



The Tragicall Historie of  
**H A M L E T**  
Prince of Denmarke.

*Enter two Centinels. { now call'd Barnardo  
{ Francisco —*

1. **S**Tand: who is that?

2. **S**T is I.

1. O you come most carefully vpon your watch,

2. And if you meete *Marcellus* and *Horatio*,

The partners of my watch, bid them make haste.

1. I will: See who goes there.

*Enter Horatio and Marcellus.*

*Hor.* Friends to this ground.

*Mar.* And leegemen to the Dane,

all honest souldier, who hath releued you?

He hath my place, giue you good night.

*Barnardo.*

Horatio there?

Of him.

*Horatio,* welcome good *Marcellus.*

What hath this thing appear'd againe to night.

2. I haue seene nothing.

*Mar.* *Horatio* layes tis but our fantasie,

Resource  
Materials for  
*Hamlet* and  
*Trippingly  
Hamlet*

On *Hamlet* and *Trippingly Hamlet*

**From the Education Department**

This collection of resources was developed to accompany our 2010 Education Tour production of *Trippingly Hamlet*. It provides background information on Shakespeare and his plays and will help you prepare your students to attend our mainstage presentation of *Hamlet* in Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park, running May 26 - June 20, 2010.

The goal of all Festival education programs is to deepen our community's appreciation and connection to Shakespeare, providing only the highest quality theatre education to inspire people of all ages to creatively engage, explore and delight in the works of William Shakespeare. Shakespeare's poetry and plays are a primary element in any process of life-long learning. In the 2008-2009 season, more than 26,000 students in area schools and community venues experienced Shakespeare through the Festival's Education programs. We welcome as many as 55,000 people annually to our mainstage production in Shakespeare Glen, Forest Park.

We hope that through the Festival's education programs, students are challenged and engaged while enhancing their ability to read, watch and perform Shakespeare. We appreciate this opportunity to *Share the Shakespeareance* with your students and faculty. Thank you for bringing the Festival to your school!

Christopher Limber  
Education Director, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis



Students at GALACTIC School enjoy 2008's *Quick-Brewed Macbeth*. Photo courtesy Hazelwood School District.

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**SFSTL Education Tour 2010 is sponsored by Jeanne and Rex Siquefield**

## Hamlet Plot Synopsis

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark! Horatio and several guards are visited by a ghost who bears a striking resemblance to their recently deceased king. Horatio wastes no time telling the king's child, Prince Hamlet, about the sighting. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet watches outside and sees the ghost who motions for him to follow. The ghost says he was murdered by his brother Claudius, Hamlet's uncle who acceded to the throne and added cruelty to his treason by marrying Hamlet's mother, Gertrude; the wedding took place less than two months after the king's death. At the request of his ghostly father, Hamlet must confine his revenge to King Claudius and as for his mother, "leave her to heaven." Hamlet, convinced of these crimes, vows revenge then struggles with how to avenge the murder. He argues, broods, and begins to appear mad. He speculates whether revenge will bring satisfaction, or if he should end his own life. For

**Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!**

Hamlet, no plan of action is obvious and he falls into a dark melancholy.

Polonius, advisor to the new king, is the father of Laertes and Ophelia, who loves Hamlet. As he leaves for England, Laertes warns Ophelia to beware of Hamlet. Polonius also advises her to refuse Hamlet's advances. Hamlet begins to act so strangely that Ophelia tells Polonius. Believing that "neglected love" is the cause of Hamlet's melancholy, Polonius informs Claudius and Gertrude, but the king and queen are not so sure love is the cause, rather that Hamlet may still be grieving his father. To investigate, Claudius sends for Hamlet's two schoolmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to carefully question him, and, with Polonius, Claudius spies on a conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia. Soon an angry Hamlet, perhaps aware that his uncle and her father are watching, rejects the terrified Ophelia, proclaiming, "Get thee to a nunnery."

Meanwhile, a troupe of traveling players arrives at the castle and Hamlet enlists their help to confirm his uncle's guilt. He rewrites a section of their play so it becomes a reenactment of his father's murder, knowing that when played before King Claudius, he will become agitated and confirm his guilt. The play, "The Mousetrap," is performed. When the parallel murder is played, Claudius rails out of the room. Hamlet and Horatio are convinced Claudius is guilty. Hamlet wants to murder him, but

discovers his uncle praying. Afraid that Claudius would then go to heaven, he waits. Hamlet goes to his mother's room to confront her while Polonius is eavesdropping behind a tapestry. Hamlet hears him, draws his sword and, thinking it is the king, stabs through the curtain and kills him. Claudius fears Hamlet and gives orders to send Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern along with a letter requesting that the English King have Hamlet killed. Hamlet discovers the letter and revises it so his traitorous friends are executed instead of him. In the meantime, Laertes returns from France intent on avenging his father's death. Further adding fuel to Laertes' fury, he discovers Ophelia has been driven utterly mad by her father's death. Hearing by letter of Hamlet's return, King Claudius plots with Laertes, who agrees to kill Hamlet in a duel with a poison-tipped sword. As insurance, Claudius will also place a poisoned pearl in a goblet of wine. Laertes receives news that Ophelia has gone to the river and, swimming with her heavy clothing on, was carried under and drowned. Hamlet, escaped from England, returns to Denmark just as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. Grief-stricken, he confronts Laertes, admitting he always loved Ophelia. Back at the castle, he informs Horatio that he must be prepared to die since death can strike at any moment. Osric, a ridiculous courtier, arrives, instructed by Claudius to arrange the fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet.

During the duel, Queen Gertrude toasts her son. She mistakenly drinks from the goblet laced with poison, unwittingly killing herself. Sport becomes a bona fide battle and Laertes cuts Hamlet. Before the prince dies, he counters, stealing Laertes' sword and wounding him with the poisoned blade. Laertes, with his last breath, proclaims, "The King's to blame." Hamlet then stabs the king and makes him drink the poisoned wine. In his last few moments, Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his story to the world. Hamlet dies, his revenge complete. A Norwegian prince named Fortinbras, who earlier in the play led an army to Denmark and attacked Poland, enters with ambassadors from England who report that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Fortinbras is shocked by the sight of the entire royal family dead on the floor. Horatio tells him he will be the next king. Hamlet is mourned by Fortinbras and Horatio who instructs the court that the Prince will be buried with the honors of a soldier.

