

A STUDENT COMPANION TO



FEATURING AN

ALL-FEMALE CAST

*William Shakespeare's*

THE **MERCHANT** OF  
**VENICE**



CARDINAL  
**STAGE**  
COMPANY

them·es·ter  
BEAUTY  
Fall 2016

Ψ THE COLLEGE OF ARTS + SCIENCES

The goal of this Themester is to reinvigorate our considerations of beauty as a core component of the human experience across the span of time and in diverse scholarly, social and cultural settings.

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# Welcome to William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Cardinal Stage's Collaboration with the COAS Themester on Beauty

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**Ellen MacKay**, Associate Professor, English, Director of IDAH,  
chair of faculty advisory committee of Themester 2016: Beauty.

When I proposed Beauty for an IU  
Themester topic, I did so with the  
following pitch:

*As an organizing principle for  
programming that reaches across the  
diverse disciplines that comprise the  
College of Arts and sciences, Beauty  
is ideal: not only can a wide range of  
scholars, scientists, artists and community  
members speak to it, they can do so  
impassionedly. After all, beauty is at the  
root of who we are and what we do: the  
fundamental principals of science and  
mathematics unfold to us a universe  
of staggering beauty, and any form of  
cultural expression is always, in some  
crucial way, aesthetic. Philosophy has long  
tried to explain the tight grip beauty has  
on human consciousness; more recently,  
cognitive science has shown us the way  
our neurons fire in its presence. Yet in past  
decades, scholars have neglected beauty's  
place in our thinking. Its association  
with appreciation instead of critique  
and surface instead of depth has meant  
that criticism has, until lately, given it a  
wide berth. In everyday discourse beauty  
likewise plays the foil to the intellectual,  
the serious, or the substantive, insuring  
its neglect as a site of generative thinking.  
With prime-time programming largely  
given over to singing, dancing, interior  
design, fashion design and cooking  
competitions, as well as top to bottom  
personal and home makeovers, the*

*moment is ripe for lively and thoughtful  
engagement of beauty's standards, costs,  
risks, pleasures and values.*

As an example of this rich and complex  
tradition of beauty, *The Merchant of  
Venice* is extraordinarily apt. At a first  
glance the reason for this is pretty  
orthodox. *Merchant* is a play by William  
Shakespeare, by longstanding consensus  
the foremost writer of the English  
language, named by Helen Vendler as the  
poet of the millennium on the *New York  
Times*' "Best of" list in 2000. Written  
during the strong ascent of Shakespeare's  
career with the Lord Chamberlain's Men  
(before the establishment of the Globe),  
*Merchant* belongs to the same period as  
*Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's  
Dream*, and *Henry IV Part 1*, the last  
featuring the ingenious invention of the  
Prince of Wales and Falstaff as a pair of  
delightful rogues. These are plays that  
have a kind of sacred geometry to them,  
by which I mean that characters and  
actions are so well counterpoised that not  
a phrase seems out of place. Given all this,  
it follows that *The Merchant of Venice*  
would serve, like its contemporaries,  
as an example of beautiful writing and  
dramatic form. Yet *Merchant* is in many  
ways an ugly play, enfolding within its  
comic juggernaut a vicious battle between  
the forces of anti-Semitic prejudice  
and bloody revenge. Off-handed racism,  
claustrophobic patriarchy, and a society

# beauty

that takes as its highest value the right to sell anything, including and especially human flesh, are all uncomfortable features of a comedy that is ostensibly a fairy-tale romance. The title from the 1600 quarto (pocket-sized) edition brings out this mixed and discordant composition: The most excellent / Historie of the Merchant / of Venice. / With the extreame cueltie of Shylocke the Jewe / towards the sayd Merchant, in cutting a just pound / of his flesh: and the obtayning of Portia / by the choise of three / chests.

As a result, *The Merchant of Venice* is less a beautiful work than a work that offers us a sustained questioning of beauty. Nowhere is this more visible than in Bassanio's turn at the casket test, when he attempts to figure out from the surface of each chest (gold, silver and lead) where inner beauty lies in the form of Portia's portrait. (There is a close reading of a passage from this scene in the pages that follow). This is a paradoxical project, but Bassanio somehow manages to choose well, deciding that beauty is "purchased by the weight" and cannot be tallied by its outward charms—a choice that contrasts strongly with present standards of female beauty that emphasize the svelte and the outwardly lovely. Yet to arrive at this judgment he contradicts his own earlier descriptions of Portia as the "golden fleece," a prize to be won by tournament, not by sober logic. And given that Portia's retinue play a song during his deliberation that rhymes each verse with the word

"lead," it may be that like Jason, who achieved the fleece only because Medea showed him how to steal it, Bassanio can only discover where beauty lies by cheating.

The passage reveals the play in microcosm. Throughout *The Merchant of Venice*, venerable ideals like the marriage of true minds or the quality of mercy are shown to be erratically upheld. Is Portia a dowry or a partner to Bassanio? Is she "as dear as life" or a chip to be traded for Antonio's reprieve, as Bassanio fruitlessly imagines during the trial scene? Does her fidelity amount to a symbol, in the form of the wedding ring she gives him and he gives away? Or is there something greater to the marital bond than what can be cashiered by Venice's melancholy *Merchant*? Shylock's eloquent attacks on Christian hypocrisy bring out questions like these in high relief, summed up by his quip, "These be Christian husbands!" before he is brought low by Portia's "mercifixion" (this term is part of the play's fraught critical tradition—see Section 6). But the trouble doesn't end with Shylock's downfall. Even when Antonio's debt is resolved by Portia's intervention, Shakespeare never relieves us of the sense that the play's romances are headed for unbeautiful endings. He ratchets up our discomfort by bringing the Christians back to a Belmont in which every twinkling star reminds Jessica and Lorenzo of the false and dead lovers at the heart of the Western tradition.

In such a play as this, beauty's relation to the ethical and the good is set out for our active reconsideration. Whereas for Plato, beauty was an effect of the quest for a just society, for Shakespeare, beauty sugars over social cruelty, with Venice's luxe environment a callous, mercenary world that is prepared to condone the murder of one of its citizens in the open court. And yet the problems that the play brings forward ignite a spark of hope.

That Shakespeare notices Shylock's persecution, and that he hinges his play on our noticing it too, makes *The Merchant of Venice* a work that pushes us to envision the care that we owe each other, not by law or even by shared faith but by recourse to our better natures. Beauty is in terrible ways absent from *The Merchant of Venice*, but the beauty Bassanio seeks, a beauty based in virtue, is repeatedly glimpsed at, to become an idea that stays with us long after the curtain comes down.

The content of this Program offers many perspectives on beauty, from sample lines taken from Shakespeare's corpus to poems selected by literary scholars to Themester faculty accounts of their discipline's take on the subject. It also delves into the challenging nature of *The Merchant of Venice* and its author. As Plato said after trying and failing to come up with a universal description of the concept, "beautiful things are difficult." By taking some time with what is hardest in Shakespeare's play, perhaps you will concur.

them·es·ter

BEAUTY  
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# Beauty from across the Disciplines

This year's Themester asserts that Beauty is an organizing concept across the academic disciplines. But in its multiple applications it is not the same concept, nor does it do the same work. Below, several faculty members offering courses tied to the Themester theme describe the traction of beauty in their respective fields of inquiry. A common feature is that for a professor leading a course, beauty is less an idea than a structure of inquiry, or even a practice.

## Heather Akou, Associate Professor, Fashion Design, School of Art + Design

As a professor of fashion design and merchandising, my research focuses on textiles, dress, and the human body. In particular, I study African dress (Somali, West African) and contemporary Islamic fashion. "Beauty" is a nebulous concept... what is beautiful and why do we care? Is it superficial to care? Is it wrong to judge? My research has led me to conclude that beautiful things are compelling. They invite us to linger, to appreciate, to savor... to consider our place in the universe and what is meaningful and important. We value beauty because it enriches our lives as human beings, not just because the media or the marketplace tells us to. There is no single or easy way to define what is beautiful. Although our collective attention might be drawn to the visual features, smells, sounds, and/or textures of extraordinary things and people, that attention can and often does shift. What is judged as beautiful today might not be so highly esteemed tomorrow. "Classics" on the other hand, can be cherished for decades or even centuries. The subjective, ethereal nature of beauty does not diminish its value; in fact, a fleeting or difficult beauty can be especially prized.

