night

- Performed on February 2, 1602 at the Middle Temple (written possibly as early as 1599); usually dated 1600 or 1601.



Twelfth Night of Christmas

- The Twelfth Night of Christmas is January 6, the Feast of Epiphany (Christian Feast of the Magi).
- In Renaissance times, Twelfth Night was the last day of Christmas revels. **(January 6th)**
- Pagan holiday sometimes labeled as the “feast of fools.”
- The purpose of allowing social roles to be turned upside down was to "channel potentially destructive insubordination into playacting and thereby promote harmony" (Bevington 326).
- Everything is turned upside down. Day of fun, disguises, and pranks.
- Shakespeare probably wrote this play for this celebration. The main character, and others, adopt disguises and things get turned upside down.

Twelfth Night themes

- Masculinity and Femininity
- Nature of love (unrequited), of wooing
- Grief
- Loyalty
- Revenge
- Puritanism: no fun, no drink, no song