View a detailed analysis of the soliloquy  
"To be or not to be..."  
<http://www.bardweb.net/content/readings/hamlet/index.html>

## List of Characters in *Hamlet*

**Hamlet, Prince of Denmark**, is a thoughtful young man who is often indecisive and tentative, but can also be rash and impulsive. He returns to Denmark from school in Germany to find his father dead and his mother remarried to his Uncle Claudius, the new King of Denmark.

**Claudius, King of Denmark**, a power hungry politician who usurped the throne and married his sister-in-law.

**Gertrude, Queen of Denmark**, mother of Hamlet, widow of the previous King of Denmark and wife of King Claudius, seemingly craves affection and status more than moral decency or honesty. She plays a major role in many scenes including Polonius' death as well as Ophelia's.

**The Ghost** is the spirit of Hamlet's father who claims to have been murdered by the newly-crowned King Claudius. He calls upon his son to avenge his death, but young Hamlet thinks that this ghost could possibly be a devil tempting him.

**Polonius**, father of Laertes and Ophelia, is the chief counselor to Claudius.

**Horatio** is Hamlet's good friend from their school days. He remains loyal to Hamlet throughout the play and is charged with telling the story after Hamlet's death.

**Laertes**, the son of Polonius, spends much of his time in Paris. After his father's death, Laertes conspires with Claudius to kill Hamlet during a duel.

**Ophelia**, daughter of Polonius, is easily controlled by the men in her life. She is the beloved of Hamlet. She goes mad after her father's death and, later, drowns.

*THE*  
Tragicall Historie of  
**H A M L E T,**  
*Prince of Denmarke.*

By William Shakepeare.

Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much  
again as it was, according to the true and perfect  
Coppie.



AT LONDON,  
Printed by I. R. for N. L. and are to be sold at his  
shoppe vnder Saint Dunions Church in  
Fleetstreet, 1605.

Title page of the first quarto of *Hamlet*

**“To be,  
or not to be:  
That is the  
question”**

*The Tragedy of Hamlet,  
Prince of Denmark,  
Act 3, Scene 1*

**Rosencrantz** and **Guildenstern** are classmates of Hamlet. Claudius brings them to Denmark in order to spy on Hamlet. They often act as the play's comic relief and are ultimately executed by the King of England.

**Fortinbras**, the Prince of Norway, whose father was murdered by Hamlet's father, is determined to avenge his father's death. Eventually, he becomes the King of Denmark with Hamlet's consent.

**Osric**, courtier who acts as Claudius's messenger and, later, as the referee of the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.

**Voltimand** and **Cornelius**, courtiers from Denmark who are sent to Norway by Claudius in order to prevent Fortinbras from attacking.

**Marcellus** and **Bernardo** are officers keeping guard at Elsinore Castle. They are the first to see the ghost of King Hamlet.

**Francisco** is a soldier keeping guard at Elsinore Castle.

**Reynaldo** is Polonius' servant who is sent to Paris to spy on Laertes.

### About *Hamlet*



William Shakespeare's most acclaimed play, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, tells the story of a young prince who struggles to avenge his father's murder by his uncle Claudius, and the

subsequent marriage of Claudius to Hamlet's mother Gertrude. For Hamlet, no plan of action is easy to set in motion. Shakespeare has made his hero's struggle complex and intensely personal. Hamlet's battlefield first exists in his mind rather than out in the world where he could actively hunt down and kill his uncle for treasonous offenses against his family and state. His dilemmas are aggravated because the crimes and deception against him have been waged from within his family. Hamlet fears the wrath of God, the uncertainty of the afterlife, and the validity of the ghost story, and therefore questions his ability to kill.

This landmark play of loyalty, ambition and revenge was ahead of its time and is a vehicle for Shakespeare to push the boundaries of dramatic writing. The expected conventions of the Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, founded in Thomas Kydd's Spanish Tragedy and culminating in the Jacobean Revenge Tragedies, are turned upside down or, in Hamlet's case, his conflicts are initially turned inward causing him to become isolated while contemplating and arguing with himself. Hamlet's intricate deliberations, so eloquent and so deeply personal, make them fascinating and stage-worthy. His most intimate relationship in the drama is with the audience to which he confides and which accompanies him as he navigates a frightful and confusing emotional landscape. Shakespeare's rich psychological intricacies of personal conflict brought a new and more sophisticated use of dialogue to the stage that acknowledges the intelligence and perceptiveness of his audience.

The Elizabethan audience expected serious plays to follow the Aristotelian belief that drama should focus on action rather than character. By using soliloquies rather than physical action to reveal the characters' motivations and thoughts, Shakespeare asked his

audience to listen and empathize with a more subtle, private inner war fought by the tragic hero. This risky, dramatic experiment was met with great enthusiasm. Imagine the surprise and delight this new psychological treatment of a tragedy prompted in Shakespeare's audience which arrived at the theatre expecting primarily action, blood and spectacle. Instead, we the audience become Hamlet's confidants and our connection to him builds as we wonder if he will be the final casualty in the play either by his own hand or someone else's, or if he will triumph against the evil around him.

Because Hamlet's turmoil is not easily or quickly solved, a tension from his indecision builds and actively binds the audience to the protagonist. We are compelled by his inaction because he is so actively battling within. *Hamlet* was very popular in its initial run and became a standard of the Bard's company. It was often requested by patrons throughout the latter part of his career. The universal examination of the hero's personal struggle - action verses inaction, to live or die, to forgive or kill, to love or hate oneself, and to be loyal to one's family or retaliate in the face of betrayal - continues to engage and thrill.