## Andrew John Dabrowski, Senior Lecturer, Mathematics.

The abstract beauty that mathematicians pursue is famously cold. There are no tears of passion shed at math conferences. It is also invariably reductive: mathematical theorems turn mysteries into inevitabilities, and sometimes even trivialities, which is the opposite of what people look for in the Arts. Mathematical beauty is lean, almost synonymous with brevity: we value the insight that cuts to the heart of a problem while reducing superficial distractions to invisibility. This again is the opposite of what an artist does, which is to caress the details. Artists

examine the world with a microscope, mathematicians prefer to use the wrong end of a telescope.

Nevertheless mathematicians are the purest hedonists in academia. Few embark on a career in math for the promise of money, fame, or sex, for which ends one would be better off in lawn care. We are here because of an addiction to the rush of witnessing how pure thought and imagination can annihilate seemingly intractable conceptual knots.



This photo of mating monarch butterflies illustrates the lecture "Beauty and Science in the Biology of Where We Live." Photo by IU Professor of Biology and Themester Advisory Committee Member Roger Hangarter

## Roger P. Hangarter Distinguished Professor and Chancellor's Professor of Biology

In the course of our research, biologists experience diverse stimuli that elicit in us sensations of beauty. Our research subjects are often inherently beautiful in their appearance and our search for the fundamental principles that underlie their nature reveals beauty on a multitude of other levels. There is beauty in their intricacy, complexity, behavior, diversity, and interactions with other life forms. Our experiments are beautiful when we discover a fundamental natural process or make a previously unrecognized observation. The organisms we study often display responses to the same types of stimuli that also elicit a sense of beauty in humans. Plants produce perfumes and colorful flowers that are attractive to pollinators. Male bowerbirds construct elaborate colorful landscapes from found

objects to attract a mate, much like how humans adorn themselves with accessories they hope will make them appear beautiful to potential mates. In essence, the subjects of our research have innate qualities that beautify them to others of their kind and as biologists we are fortunate to enrich our lives through our research of the beauty that constitutes life. Moreover, the subjects of our research are endowed with beauty without human intervention and often even in spite of human activities.

## Jason Jackson, Professor of Folklore, Director, Mathers Museum of World Cultures

For ethnographers beauty is a key concern, but my colleagues and I strive to set aside our own inherited beliefs about what that concept means. Our task is to discover conceptions of beauty that are found variably across cultures. "Beauty" then is a loose tag that we use to keep track of a diversity of words, ideas, and exemplary instances that our interlocutors in specific social worlds might share with us. While views of beauty can be diverse within a society, considering conceptions of beauty from different peoples, expressed in a multitude of languages and expressive forms, opens up wider vistas. While something roughly translatable as beauty may be found in most societies, I find the variation of conception and expression to be of greatest interest. The Navajo, whose textiles are the focus of a 2016 Themester exhibition, offer an illustration. Their word *Hózhó* is often translated as beauty. But whereas the English concept tends to emphasize the aesthetics of sensory experience, *Hózhó* centers on healthy relationships with people, spiritual brings, and one's environment. *Hózhó* is then evidenced in the simpler kinds of beauty that we hear in a well-sung song or see in the smile of a contented person.



**Radhika Parameswaran, Professor,  
The Media School**

The global spread of beauty products and such beauty rituals as pageants and contests are an integral part of the modernization of many countries in Asia and Africa. Multinational, national and other smaller local companies have seized upon the growing purchasing power of Asian and African women who have recently joined the labor market to sell a variety of beauty products across the socio-economic spectrum. With the sponsorship and support of cosmetics companies, producers of Miss World and Miss Universe pageants have organized these pageants in new locations—India, Venezuela and Nigeria, for example—to signal their interest in becoming more diverse and multicultural and to expand their appeal to new media audiences. The number of women—many of them migrating from rural to urban areas—entering the retail, hospitality and tourism industries has increased greatly across Asia and Africa in the last two decades, and these women are ideal consumers for beauty products and services. Feminist scholars are interested in studying the global expansion of beauty culture as a part of many different nations' incorporation into the global economy. How does the arrival of global commodity beauty culture in new parts of the world enable or disable women from achieving their goals? Feminist scholars tackle this question from various angles and their work has produced a lively debate on gender and global modernity.

**Caty Pilachowski,  
Professor of Astronomy.**

Astronomical images, from the first telescopic drawings by Galileo to the magnificent Hubble Heritage images from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope both awe us with their beauty and move us to understand more deeply the Universe in which we live. Breathtaking images of galaxies, nebulae, and star clusters reveal the secrets of our universe and of our own origins. Astronomy's spectacular images both portray our place in space and time on the largest scales and challenge our intellectual understanding of the complex processes that form galaxies, stars, and planets. Iconic Hubble images like the Pillars of Creation or the majestic Ring Nebula are recognized everywhere, and have captured the public imagination with their beauty. Astronomy's place as

the most accessible of the sciences and its popularity among people everywhere are due in significant part to the beauty of its images, which inspire people around the world.

**Kathleen Rowold, Professor,  
Department of Apparel Merchandising  
+ Interior Design; Director of the  
Sage Collection**

When is it considered beautiful for women to have broad shoulders? Why are narrow hips popular for a while and a then full, round derriere preferred? How can straight boyish figures be fashionable one decade and then curvy voluptuous breasts desirable the next?

Ideals of beauty focusing on body shapes and proportions are variable and usually unattainable. Typically, these ideals are dictated by the fashion gatekeepers of the culture (the aristocracy, the wealthy, celebrities, the media powerful, and leaders of commerce) rather than the actual designer. Each generation is taught by example to embrace the preconceived notions of beauty related to fashion; however, they are also taught to seek and treasure novelty, and thus fashion changes emerge. Beginning with the columnar shape of the Greco-Roman inspired gowns of the early 1800s, to the hourglass silhouettes of the 1830s Romantic period, to the dome-shaped skirts of the antebellum years, women's fashions until the 19th century consisted of expanding and contracting skirts and ballooning sleeves draped over foundation garments such as corsets, petticoats and bustles that molded and shaped the human form. Contradicting concepts of beauty in fashion during the 20th century emerged with increasing speed due to mass media and the ready-to-wear fashion industry that promoted variations in silhouette and skirt lengths. Technological innovation, e-commerce, and social media ushered in a lean, urban, cyber-style in the early 21st century. Driven by rapid retail product turnover, a multiplicity of fashion looks led to the dissolution of a monolithic 21st century style.

**Anya Peterson Royce, Chancellor's  
Professor of Anthropology and  
Comparative Literature**

Beauty of human making requires mindfulness, reflection, discipline, and intention. Nature is not bound by those rules. Do we find/define beauty in the same way in both contexts? Do all peoples



This photo, taken in 2009 in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, shows women wearing Baiana dress, which combines elements of African and European clothing. It is part of the Mathers Museum exhibit "Costume: Performing Identities through Dress."

recognize and define beauty in the same way? Do we define beauty solely in terms of form or do we appreciate "beauty" for what it does for us – for example, reminding the Dine' people of respect for community and being present? Seamus Heaney describes an Irish landscape in these words: "things founded clean on their own shapes, water and ground in their extremity." What do words like 'clean' and 'shapes' connote? Do White Mountain Apache recognize this as beauty in their own world-scape or are the stories associated with places most important?

If we examine symmetry, we find peoples who regard symmetry as an essential component of beauty, and others, like the Balinese or Henri Matisse who find beauty in asymmetry, though that asymmetry acknowledges the plumline of being in balance, being centered.