The traditional Elizabethan revenge play not only contains a ghost, but is also set against the protagonist's struggles to achieve justice through his or her own actions. Everyone talks of Hamlet's insane behavior, blaming it on his love for Ophelia (and her rejection of him), or on the death of his father. However, there is a case to be made for Hamlet being genuinely mad or, by contrast, "mad in craft," calculated to hide his pain and his plot of revenge. His state of being was labeled by Renaissance psychologists as the condition of "Melancholy," a state of spiritual abandon which was likened to insanity but also considered the stuff of artistic genius. It is up to the production and the audience to decide if Hamlet is sane and "acting" his insanity or really unbalanced - as Shakespeare has left it open to interpretation, again respecting his questioning audiences' ability to make up their own minds.

***Hamlet* tells the story of a young prince who struggles to avenge his father's murder**

## About the Adaptation *Trippingly Hamlet*

The Shakespeare Festival St. Louis Education Tour Production coming to your school is aptly named *Trippingly Hamlet*. In the play, Hamlet offers advice to the Players who arrive at the castle, beginning with "Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue." He means "with a light step; nimbly." It is challenging to condense a script with 4,024 lines to 800, but we have carefully chosen the major story events and bound them together with brief narrative passages that keep the story moving quickly. Our production mixes several scenes with small excerpts and narration, summarizing the story in an entertaining 50 minutes. Five versatile performers play all the roles, shifting character by changing their voices, movement, costume, or sometimes by wearing a mask.

We suggest you select small sections of the actual play to present to your students prior to our performance. The more familiar your students are with the story and characters, the richer their experience of the performance will be. In creating *Trippingly Hamlet*, Shakespeare's original text is told starting at the tragic end and then begun again like a story. The three main characters killed in the last scene: Hamlet, his mother Gertrude, and his stepfather and uncle, Claudius, narrate the action as ghosts. Structurally, their narrative passages are in iambic pentameter and they echo Hamlet's desire to have his story told to the world, a last wish he utters to Horatio moments before his death:

*If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story.*  
Hamlet, Act V, scene ii

Our audience is thus invited to help bring Hamlet back to life so we may hear his tale. In this way, we as a theatre

audience always complete the experience of a live performance. It is our ability to believe and respond that brings the play to life. In this version of *Hamlet*, the play's events are offered by the very characters who struggle against each other to the death throughout the play. We know the ending and they ask us to examine the events and draw our own conclusions. It is Shakespeare's rich and truthful characters written over 400 years ago that enable us in 2010 to still find Hamlet's inner struggles compelling.

Shakespeare embraced his theatrical traditions and transformed dramatic writing forever. His Globe theatre was an outdoor venue. It demanded energy, volume and intensity from its actors. The distractions of a rambunctious audience required a larger, less realistic style of acting than we see today in film and in smaller indoor theatres. When Shakespeare began his writing career, actors were more presentational, even bombastic. Shakespeare's writing, particularly in *Hamlet*, is evidence that he was aiming at a more truthful representation of humanity, even though his plays are also peppered with action, spectacle and theatricality. The depth of his characters and the empathy they inspire earns Shakespeare the right to be larger than life. His writing tapped the latent talents and intelligence of both his actors and his audience. As John Barton says in his wonderful book *Playing Shakespeare*: "Shakespeare wrote these infinitely rich and complex plays with great psychological depth. I don't think he would have done it unless his actors could have done him justice."



Top: Khnemu Menu-Ra, Elizabeth Birkenmeier in *Quick-Brewed Macbeth*; Robert A. Mitchell, Michael B. Perkins in *Me & Richard 3*. Bottom: ensemble, *Soothsaying: A Stylin' Julius Caesar*; Eric Little, Matt Kahler, Maura Kidwell in *The Tempest in a Flash!* Photos © J. David Levy.

# Questions for Before and After Seeing the Play

## Before the Play

1. Have you ever had a really hard time making an important decision? How did you finally decide what to do?
2. Once you made your difficult decision did you have trouble following through? Have you ever decided to do something but, for some reason, felt hesitant to follow through? What might contribute to your hesitation? In the past what has stopped you from acting on correct (or incorrect) decisions immediately?
3. Did making a tough decision energize you or paralyze you?
4. What is "revenge"?
5. Is revenge ever justified?
6. What other plays, movies, novels or short stories incorporate the theme of revenge?
7. A tragic hero is a character who has a fatal flaw or makes an error in judgment which brings about his/her downfall. Who, today, are tragic heroes and what are their flaws?
8. Someone you trust tells you something bad about someone else you trust. How do you know whom to believe? What could you do to find out if the person is telling the truth? What if you discover they are lying? Do you confront the issue or let it go?
9. Name some traits that a great leader should have. What would you do if you found out that your leader did something wrong? What if you realize you could lead better than your leader? What are your appropriate options then?
10. Have you ever pretended to be something you're not? Feel sick? Act sad? Why? What happened?

Is revenge ever justified?

## After the Play

1. Give three phrases or words that might establish an ominous mood in the very beginning of the play. What words does Shakespeare use to paint the mood in Act I Scene i of *Hamlet*?
2. What does Hamlet think the ghost indicates?

3. Many characters, including Hamlet, talk of his "state of mind". Who are they and what are the different explanations of Hamlet's madness? Are the other characters content with these explanations? Are you?
4. Read Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy in Act III, sc. i. What are the five most important points he makes? In a sentence or two paraphrase these main points. Write a letter, a poem or a song lyric based on these five points.
5. Does Ophelia commit suicide, or was her death an accident?
6. In Act II, we meet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. What are they doing at court? How are we supposed to feel about them and why?
7. There are thinkers and doers. Who in this play thinks primarily and who are persons of action?
8. Characterize yourself as a "thinker" or a "doer." As such, which character in the play are you most like? Would you like to be different than that? How?
9. Hamlet is Shakespeare's longest play, containing over 4,000 lines, which would take over 4 hours to perform. What could be done to make it shorter? How much shorter should it be? What is absolutely essential?
10. Who "wins" in the end? How?
11. How might you have changed the end of the play?
12. In 1995, an adaptation was written in Dr. Suess-like rhyme called *Green Eggs and Hamlet*. Rewrite Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy using Suessian rhyme.
13. In your opinion, why is *Hamlet* still considered one of Shakespeare's greatest works after over 400 years? How is it relevant in today's world?
14. Laertes and Hamlet both lose their father. How do they each react? How are they similar/different?

Who "wins" in the end?

## Shakespeare's Sources for Hamlet

*Hamlet*, Shakespeare's longest play, was written between 1599 -1601 and contains 4,024 lines, compared to another well-known tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, which has a mere 2,989 lines. It also contains the much-loved Shakespearean device of a play-within-a-play. For over 400 years, the play has also been known for its ghostly imagery as well as its intense portrayal of melancholy.

The story of Hamlet is said to date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century

The story of Hamlet is actually said to date back to the 13th century, to the writer Saxo Grammaticus. His is the story of Amleth whose father was murdered by his uncle, Feng who then goes on to marry Amleth's mother, Gerutha. Taking place in a pre-Christian Denmark, Amleth feels no guilt over his revenge as there is no violation of moral or religious law. Thus, the ghost images and the extreme melancholy that we are familiar with today were added at a later time by another author. Shakespeare's primary source for *Hamlet* is believed to be *Ur-Hamlet*, written in the 16th century, of which little is known, as there is no existing copy of the play. Scholars believe it to have been written by Thomas Kydd. There has also been mention of the fact that Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died only years before he wrote *Hamlet*. While there is dispute about how much *Hamlet* is about the playwright's son, many agree that the tale of *Hamlet* is deeply infused with feelings of grief and loss that are a result of young Hamnet's death.

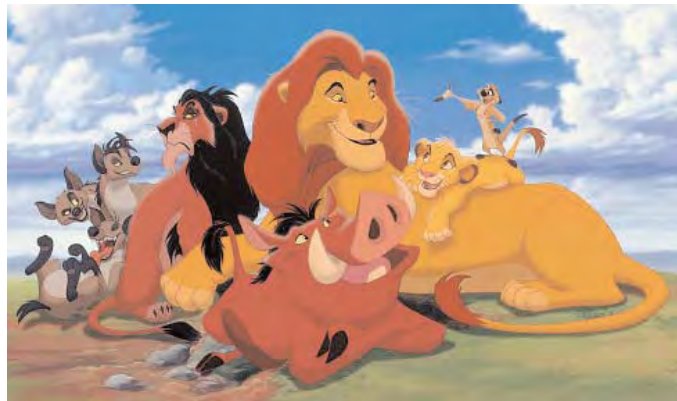
## Interesting Hamlet Trivia

While the themes and conflicts present in *Hamlet* are relevant today, the well-known tragedy has left other lasting marks on our lives. *Hamlet* was the first of Shakespeare's plays to introduce the stage convention of using movable flats and generic scenery to define location and setting. The tragedy is also said to have introduced over 600 new words that had not appeared in English text previously. In the play, the playwright coins many phrases still used today such as "In my heart of hearts . . .," ". . . own flesh and blood" as well as "There's a method in (to) my madness."

Evidence of the play's popularity and timelessness, it has topped the Royal Shakespeare Company's list of the most-performed Shakespearean plays since 1879 and the title character remains the most complex and coveted

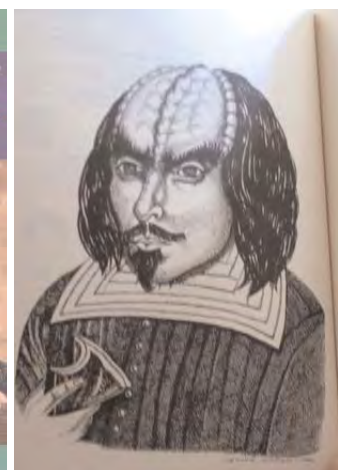
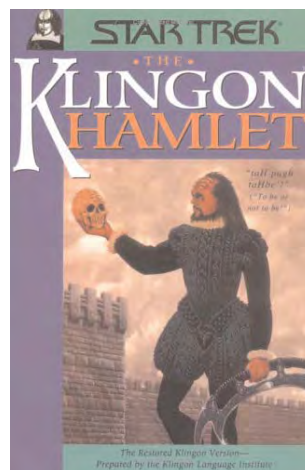
role in classical theatre, attracting even women!

One of the earliest recorded performances of *Hamlet* is thought to have taken place on the East India Company's ship, the Red Dragon, in 1607 while it was anchored in Sierra Leone. The tragedy was performed by the crew and, according to the captain, the performance kept "my people from idleness and unlawful games, or sleep."



Disney's acclaimed film, *The Lion King*, adapts many of *Hamlet*'s plot devices into an animated tale about a pride of African Lions.

The storyline and themes of *Hamlet* have inspired many works in popular culture (see our resource guide on our website, "Other Works of Art Based on Hamlet.") Disney's acclaimed film, *The Lion King*, adapts many of the plot devices into an animated tale about a pride of African Lions. In contrast, Shakespeare met science fiction in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, whose villain frequently quotes from Shakespeare (and mostly *Hamlet*); in fact, the creators of *Star Trek* translated *Hamlet* into their fictional Klingon language with the tag line, "You've not experienced Shakespeare until you've read it in the original Klingon."



*Hamlet* was translated into Klingon by the creators of *Star Trek*, complete with a "portrait" of the Bard



## Activity: Shakespeare Trivia Contest

Your students may enjoy participating in a Shakespeare Trivia Contest. Your school can provide prizes such as a book on Shakespeare, a copy of one of his plays, a DVD of a Shakespeare play on film, a school t-shirt or pennant, etc.

### What you will need:

- A library (see our list of book resources at the end of this guide)
- Web access (see our list of web resources at the end of this guide)
- A bulletin board in your classroom or in a school hallway
- 3X5 index cards
- Thumb tacks
- Student Contestant Scorecard (to place on bulletin board)

*Shakespeare was the son of a glover. John Aubrey, in his biographical extravaganza of the time, wrote the following record of Shakespeare's encounter with his family trade:*

*"I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbors, that when he was a boy, he exercised his father's trade, but when he kill'd a calf\* he would do it in high style and make a speech."  
\*for the leather*

### Goal:

To find and place on the bulletin board interesting, little-known facts about (choose one):

- Shakespeare
- *Hamlet*
- The Globe Theatre in London

The student that finds and records the most trivia wins!