The Tongan Islanders lump dance, kava ceremonies, and the presentation of pigs under one term that translates roughly as "taking the long way around." This way is filled with meanders, elaboration, doubling back, metaphorical imagery. Cellist Janos Starker gives highest praise to musical interpretations that are not predictable but which, in the end, seem inevitable. The Zapotec people of Mexico value being present and being in balance but know that you only appreciate these states by embracing the unknown. They share this principle of uncertainly, imbalance, and surprise with the Balinese, Starker, the Tongan islanders, and Matisse. Should we re-examine Edmund Burke's distinction between that which pleases us—beauty, and that which moves us—the sublime? Is the unexpected necessary for us to experience the sublime? And where does it leave beauty?



# *A Short Sketch of Shakespeare's Life as We Know it*

Drawn from the Folger Library's educational resources // [www.folger.edu/shakespeare](http://www.folger.edu/shakespeare)

Since William Shakespeare died 400 years ago and many records from Renaissance England are either lost or never existed at all, we don't know as much as we would like about his life. Still, we can cobble together a biographical profile with the facts that remain.

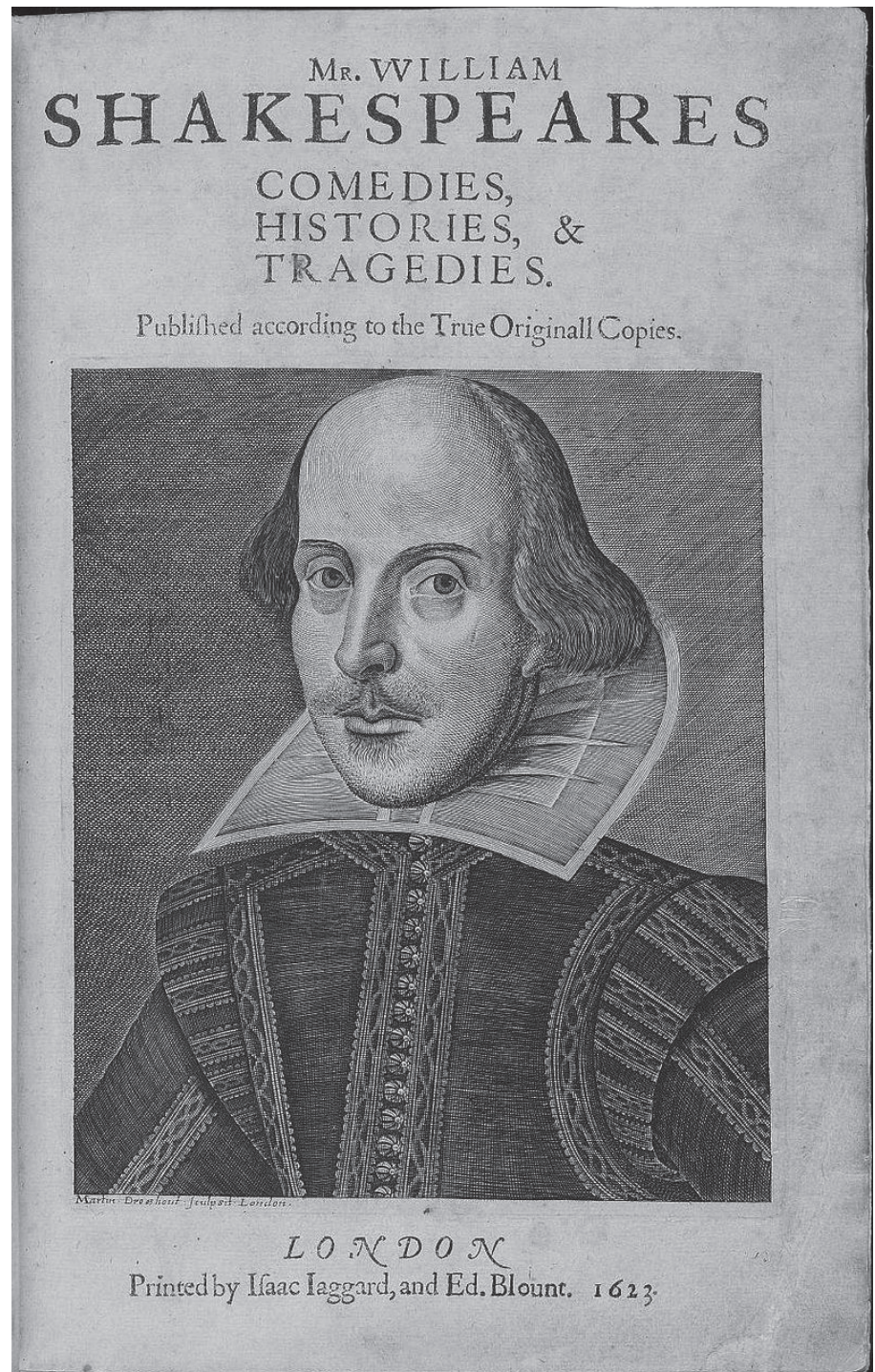
We know that he was baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon, 100 miles northwest of London, on April 26, 1564. We don't know his exact birthdate, but because baptism usually followed childbirth by a few days, we have settled on a birthdate of April 23, which is also St. George's Day (St. George is the patron saint of England).

We know that Shakespeare's life revolved around two locations: Stratford and London. He grew up, had a family, and bought property in Stratford, but he worked in London, the center of English theater. As an actor, a playwright, and a partner in a leading acting company (two, actually—first the Lord Chamberlain's Men, then the King's Men), he became both prosperous and well-known.

## **Birth and childhood**

William Shakespeare was John and Mary Shakespeare's oldest surviving child; their first two children, both girls, did not live beyond infancy. William had three younger brothers, Gilbert, Richard, and Edmund, and two younger sisters: Anne, who died at seven, and Joan.

Their father, John Shakespeare, was a leatherworker who specialized in the soft white leather used for gloves and similar items. A prosperous businessman, he married Mary Arden, of the prominent Arden family. John rose through local offices in Stratford, becoming an alderman and eventually, when William was five, the town bailiff—a sort of custodian of the town's business. Not long after that, however, John



The portrait of William Shakespeare engraved by Martin Droeshout as the frontispiece for the title page of the First Folio collection of Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623.



Shakespeare stepped back from public life; we don't know why. Shakespeare, as the son of a leading Stratford citizen, almost certainly attended Stratford's grammar school. Like all such schools, its curriculum consisted of an intense emphasis on the Latin classics, including the memorization, re-writing, and acting of classic Latin plays. Shakespeare most likely attended until about age 15.

**Marriage and children**

A few years after he left school, in late 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. She was already expecting their first child, Susanna, which was a fairly common situation at the time. When they married, Anne was 26 and William was 18. Anne grew up just outside Stratford in the village of Shottery. After marrying William,

she spent the rest of her life in Stratford.

In early 1585, the couple had twins, Judith and Hamnet, completing the family. In the years ahead, Anne and the children lived in Stratford while Shakespeare worked in London, although we don't know when he moved there. Some later observers have suggested that this separation, and the couple's relatively few children, were signs of a strained marriage, but we do not know that, either. Someone pursuing a theater career had no choice but to work in London, and many branches of the Shakespeares had small families.

Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, died in 1596 at the age of 11. His older daughter Susanna later married a well-to-do Stratford doctor, John Hall. Their daughter Elizabeth, Shakespeare's first

grandchild, was born in 1608. In 1616, just months before his death, Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, a Stratford vintner. The family subsequently died out, leaving no direct descendants.

**London theater**

For several years after Judith and Hamnet's arrival in 1585, nothing is known for certain of Shakespeare's activities: how he earned a living, when he moved from Stratford, or how he got his start in the theater.