*Some dramatic theorists have built extravagant cases questioning the authenticity of Shakespeare's existence. For example, "there is no record of the boy ever going to school." Simply, there is no record of a vast majority of Elizabethans who went to school.*

Set a time period - at least two weeks - during which students are encouraged to research and post their findings. They should sign their names on the back of each index card they post. At the end of the allotted time, the cards are taken down and the winner is announced. A count can be done every few days and the results posted, or the students can place a check after their name every time they post a card.

*Play writing was not considered as an important profession in the Elizabethan era. Neither was it a respectable way to make a living. No one knew, therefore, that William Shakespeare would ever be famous. His only claim to fame in his day was that he died having bought quite a lot of property, made quite a bit of money, and for a "theatre person" was unusually respectable.*

*Shakespeare's home of Stratford was on the road from London to the North Country of England. Very often famous acting companies of the time would come through and perform. It is assumed that Shakespeare became "stage struck" at an early age (sometime around 1587, when he was 23). He ran off and later wrote to his family to tell them of the news.*

## On Tragedy

In Shakespeare's time, playgoers expected formulaic tragedies using traditional conventions. These tenets included a hero who avenges a crime committed against a family member or a personal injustice. By taking the law into their own hands and working outside the traditional power structure, these



tragic protagonists pull out all the stops to reclaim their personal or familial honor. In *Macbeth*, the title character destroys all sense of natural, human and divine laws by eliminating all those who stand in his way, including the King himself, as he assumes what he thinks is his rightful place on the throne. The Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy had two distinct features: 1) the person seeking revenge typically pretends to be mad, and, 2) for various reasons, vengeance is delayed.

Contemporary writers in Shakespeare's time believed strongly that certain rules should be followed in Elizabethan tragedies. The form was as important, sometimes almost more important, than the story itself.

Writers of this time believed tragedies should be written according to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle states that a tragedy should contain a hero in a stately position such as a king or general. As opposed to his fellow playwrights and scholars, Shakespeare's audience was not concerned with rules and conventions. He wrote plays primarily to please his patrons. His tragedies do center on characters of such estate, but the Bard writes these figures as human beings dealing with realistic issues and concerns with which his audience can identify as opposed to untouchable, invincible members of high society. Take, for example, young Hamlet. While he is the Prince of Denmark, he is also a God-fearing man in love, concerned with the murder of his father. Although the emotions and situations are exaggerated, we can easily empathize and can learn from the hero's downfall.

Another common Elizabethan belief is that a tragic hero has a flaw that brings about his downfall. While many of Shakespeare's tragic characters contain a flaw, sometimes such flaws are practically indecipherable due to their complex and layered characterization. It is often argued that Othello does not have a traditional tragic flaw, but is justifiably and purely human; he is a loyal man who is affected by jealousy and pushed by Iago into a deeply troubled state of mind.

In addition to the tragic flaw, Shakespeare's contemporary playwrights wrote tragedies that ended with a revelation of self-knowledge or lesson learned by the story's hero about how his own frailty has brought about his and others' downfall. There is a general consensus that Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, does not contain any lesson. All the audience is left with is a disconcerting pile of bodies and a pool of blood. While Shakespeare did not always diverge from the expected norms of an Elizabethan tragedy, he wrote plays which he banked on to delight and titillate his audience. He gave little credence to the "rules."

Elizabethan audiences expected action. They wanted sword-fighting, spectacle, blood and death. While Shakespeare used these features in his tragedies, he also infused his writings with profound inner battles and relevant personal issues, often dramatized with soliloquies and gripping dialogue. By acknowledging the popular interest in physical conflict and fusing it with relatable characters dealing with ordinary concerns, Shakespeare created accessible, dramatic and spellbinding meditations on the human condition.

**The Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy had two distinct features: 1) the person seeking revenge pretends to be mad, and, 2) for various reasons, vengeance is delayed.**



### Genre: Comedy or Tragedy?

**Enduring Understandings:** There are classic definitions of “Comedy” and “Tragedy” that help us understand how a play is structured and developed as a performance.

**Essential Question:** How can we define Comedy and Tragedy in Shakespeare?

**Objectives:** Students will

- Brainstorm the components of “Comedy” and “Tragedy.”
- Examine and consider definitions of Comedy and Tragedy often used by playwrights, directors and actors.
- Examine *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and decide what genre it is.

**Outcomes:** Students will

- Understand the classic definitions of Comedy and Tragedy.
- Use these definitions to analyze a classic play.

### Lesson Plan:

**Background:** Considering Genre—Drawing distinctions between Shakespeare’s plays and categorizing his works has been a focus of scholars for hundreds of years, and the criteria used to differentiate the plays into types or genres has changed over time.

The distinction between Comedy and Tragedy became particularly important during Shakespeare’s life. During that time, writers of Tragedy conformed to Aristotle’s definition, relating the tale of a great man or woman brought down through hubris or fate. Comedy in this time, much like in our own, descended from the Roman “New Comedy” of Plautus and Terence, which kept away from politics and focused on love, domestic troubles and family affairs.

1. As a class, come up with definitions for each of these theatrical genres. Generate a list of elements for each style. What makes a play a Comedy? What makes a play a Tragedy? What makes a play a History? What makes a play a Romance? Have your students read all or part of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and/or Castelvetro’s *On Aristotle’s “Poetics.”* How do the two writers define Comedy and Tragedy? According to them, what elements does each style possess?
2. The following excerpts of Castelvetro’s work come from *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974). Do *Windsor Live!* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor* conform to any of these concepts? In what ways do they differ from these concepts? Do you agree with these ideas about Comedy and Tragedy?

#### Tragedy

The essential elements of the action or of the plot of tragedy are terror and compassion. (146)

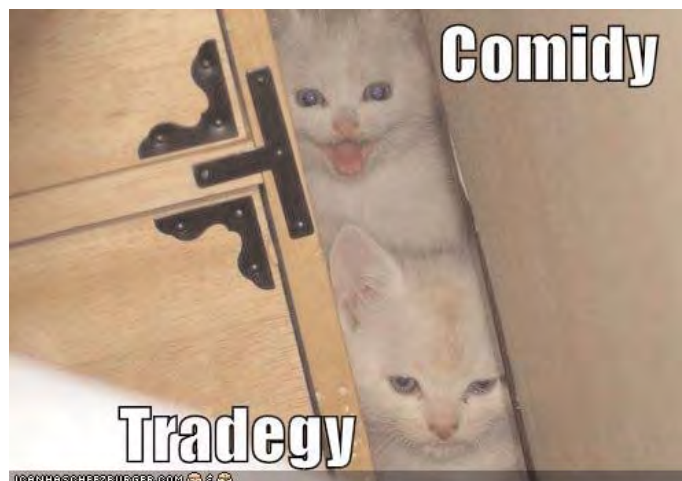
The plot ... must contain action which is not only human but also magnificent and royal ... it follows that the plot must contain action which definitely occurred and which involves a king who has lived ... (146)

The characters of tragedy ... are royal and are more dynamic and proud ... (147)

#### Comedy

... the joy which is the aim of comedy consists in the concealment of some disgrace brought on oneself, or on some loved one, or in the preservation from some shame which others did not believe was possible, or in the recovery of a person, or a precious possession which was lost, or in the successful pursuit of love. (147)

It is the poet’s special talent to structure the plot of comedy by inventing the general and particular aspects of a situation. (146)



“LOL cat” image courtesy of [www.icanhascheezburger.com](http://www.icanhascheezburger.com); the misspelling of “comedy” and “tragedy” is deliberate.

**Activity: How to Write a Play Review - Grades 3-6**

Now that you've seen *All the World's a Stage...* write a review for the school or local paper about the performance. It is a great way to share your thoughts and feelings about a theatre performance. Include the **who**, **what**, **when** and **where** of the show. Think about the story, set, props, costumes and movement as well as how well the actors performed. What do you think worked well? What did you like and what would you have done differently? Be sure you don't give away any surprises, though! Check out examples of theatre reviews from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the Riverfront Times. Send us your thoughts!

**Introduction:**

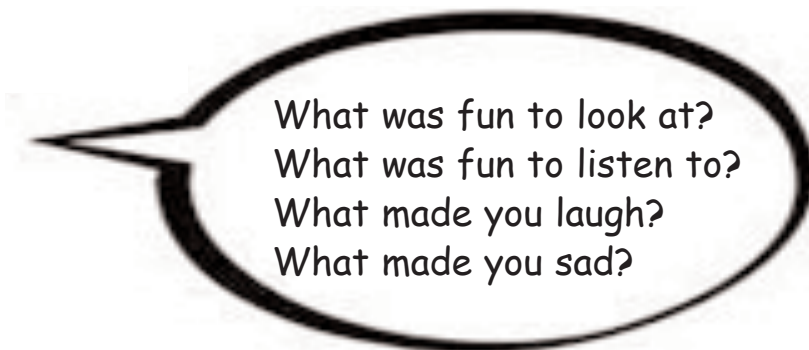
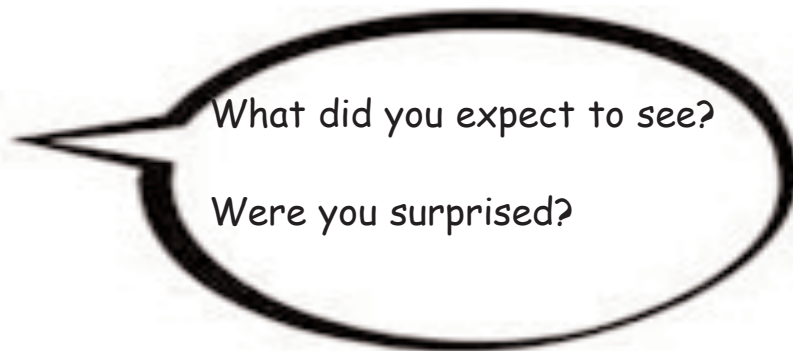
- ✦ Title
- ✦ Playwright
- ✦ What kind of play was it? (Musical? Drama? Comedy?)
- ✦ Who performed the play?

**Basics:**

- ✦ What was the subject of the play?
- ✦ Was there a message?
- ✦ What was the Mood?
- ✦ What was the story?

**The Look and Sound:**

- ✦ The Setting
- ✦ The Costumes
- ✦ Sound effects or music
- ✦ The Actors:
  - Were they believable?
  - Were they fun?
  - Did they work well together
  - How were there voices?
  - Could you hear them and understand them?
  - Did they move well?

**What Did You Think?**

A review helps readers decide if a play is something for which they might want to buy a ticket and see. Using your answers, write a letter to a friend and tell him/her about the play. Imagine they are deciding if they want to go to see it when they visit you over the holidays and have asked you, "What did you think?"

**Activity: How to Write a Play Review - Grades 7-12**

Now that you've seen *All the World's a Stage...* write a review for the school or local paper about the performance. It is a great way to articulate your thoughts and feelings about a theatre performance. Include the **who**, **what**, **when** and **where** of the show. Also, think about the plot/story, set, costumes and movement as well as how well the actors performed. What do you think worked well? What did you like and what would you have interpreted differently? The outline below covers some important topics for thinking carefully about a production. More than simply stating whether the show was "good" or "bad," a review should inform the reading audience about the play's basic structure, themes, and the ways in which the various design elements, acting choices and overall directorial vision addressed these issues. Be sure you don't give away any surprises, though! Check out examples of theatre reviews from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the Riverfront Times. Send us your thoughts!

**Heading**

1. Give title, playwright, and type of play.
2. Give date of production, place, and name of performing group.
3. Include a program of the play with your review.