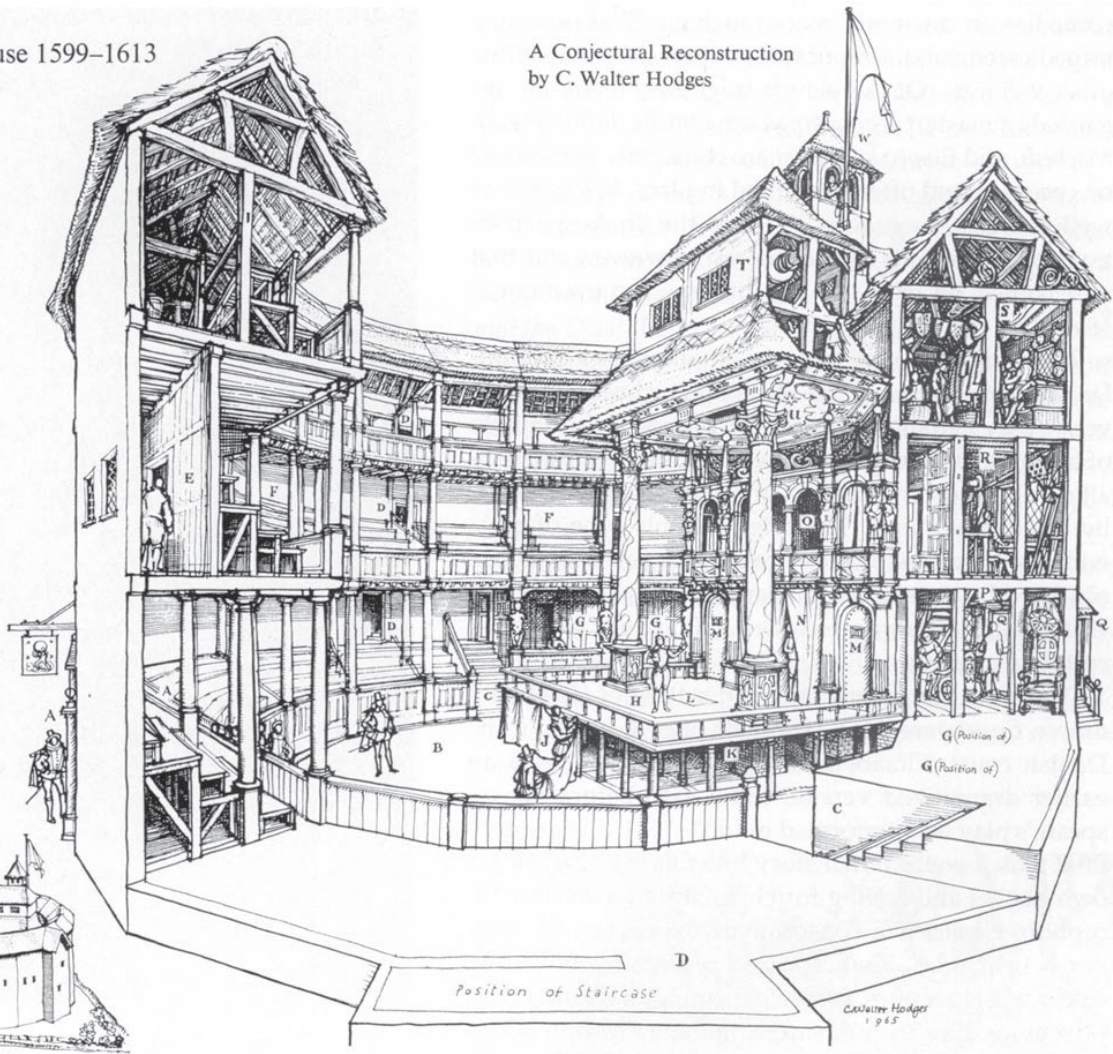
The first definite mention of Shakespeare is in 1592, when he is described by a rival playwright as a certain Master "Shakespeare." The same writer alludes to one of Shakespeare's earliest history plays, *Henry VI, Part 3*, which must already have been performed. The next year, in 1593, Shakespeare published a long poem, *Venus*

The Globe Playhouse 1599–1613

A Conjectural Reconstruction by C. Walter Hodges

KEY

- A Main entrance
- B The Yard, where the 'groundlings' stood (for one penny admission)
- CC Entrances to lowest gallery (on payment of another penny)
- D Entrances to staircase and upper galleries
- E Corridor serving the different sections of the middle gallery
- F Middle gallery (The 'Twopenny Rooms')
- G 'Gentlemen's Rooms' or 'Lords' Rooms'
- H The stage
- J The hanging being put up round the stage (N.B. In some theatres this was boarded in)
- K The 'Hell' under the stage
- L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell
- M Stage doors, leading into the tiring-house
- N Curtained 'place behind the stage', sometimes opened for special scenes
- O Gallery above the stage, used as required sometimes by musicians, sometimes by spectators, and often as part of the play (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*)
- P Back-stage area (the tiring-house)
- Q Tiring-house door
- R Dressing rooms
- S Wardrobe and storage
- T The hut housing the machine for lowering enthroned gods, etc., to the stage
- U The 'Heavens'
- W Hoisting the playhouse flag

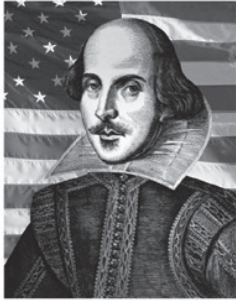




# LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1555 1556 1557 1558 1559 1560 1561 1562 1563 1564 1565 1566 1567 1568 1569 1570 1571 1572 1573 1574 1575 1576 1577 1578 1579 1580 1581 1582 1583 1584 1585 1586 1587 1588 1589 1590 1591 1592 1593 1594

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS PRESENTS



SHAKESPEARE IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE AND WORK



★ William Shakespeare born to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Shakespeare attends grammar school.

Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway.

Shakespeare's twins Judith and Hamnet born.

Shakespeare begins the Sonnets.

Shakespeare's daughter Susanna born.

Shakespeare goes to London to pursue life as an actor and playwright.



HENRY VI, PART II · HENRY VI, PART III (date of first performance)

HENRY VI, PART I

RICHARD III · THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

TITUS ANDRONICUS · TAMING OF THE SHREW

"The inaudible and noiseless foot of time," ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL



James Earl Jones in Othello

"The play's the thing." HAMLET



Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio in Romeo and Juliet



John Barrymore in Hamlet

1555 1556 1557 1558 1559 1560 1561 1562 1563 1564 1565 1566 1567 1568 1569 1570 1571 1572 1573 1574 1575 1576 1577 1578 1579 1580 1581 1582 1583 1584 1585 1586 1587 1588 1589 1590 1591 1592 1593 1594

WESTERN HISTORY

Queen Elizabeth I of England begins her reign.



A series of civil wars between the Catholics and Protestants, known as the Wars of Religion, begins in France.

John Calvin, an influential Protestant leader during the Reformation, dies.

A revolt of the Spanish-ruled Netherlands against Phillip II, King of Spain, begins the Eighty Years War.

Thousands of French Protestants are killed in what is known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

Sir Francis Drake circumnavigates the globe and is knighted.

Mary Queen of Scots tried for treason and is beheaded.

The Wars of Religion end when Henry of Navarre becomes King Henry IV of France.

Plague kills 15,000 in London. Theaters in London close to control disease.



An outbreak of the plague devastates London.



Katharine Hepburn in Antony and Cleopatra



The British Navy defeats the Spanish Armada, avoiding a long war between England and Spain.

◀ 1540 Michelangelo finishes painting *The Last Judgment*.

Christopher "Kit" Marlowe born.

Poet John Donne born.

The first permanent theater in England, the Theatre, is built.

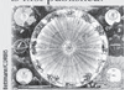
Satirist John Fletcher born.

Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine* first produced.

Thomas Kyd: *The Spanish Tragedy* first produced. The popular play influenced Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

WESTERN ARTS, SCIENCE AND CULTURE

◀ 1543 Copernicus' heliocentric theory, claiming the sun is the center of the universe, is first published.