You'll already have ideas about these from reading the play before seeing the show!

**Essay Outline**

- I. Theme of the play (What was the play about? Was there a message?)
- II. Atmosphere (Tell how it was expressed in the scenery, lighting, and sound effects.)

III. Brief summary of the story or plot

Remember to reference your program for the names (and correct spellings) of the designers, actors, and director!

- IV. Technical evaluation
- a. Setting/Scenic design
  - b. Costumes
  - c. Sound design or music

- V. Acting evaluation
- a. Were the actors believable and fun in their roles?
  - b. Did all characters work together to create an ensemble or did some detract by not doing what they should?
  - c. How did their voice and movement make them effective?
  - d. Did the actors underplay or overplay their parts?
  - e. Were there any outstanding performances? Give specific examples and details.

Was the acting highly stylized? Or did it seem realistic? Could you understand everything that the actors were saying?

- VI. Directorial evaluation
- a. Did the stage stay comfortably balanced?
  - b. Did all aspects of the production communicate the same concept or feeling or were some distracting?
  - c. Did this production interpret the script to your satisfaction?
  - d. Was the director's concept true to what you think the playwright intended?
  - e. Were any aspects of the production confusing?

VII. Personal opinion (You may discuss any aspect of the play you wish, but give reasons to justify and explain your beliefs.)

Were there any surprises? Disappointments? Feel free to respond to the entire theatre experience.

**Comparing Film Versions of *Hamlet***

After reviewing the play in class, watch several different film interpretations of *Hamlet* and compare production approaches. You might begin by watching the delightful European animated series *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* version of *Hamlet*. This is a 35-minute condensed version with voices provided by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Then watch and compare several scenes from the three full-length movies below:



*Hamlet* (1948) directed by and starring Laurence Olivier; won Best Picture and Best Actor Oscars. This film version cut the character of Fortinbras to allow more time to spotlight the relationships of the royal family. Filmed in black and white with a traditional castle setting that looks more like a theatrical set than a real-life location, this production casts a mysterious spell.

*Hamlet* (1990) directed by Franco Zeffirelli; starring Mel Gibson and Glenn Close; presents a visually stunning and well-cast version of *Hamlet*, set within the ominous walls of a Scandinavian castle, with Mel Gibson as a likable and energetic Hamlet. Like Olivier, Zeffirelli recognized that for film, Shakespeare's complex story is helped by formidable cutting. His version also cut Fortinbras and rendered a dysfunctional royal family with almost a contemporary feel.



*Hamlet* (1996) adapted by, directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh: Branagh threw cinematic caution to the wind with a lavish full-text film version of the play (four hours long). Set in the Edwardian period within the architectural grandeur of Blenheim Palace, this visually stunning film full of mirrors, courtly confetti of gold and epic camera work shows how Shakespeare's characters remain just as impressive as their surroundings.

Compare and contrast the different versions making decisions about the effectiveness of the choices made in each film. Consider:

<b>Production:</b>	<b>1948 Lawrence Olivier</b>	<b>1990 Mel Gibson</b>	<b>1996 Kenneth Branagh</b>
Acting			
Sets			
Costumes			
Locations			
Time Period			
Text: Play to Screen			

## Surf the Web and Storm the Stage!

**Preparation:** Read and select scenes from *Hamlet* for your students to perform.

**Enduring Understandings:** Researching Shakespeare on the Internet is one of many tremendous resources in preparing for a performance by actors, directors and designers.

**Essential Question:** What can I discover about Shakespeare and his World using the internet?

**Objectives:** Students will

- Investigate online resources about Shakespeare's plays.
- Explore productions of Shakespeare across cultures and periods.
- Examine *Hamlet* and develop...

**Outcomes:** Students will

- Understand how Shakespeare's own theatre affected his performances and playwriting.
- Understand that how a production is presented is a coordinated synthesis of acting, directing and design.
- Be encouraged to be creative and experimental as they prepare their version of Shakespeare.

## Lesson Plan:

1. Imagine that you're going to perform a scene in the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London in the original Shakespearean style. Visit the websites listed below and answer the questions that follow to gain an understanding of what a performance would be like in Shakespeare's time.
  - a. In what specific ways have these performances modernized the plays?
  - b. Do you think that modernizing Shakespeare's plays is a good idea? Why or why not?
- OSU to present Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*: <http://osu.orst.edu/Dept/ncs/newsarch/1997/November97/errors.htm>



- Shakespeare's Globe: <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org>
  - Shakespeare Globe (virtual tour): [http://aspirations.english.cam.ac.uk/converse/enrich/globe\\_picker.html](http://aspirations.english.cam.ac.uk/converse/enrich/globe_picker.html)
  - The Reconstructed Globe: <http://www.globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-reconstruction.htm>
  - The Globe Reborn: <http://www.watson.org/~leigh/shakespeare.html#globe>
  - Elizabethan Period Costumes (worn in daily life during this period): <http://www.renfaire.com/Costume/index.html>
2. Answer the following questions based on information you find at the websites listed above:
    - a. What does the theatre look like? Describe its architecture and design.
    - b. How will the stage be set up?
    - c. What types of scenery will be used? Is the scenery elaborate or more minimal?
    - d. What will the costumes look like?
    - e. Which types of people (social classes) will sit in which locations of the theater?
    - f. In what ways will the audience be involved?
    - g. What might the members of your audience be wearing to the show?

3. Go to the following web pages to read about some ways in which Shakespeare's plays have been adapted to modern times. Then answer the questions below.

OSU to present Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*:  
<http://osu.orst.edu/Dept/ncs/newsarch/1997/November97/errors.htm>

Modern Film Adaptations of Shakespeare:  
<http://www.fathom.com/course/28701907/index.html>

- a. In what specific ways have these performances modernized the plays?
- b. Do you think that modernizing Shakespeare's plays is a good idea? Why or why not?

### Books to Investigate

*Shakespeare for Kids: His Life and Times: 21 Activities.*, by Colleen Aagesen and Margie Blumberg. Chicago: Chicago Review, 1999. This book tracks the life of the playwright, from his early years in Stratford-upon-Avon, his marriage and family, to his move to London and work in the theatre, and finally his retirement back in the country. Includes some wonderful maps, portraits, drawings, as well as activities that focus on different aspects of life in early modern England.

*Shakespeare Can Be Fun! Hamlet for Kids*, by Lois Burdett. Willowdale, ON: Firefly Books, 1999. Reading level: Ages 7 and up. An adaptation of Shakespeare's play with illustrations drawn by the middle school students in her class. Note that this series covers seven of Shakespeare's plays, as well as a portrait of the playwright. A short teacher guide is also available online at The Writing Company:  
<http://www.writingco.com/c/featuredproduct.html?subject@Shakespeare+s@l2ccu8WOemK.k>

*Perform It! A Complete Guide to Young People's Theatre*, by Jan Helling Croteau. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000. This book chronicles the work of the author as a theatre director and teacher, working primarily with high school students producing Shakespeare. She addresses many issues, from warm-ups and acting techniques to choosing a play and the logistics of production.

*Teaching Shakespeare Today: Practical Approaches and Productive Strategies*, by James E. Davis and Ronald E. Salomone, Eds. Urbana: NCTE, 1993. This book contains a series of more scholarly articles written

by teachers for educators introducing Shakespeare to middle school and high school students. The collection covers approaches to teaching Shakespeare, using performance as a teaching tool, extratextual resources, the challenges and rewards of using Shakespeare in the classroom, and a section specifically focused on several of Shakespeare's plays. These articles provide "practical and pedagogical commentary to meet the needs of students and instructors struggling with Shakespeare" making it an "enjoyable and productive experience for today's students."

*Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-first Century*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1997. A follow up to their previous collection, this book includes "thirty-two essays written by middle school, high school, and college teachers" which address: contemporary issues of race and gender in Shakespeare's plays, critical theories, classroom approaches, workshops, technology, and other current trends.

*The Random House Book of Shakespeare Stories* by Andrew Matthews, illustrated by Angela Barrett. New York: Random, 2003. Reading level: Ages 9-12. A book for introducing children to Shakespeare, this covers eight of the Bard's plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Henry the Fifth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*) in easy to understand prose. The book also includes a brief summary of theatre in Shakespeare's time as well as notes from the illustrator detailing the inspiration for her imaginative artistry throughout the collection.

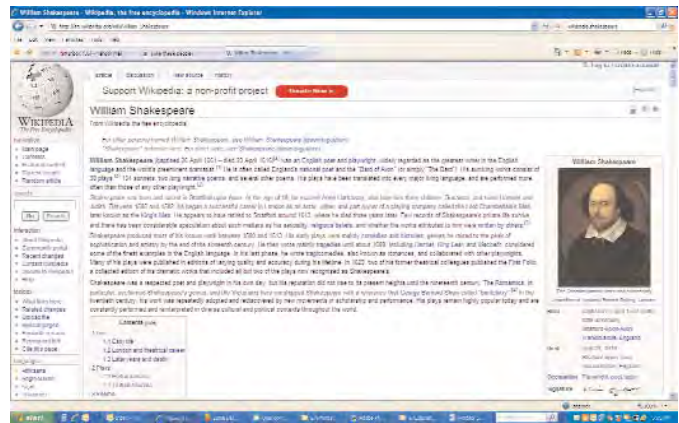
*Tales from Shakespeare: Seven Plays*, by Marcia Williams. Cambridge: Candlewick, 1998. Reading level: Ages 8-12. This collection presents comic-book styled versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Tempest*. Not only does she cover all the main plot points with lovely illustrations (actors speak Shakespeare's lines with the story explained in plain text below), but she also includes comments and illustrations highlighting the theatre-going experience of Shakespeare's time. Marcia Williams has also published another book *Bravo, Mr. William Shakespeare*, that approaches seven other plays in similar fashion (*As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Richard III*, and *King Lear*).





**Shakespeare Websites:**

- Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet: <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>
- The Shakespeare Resource Center: [www.bardweb.net](http://www.bardweb.net)
- Shakespeare's Globe Center USA: <http://www.sgc.umd.edu/>
- Shakespeare: A Virtual Field Trip: [www.hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/Svtour.html](http://www.hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/engramja/Svtour.html)
- Life in Elizabethan England: <http://elizabethan.org/compendium/>
- Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: [www.shakespeare.org.uk](http://www.shakespeare.org.uk)
- Shakespeare Lite: <http://library.thinkquest.org/23293/>



- Shakespeare Magazine: <http://www.shakespearemag.com/intro.asp>
- Absolute Shakespeare: <http://absoluteshakespeare.com/>
- Everything Shakespeare: <http://www.field-of-themes.com/shakespeare/indexmain.html>
- Ready to Use Activities for Teaching: <http://www.pearsonschool.com/>
- Shakespeare Curriculum Resources from The Center for Learning: <http://www.centerforlearning.org/c-41-shakespeare.aspx>

**One More Activity**

Write and let me know your thoughts. YOU are the reason we do what we do, and it's your responses that help us to provide theatre experiences that are exciting, meaningful and educational. Write care of:

Christopher Limber, Education Director  
 Shakespeare Festival St. Louis  
 462 N. Taylor Ave., Ste. 202  
 St. Louis, MO, 63108  
 Email: [climber@sfstl.com](mailto:climber@sfstl.com)

**Books on Shakespeare and Teaching Shakespeare:**

- Asimov, Isaac. *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*. Doubleday, 1978.
- Epstein, Norrie. *The Friendly Shakespeare*. Penguin Books, 1993.
- Gibson, Janet and Rex Gibson. *Discovering Shakespeare's Language*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kermode, Frank. *Shakespeare's Language*. Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000.
- Linklater, Kristin. *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*. Theatre Communications Group, 1992.
- Pritchard, R. E. *Shakespeare's England*. Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999.
- Papp, Joseph and Elizabeth Kirkland. *Shakespeare Alive*. Bantam Books, 1988.
- Reynolds, P. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