Arthur Golding translates Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. The text later influenced Shakespeare's work.



Playwright Ben Jonson born.

Raphael Holinshed publishes *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, which becomes Shakespeare's primary source for his history plays.

Marlowe's play *Dr. Faustus* first produced.



Richard Burbage, who portrayed many of Shakespeare's characters, born.

Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta* first produced. The production influenced Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.



Anthony Dondos and Claire Luce in *Much Ado About Nothing*



The Sallie Mac Fund



Unless otherwise indicated, all images are from the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, home to the world's largest Shakespeare collection. To learn more, visit [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu).



Claes Jansz Visscher's map of London, 1625

1594 1595 1596 1597 1598 1599 1600 1601 1602 1603 1604 1605 1606 1607 1608 1609 1610 1611 1612 1613 1614 1615 1616 1617 1618 1619 1620 1621 1622 1623 1624 1625

Shakespeare's writing begins.

Hamnet Shakespeare dies at age 11.

Shakespeare purchases New Place, the second largest house in Stratford.

Shakespeare's father dies. He purchases more land in Stratford and the cottage across from New Place.

Shakespeare purchases more land in Stratford.

Globe Theatre burns to the ground.

Globe Theatre, completely rebuilt, reopens.

★ On April 23, Shakespeare dies at age 52, and is buried at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, two days later.

Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway, dies.

First Folio of Shakespeare's work is published.

Shakespeare becomes founding member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

Lord Chamberlain's Men lease land and build the Globe Theatre from the remains of the Theatre. The Globe opens.

Shakespeare is listed as a principal actor in the program for Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, confirming his reputation as an actor.

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* published without his permission.

Shakespeare retires from the theatre, moves permanently to Stratford.

Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway, dies.

First Folio of Shakespeare's work is published.

Shakespeare prospers financially from his partnership in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men), as well as from his writing and acting. He invested much of his wealth in real-estate purchases in Stratford and bought the second-largest house in town, New Place, in 1597. He died on April 23, 1616—the traditional date of his birthday. We also do not know the cause of his death. His brother-in-law had died a week earlier, which could imply infectious disease, but Shakespeare's health may have had a longer decline.

The memorial bust of Shakespeare at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford is considered one of two authentic likenesses, because it was approved by people who knew him. The other such likeness is the engraving by Martin Droeshout in the 1623 First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, produced seven years after his death by his friends and colleagues from the King's Men.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA • LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST • ROMEO AND JULIET  
 RICHARD II • A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM  
 KING JOHN • THE MERCHANT OF VENICE  
 HENRY IV, PART I • HENRY IV, PART II  
 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING • HENRY V  
 AS YOU LIKE IT • TWELFTH NIGHT  
 HAMLET • THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR  
 TROILUS AND CRESSIDA  
 ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL  
 MEASURE FOR MEASURE • OTHELLO  
 KING LEAR • MACBETH  
 ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA  
 CORIOLANUS • TIMON OF ATHENS  
 PERICLES  
 CYMBELINE  
 THE WINTER'S TALE  
 THE TEMPEST  
 HENRY VIII • THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

1594 1595 1596 1597 1598 1599 1600 1601 1602 1603 1604 1605 1606 1607 1608 1609 1610 1611 1612 1613 1614 1615 1616 1617 1618 1619 1620 1621 1622 1623 1624 1625

Sir Walter Raleigh explores 300 miles up the Orinoco River.

Phillip II of Spain dies. French Protestants are permitted to freely practice their religion by the Edict of Nantes.

English Parliament prescribes sentences sending criminals to the colonies.

The Earl of Essex attempts to rebel against Queen Elizabeth, fails and is executed.

The Theatre permanently closes due to the expiration of its lease.

Dutch opticians invent the telescope.

John Florio's *A World of Words* (English-Italian dictionary) is published.

The Globe Theatre is built on Bankside from the timbers of the Theatre.

First Water Closets (toilets) put in homes.

England establishes a peace treaty with Spain.

Sir Walter Raleigh is arrested, tried and imprisoned because he disobeyed the Queen by secretly marrying one of her maids of honor.

Queen Elizabeth dies. James VI of Scotland succeeds Elizabeth I becoming King James I of England and Scotland.

The "Scientific Revolution" begins with Johann Keplers recordings of planetary movements and Galileo's perfection of the telescope.

Henry Hudson explores Delaware Bay and Hudson River.

Jamestown, one of the first English settlements in the Americas, is founded.

King Henry IV of France is murdered. He is succeeded by his son, Louis XIII.

Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone* is written.

The King James Bible first published.

Ben Jonson's *Works* published. He is first living playwright to publish his complete works.

Tobacco planted in Virginia.

Pocahontas marries John Rolfe.

King Henry IV of France is murdered. He is succeeded by his son, Louis XIII.

Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* is published.

Sir Walter Raleigh released from lower to lead expedition in search of El Dorado.

Lucy Newman-Williams in *Macbeth*.

Kevin Kline and Michelle Pfeiffer in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Al Pacino in *Looking for Richard*.

Al Pacino in *Looking for Richard*.

Lucy Newman-Williams in *Macbeth*.

Kevin Kline and Michelle Pfeiffer in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



# “Which is the Merchant here, and which the Jew?”

Is *The Merchant of Venice* anti-Semitic?

## Mirjam Zadoff

*The Merchant of Venice* has often been described as an anti-Semitic play, but is this really the case? Scholars have tried to trace Shakespeare’s knowledge of Jews, have asked whether he knew Jews or even had the opportunity to meet them up close. England had expelled all its Jewish inhabitants back in 1290. Not until the middle of the 17th century were Jews officially permitted to settle again in England. Yet, after the expulsion of the Jewish communities of Portugal and Spain in the 1490ies, a tiny minority of Sephardi Jews settled in London. They had been forced to convert to Christianity by the Spanish inquisition and as such they arrived to England, hiding their true identity and only secretly practicing their faith. As merchants and skilled traders these ‘crypto-Jews’ were most useful to the country, but the Queen tolerated their presence especially because of their international connections and their knowledge of the Iberian Peninsula – after all England was at war with Spain.

But is it really important whether Shakespeare knew these Jews? What he presents us with are two characters, the merchant Antonio and Shylock the Jew, who are striking in their likeness and who inhabit the same world – a most specific world with its own laws and language: the world of mercantile commerce. Medieval Christianity had limited the trade of moneylending to Jewish merchants, who according to the Hebrew Bible were allowed to do so. Christians on the other hand were forbidden to engage in this profession for the sake of universal brotherhood. In 1571 England legalized moneylending for Christians, and Shakespeare’s father engaged in it and was accused of usury, which remained a crime. Nonetheless the English public continued to associate moneylending with Jews, and Christian moneylenders would even wear typical Jewish hats to ensure their customers of their professionalism. Consequently many critics saw the growing importance of commerce and mercantile culture as a negative – Jewish

– influence.

According to historian David Nirenberg the crucial question that underlies *The Merchant of Venice* and that Shakespeare ask his audience is this: “How can a society built on ‘Jewish’ foundations of commerce, contract, property, and law consider itself Christian?” This differentiation between a ‘Jewish’ world of commerce and a Christian world of divine love was not new but referred to an old Christian argument: accusing the Jews of having made the wrong choice by embracing commerce and letting themselves be alienated from god. As Nirenberg continues, Shakespeare presents us with a world of commerce, in which the boundaries between the Jew and the merchant are blurred, a world in which it has become impossible to clearly differentiate between the two. And therefore Shakespeare recuperates and imposes on his character an inherent Jewish otherness - to enormous Christian relief. If we accept Nirenberg’s compelling analysis, we must conclude that *The Merchant* is an early take on modern anti-Semitism.

Whatever Shakespeare’s intentions were, the figure of Shylock became associated with usurious cruelty.

## How was Shylock perceived in the Jewish world?

The great romantic poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) expressed his fascination for the tragic figure and called him “the most respectable person in the piece.” Heine, himself of Jewish decent, had converted to Christianity as a reaction to the demands of the world surrounding him – a step which he regretted afterwards. For him and many of his contemporaries, Shylock came to mirror the ambiguous state of Jewishness in modernity.

Shylock loses what is most valuable to him – his daughter Jessica. He loses her not only to another man but also to Christianity, consequently he himself is forced to renounce his faith and convert. This reflects the highly complex situation of European Jewry in the early modern

period and up until the 18th century: the momentary power of a single Jew as an economic player in a game beyond his scale versus the collective powerlessness and dependence of the Jewish community and the Jewish family.

In the second half of the 19th century the Polish-Jewish painter Maurycy Gottlieb portrayed Shylock with an emphasis on this tragic drama: as the loving and caring father of Jessica, as a noble old man. Interestingly Gottlieb painted Shylock and Jessica very similarly to an earlier painting of his, depicting Nathan the Wise and his daughter Recha. Nathan, a fictional character by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, is very different from Shylock: Modeled after the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, one of the most important proponents of the enlightenment, he is noble, just and wise. Gottlieb’s comparison of the two reflects the modern embrace of Shylock by many Jewish intellectuals, who saw in the troubled figure a universal Jewish hero.

The complex character of Shylock keeps changing over time, with his various interpretations and audiences. The most extreme examples are the countless National-socialist interpretations during the year 1933 and 1945, which seemed to embark on a competition for the most anti-Semitic production of *The Merchant of Venice* and the most vicious depiction of Shylock. Also as a consequence of this the play is not put on stage in Israeli theaters until today.

In 2012 the Israeli National Theater Habimah was scheduled to perform *The Merchant of Venice* at the London Globe Theater. The performance in Hebrew, as part of the International Shakespeare Festival featuring plays in 37 languages, was disturbed by the furious uproar of protesters outside the theater. What was their problem? As part of a larger anti-Israel boycott movement they protested against a public performance by the Israeli National Theater in London, and against Shakespeare being played in Hebrew. This boycott movement is a reaction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and targets Israeli academics and artists



abroad, despite the fact that they are often an oppositional voice within Israel. In a somewhat ironic manner, during the boycotters' protest on the streets, Shylock was inside the Globe Theatre reciting his monologue on anti-Jewish prejudice.

A most recent take by the Royal Shakespeare Company features Makram Khoury as Shylock. Khoury was born in Jerusalem in 1945, and he and his family became Israeli citizens after the creation of the State of Israel. The actor was the first Arab Israeli to win the Israel Prize, the highest civic honor in Israel. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict his appearance in the play is of course a highly political statement. In Khoury's interpretation Shylock becomes, more than ever, an agent for a universal cause, a paradigmatic representative of the oppressed.

To conclude: What was Shakespeare, the playwrights, relationship to his fictional character? Did he like or despise his Shylock? As Kenneth Gross, Professor of English at Rochester University, argues, Shakespeare actually should have thanked his protagonist: *The Merchant of Venice* was Shakespeare's breakthrough as a playwright, and with Shylock he had created a character larger and more complex than the play that contains it.

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(above) Maurycy Gottlieb, *Shylock and Jessica*, 1876.



(left) Maurycy Gottlieb, *Recha welcoming her father*, 1877. Based on the play *Nathan the Wise*, by Gotthold Lessing, 173.



# Beauty and Ugliness in Jewish History

## Mirjam Zadoff

Owing to its anti-idolatrous stance, traditional Judaism prohibits any depiction of human beings. The Jewish law states that it “is forbidden to make complete solid or raised images of people or angels, or any images of heavenly bodies.” Consequently until the age of modernity and the advent of secular Judaism there are no images of human beings to be found in Jewish art. Until then most visual images of Jews were produced by Christians, who portrayed Jews in an unfavorable manner, reflecting religious anti-Judaism. These images show Jews as physically and morally deformed: as greedy moneylenders or ritual murderers of Christian children—the latter a Christian myth that fueled anti-Semitic violence in the late medieval and early modern periods. Since the 17th century portrayals of Jews by Christian artists started to include images of beauty, depicting them as the noble protagonists of the Christian Old Testament – the Hebrew Bible. By doing so, painters were able to portray Jewish beauty without being criticized for their too favorable image of contemporary Jews, as the example of Rembrandt’s *The Jewish Bride* (1667) reflects. Especially during the 19th and 20th century, images of Jews in the eyes of others shifted towards exceptional beauty on the one hand and extraordinary ugliness on the



(above) Eugene Delacroix, *Juive De Tanger En Costume D'apparat*, 1835.



(left) Averil Burleigh, “Look to my house,” illustration from *Shylock*, a novelization of *The Merchant of Venice*, 1918.

other. Racial anti-Semitism attributed to Jews hideously distorted faces and bodies – marked by hooked noses, large foreheads, bulging eyes and bowed legs. On the other hand, non-Jewish as well as Jewish artists discovered oriental Jewesses as women of stunning exotic beauty, reflected by paintings like *Juive de Tanger* by French artist Charles Landelle (1874) or *Beauté orientale* by Émile Vernet-

Lecomte (1869) and numerous paintings by Eugene Delacroix—most notably his *Juive De Tanger En Costume D'apparat* (1835). Various illustrations of Shylock and his daughter Jessica reflect this shift by mixing the stereotypical features of Jewish men with those of the ‘Jewish Beauty’.

# The Merchant of Venice: *Excerpts from the Critical Reception of a Beautiful and Ugly Play*

*Though we have seen the play received and acted as a comedy, and the part of the Jew performed by an excellent comedian, yet I cannot but think that it was designed tragically by the author. There appears in it such a deadly spirit of revenge, such a savage fierceness and fellness, and such a bloody designation of cruelty and mischief, as cannot agree either with the style or character of comedy.*

—Nicholas Rowe, editor of *Shakespeare*, 1709

It may surprise you to hear that *The Merchant of Venice* is not, strictly speaking, a Problem Play. This category was invented by the scholar F. S. Boas in 1896 to describe those works that are poised uncomfortably between tragedy and comedy, and that do not resolve with the resounding finality that we expect from both genres. For Boas, inspired by the sober social dramas of Henrik Ibsen (such as *A Dolls House* and *Hedda Gabler*), the Problem Plays consisted of *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, all of which are listed in the 1623 Folio edition of Shakespeare's works as Comedies, but that torture the category with their unlikely pairings of lovers and asymmetrically 'happy' marriages. Boas thought these imperfect love plots pointed to something rotten in the state where they were situated (he borrowed the notion from Hamlet, which he saw as the tragic key to the Problem Comedies), and to something improper in their address of the audience—as Ernst Schanzer puts it, they play “fast and loose with our response affections,... engaging and alienating them in turn.”

By contrast, *The Merchant of Venice* has seemed a tight comic construction. Three marriages take place over the course of the play's first three acts, and however precarious their grounds, they do not unravel before the play ends. For its conformity with the demand that all the single men and single women meet their matches, it has been thought problem-free.

Still, even before the postwar repudiation of anti-Semitism, scholars

struggled to account for the play's strange amalgam of religious persecution, murderous revenge and fairy tale romance. *The Merchant of Venice* has never delivered its audience to the “cockleshell boat of romantic comedy,” a phrase John Wain uses to characterize plays like *As You Like It* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that carry audiences away from their real-world concerns. A perfect example is Puck's epilogue at the close of *Midsummer*:

“If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream”.

Instead, as Ruth Nevo writes, *Merchant* is “split, sundered, schizoid.” Shuttling back and forth between the fantasy world of Belmont and the legal cruelties of Venice, audiences are less transported than seasick. Its insistence on oppositions that are never reconciled has made the play one that scholars argue strongly over. At issue is not merely what the play is about, but what a play is for. Should good comedy be “no more yielding [than] a dream?” Or should it nag at us by mingling merriment with blunt expressions of prejudice? Can ugly scenes push us to seek or establish moral beauty? Or do the deficiencies of character forfeit the pleasure and the worth of the theatrical experience? More so than any other play in the canon, *Merchant* raises these questions and “threaten[s] Shakespeare's reputation as a masterful and enlightened artist” (Paul Godet, “Lorenzo's 'Infidel'”). What follows are some selections from the wide variety of critical responses to the play. Some may offer new insights. Some may seem plainly wrong. The beauty of great art is that it lies with you to decide how to resolve them, and in the process to learn what “energies, affinities, and admirations” shape you. So Susan Sontag wrote in 2002.

Read simply and clearly, the story of Shylock is a story of one man so alien to a certain beautiful society whose precincts he invades that by contrast he looks, sounds, and acts ugly.” Mark Van Doren, 1951.

## Problem Comedies

*“All these dramas introduce us into highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe with rottenness. Amidst such abnormal conditions of brain and of emotion are generated intricate cases of conscience that demand a solution by unprecedented methods. Thus throughout these plays we move long dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome. (F.S. Boas, Shakespeare and his Predecessors, London, 1896, 345.)*

*“the essential characteristic of a problem play ... is that a perplexing and distressing complication in human life is presented in a spirit of high seriousness ... the theme is handled so as to arouse not merely interest or excitement, or pity or amusement, but to probe the complicated interrelations of character and action, in a situation admitting of different ethical interpretations.... The 'problem' is not like one in mathematics, to which there is a single true solution, but is one of conduct, as to which there are no fixed and immutable laws. Often it cannot be reduced to any formula, any one question, since human life is too complex to be so neatly simplified” (W. W. Lawrence, quoted in Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, London 1931, 4)*

*“One of the marks of these plays—though it is by no means confined to them—is the playwright's procedure of manipulating our response to the principal characters, playing fast and loose with our response affections for them, engaging and alienating them in turn. (For the sake of convenience, the term 'dramatic coquetry' may be coined to describe this procedure.)” (Ernest Schanzer, Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, London 1931, 70).*





"Tarry a little, Jew, said Portia, this bond here gives you no drop of blood" An illustration for the immensely popular Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare by Louis Rhead, about 1918. Courtesy of Folger Library.

At what would correspond in medieval terminology to the moral level, the play is concerned to explore and define Christian love and its various antitheses. As revealed in the action, Christian love involves both giving and forgiving; it demands an attitude of carelessness regarding the things of this world founded upon a trust in God's providence; an attitude of self-forgetfulness and humility founded upon recognition of man's common sinfulness; a readiness to give and risk everything, possessions and person, for the sake of love; and a willingness to forgive injuries and to love enemies. Barbara Lewalski, 1962.

Shakespeare... presents us a Venice that lived in the Elizabethan mind... a city of royal merchants trading to the gorgeous East, of Jews in their gaberdines... and of splendid gentlemen in rustling silks. To the lucky young Englishman who could hope to travel there, Venice stood for culture and manners and the luxury of civilization; and this—without one word of description—is how Shakespeare pictures it. Harley Granville-Barker, 1946.

The whole play dramatizes the conflict between the triumph of human, social relations over the relations kept track of by accounting. C. L. Barber, 1959.

The central theme of love's wealth is amplified... in Jessica's story: she escapes with Lorenzo from behind the locked doors of Shylock's house, squanders the Venetian wealth she has stolen in joyful celebration, and then finds peace and happiness with the "unthrift love" (5.1.16). John Russell Brown, 1957.

You must not suppose that since Portia has all our sympathy Shylock can have none: poetic drama can be paradoxical. Portia stands serene in white purity, symbol of Christian romance. But Shylock, saying he is ill, picks up his cloak and goes out robed in purple: the purple of tragedy. Two tremendous imaginative issues conflict: the romantic dream and tragic realism. G Wilson Knight, 1936.

*The Merchant of Venice* is "about" judgment, redemption and mercy; the supersession in human history of the grim four thousand years of unalleviated justice by the era of love and mercy. It begins with usury and corrupt love; it ends with harmony and perfect love. Frank Kermode, 1961.

I have to confess that what seems to me obvious is that the promised supersession of justice by love and mercy does not come about, and that the end is something of a parody of heavenly harmony and love. A. D. Moody, 1961.

I cannot picture Portia, who is certainly no Victorian doormat of a wife, allowing her bridegroom to let her enter the house by herself. If Antonio is not to fade away into a nonentity, then the married couples must enter the lighted house and leave Antonio standing alone on the darkened stage, outside the Eden from which, not by the choice of others, but by his own nature, he is excluded. W. H. Auden, 1962.

Christian villainy in *Merchant* takes a deceptively mild form. In ancient times Jews were tied or nailed to a cross and left to hang until dead. In Shakespeare's Venice strict justice is mitigated by an act of mercy: the Jew is denied his living but granted his life (4.1.365-94). Instead of being crucified, he is mercifixed. Mercifixion may be more humane than crucifixion: you mercify rather than punish. Nevertheless, it inflicts its own kind of pain: you punish by mercifixing. Harry Berger, 2010.

With its reliance on safe aphorisms and its fairy-tale atmosphere, the casket-choice scenes could hardly be more distanced. But the fairy tale of Belmont becomes the nightmare of 4.1, and the language provoked by the casket plot insistently returns us to Shylock's knife, in effect undoing that distance after all. Morocco initiates the casket choices by offering to "make incision for [Portia's] love" (2.1.6); Bassanio's reference to cowards, "Who, inward searched, have livers white as milk" (3.2.86) similarly invokes the image of the knife. Faced with the caskets, Aragon prides himself on his capacity to see beyond "the fool multitude ... Which pries not to th'interior" (2.9.25-27); but the first and last interior the play invites its audience to pry into is Antonio's. Jane Adelman, 2008.

## Beauty in *The Merchant of Venice*: a close look

There is but one use of the word “beauty” as an aesthetic concept in *The Merchant of Venice*, but it comes at a crucial moment, when Bassanio makes his choice during the casket test. On the one hand, Bassanio’s success would make his take on beauty seem sound and well-reasoned. But as the annotations below discuss, his preference for lead over gold marks an unexplained change in his style of thought.

**SPOILER ALERT:** if you would like to be kept in suspense on this pivotal plot point, please read this AFTER YOU HAVE WATCHED THE PRODUCTION, because I am about to destroy the surprise of both his choice and the logic that he uses to make it.

So may the outward shows<sup>1</sup> be least themselves;  
The world is still deceived with ornament.  
In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt  
But, being seasoned with a gracious voice,  
Obscures the show of evil? In religion,  
What damnèd error but some sober brow  
Will bless it and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?  
There is no vice so simple but assumes  
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.  
How many cowards whose hearts are all as false  
As stairs of sand, wear yet upon their chins  
The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars,  
Who inward searched have livers white as milk,  
And these assume but valor’s excrement  
To render them redoubted. Look on beauty,  
And you shall see ‘tis purchased by the weight;<sup>2</sup>  
Which therein works a miracle in nature,  
Making them lightest that wear most of it:  
So are those crisped snaky golden locks<sup>3</sup>  
Which make such wanton gambols with the wind,  
Upon supposed fairness, often known  
To be the dowry of a second head,  
The skull that bred them in the sepulchre.  
Thus ornament is but the guiled shore  
To a most dangerous sea; the beauteous scarf  
Veiling an Indian beauty;<sup>4</sup> in a word,  
The seeming truth which cunning times put on  
To entrap the wisest. Therefore, thou gaudy gold,  
Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee;  
Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge  
‘Tween man and man. But thou, thou meager lead,  
Which rather threaten’st than dost promise aught,  
Thy paleness<sup>5</sup> moves me more than eloquence,  
And here choose I.

1. *The mistrust of “outward shows” is a cultural mainstay in the English Renaissance—you might remember Hamlet contrasting “actions that a man might play” with his sincere and anguishing grief “which passeth show.” This opposition is not new; Christian thought has long warned against the dangers of superficial or ornamental beauty, often personified by a seductive woman—e.g. Eve, Delilah, Bathsheba, Jezebel—and promoted the inner beauty of a life devoutly lived, away from the dazzle of luxurious and venal things. But an interesting feature of this theme in Shakespeare’s time is the way opponents of the stage use the critique of ornament to condemn the stage. Because acting is an insincere art, trading in actions and feelings that are merely outwardly performed, religious critics argue that it should not be tolerated in a Protestant nation. One of the hallmarks of the Puritan regime of Oliver Cromwell is his closure of the theatres, including Shakespeare’s Globe. Why would Shakespeare borrow from the rhetoric of his opponents,? Possibly to show how ornament is better understood as a problem of hypocrisy—of seeming one thing and doing another in the high stakes precincts of real life, like the courthouse, the church and the army. Possibly to signal the spuriousness of Bassanio’s rationalizing.*

2. *This idea of beauty as no bling and all substance borrows from a Christian ethics of goodness, based on the eschewing of momentary pleasure for long-term rewards.*

3. *It is worth noticing that Bassanio has no trouble characterizing Portia as a golden-tressed prize when he first describes her to Antonio as the “golden fleece” that like Jason (the Argonaut), he has decided to “quest” for (1.2.177). What accounts for his sudden and utter repudiation of that conceit here, we might wonder? A cynic would say that Bassanio wins the casket test by knowing to talk gold with the merchant who carries his debts and drop the subject when love is on the line. A further aside: things don’t end that well for Jason, whose path to the fleece through his marriage to Medea culminates in her murder of their offspring. This use of an uncomfortable classical precedent to frame the dramatic situation returns in the last act, when Lorenzo and Jessica raise the dismal histories of Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, and (once again) Medea and Jason to describe the beauty of the night they share in Belmont. What does Shakespeare want us to think about the beauty of love?*

4. *This overtly racist analogy harks back to Portia’s dismissal of the Prince of Morocco: “May all of his complexion choose me so.” The meaning here is that ornament is the “fair” gilding that conceals something dark and less lovely beneath.*

5. *Why is Bassanio drawn to the least appealing casket, the one that seems rather to “threaten” than to “promise”? The play sets its action in the middle of a mercantile society in which venture capitalism—in this case, trade on distant continents—enriches its title character, then brings him to his knees. Bassanio’s turn away from the currency metals of gold and silver seems like a turn away from this culture built on lucre and its risky pursuit. But of course in choosing lead, Bassanio is seeking a monetary prize within. As he explains to Antonio at the top of the play, Portia is the remedy for his squandered finances. Bassanio’s suspicion of ornament, from this vantage, is only a veneer of frugality.*



# Quick Facts About Money in Shakespeare's Time


*The Merchant of Venice* is a play about money. Debts, investments and financial risk form the plot structure of this dark comedy. Here are some useful facts to help you understand money in Shakespeare's own time. The information comes from Oxford University Press.

- + The standard rate for an author writing a play was approximately £5-6 in the 1590s. By 1616, it was up to about £10 per play. To be fair, this was over four centuries ago and £1 in 1600 would be equal to approximately £100 in 2015.
- + In the 1600s, a performance at court would warrant a reward of £10 to the entire acting company. £10 is not much when split among an entire company of actors. However it is somewhat better than a year's worth of wages of a provincial grammar-school master, which was around £20.
- + Shakespeare was Karl Marx's favorite author, and when Marx moved to England in 1849, he read Shakespeare every day. *Timon of Athens* proved to be an influential source in Marx's critique of capitalist money economy, as seen in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and in *Capital, Volume 1*.
- + The corn riots in the opening scenes of *Coriolanus* are meant to echo the actual Midland Uprising in England in 1607-1608. During this uprising, Shakespeare was a wealthy landowner from Stratford. He consistently protected his land, which was his source of income, rather than the townspeople's rights.
- + Shakespeare's First Folio (an anthology of all of Shakespeare's plays in a luxe, oversized edition) of 1623 was originally sold for only £1. Today, it commands a price in the range of £2.5-£3.5 million (about \$3.2-7 million US dollars).
- + Out of the estimated 750 copies printed of the First Folio in 1623, only 233 are known to have survived; 82 are currently in the collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
- + The word 'gold' appears in *Timon of Athens* far more frequently than in any other Shakespeare play. It is mentioned 36 times.



## COST OF VARIOUS GOODS IN LONDON

REWARD TO AN ENTIRE ACTING COMPANY FOR A PERFORMANCE AT COURT AROUND 1600	£10	
WRITING A PLAY (SOLO) IN 1616	£10	
WRITING A PLAY (SOLO) IN 1590S	£5-6	
WRITING A WORK DEDICATED TO A PATRON	£5	
TOBACCO, 1KG	£4 16S	
BIBLE	£2	
HORSE	£1 10S	
SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST FOLIO	£1	
BED	4S	
WINE, 1L	1S	
PAIR OF SHOES	1S	
CHEAPEST SEAT IN A PRIVATE THEATRE	6D	
FOOD FOR A DAY	4D	
A DOZEN EGGS	4D	
SEAT IN THE GALLERY OF A PUBLIC PLAYHOUSE	2D	
STANDING IN A PUBLIC PLAYHOUSE	1D	
CANDLE	0.8D	
SMALL BEER	0.5D	

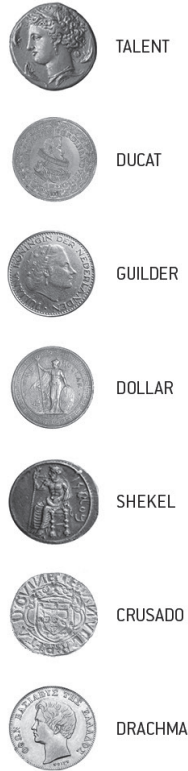




OTHER ENGLISH COINS



FOREIGN COINS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS



The English government sought to restrict to the ranks of aristocracy the right to wear particular fabrics and accessories; the laws indicated which colors and types of clothing, furs, fabrics, and trims were allowed to persons of various ranks or incomes:

WOMEN

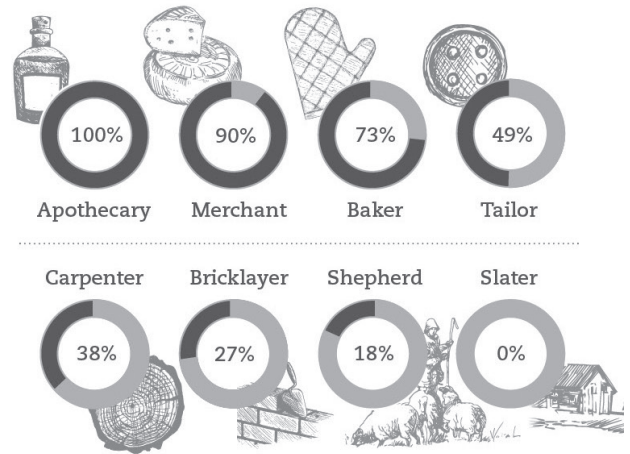
STATUS	MATERIAL	COLOR
Queen, Queen's mother, children, and sisters, and aunts	Silk	●
Viscountesses, Baronesses, and other personages of like degrees	Cloth of Silver, Tinted satin, silk, or cloth mixed or embroidered with any silver	●
Wives of barons, knights of the order, or councilors' ladies, and gentlewomen of the privy chamber and bed chamber, and the maids of honor	Velvet, tufted taffeta, satin	● ●
Lower Class Women	Wool, linen and sheepskin	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

MEN



STATUS	MATERIAL	COLOR
King, King's mother, children, brethren, and uncles	Silk	●
Above Viscounts, and barons, and other persons of like degree	Cloth of Silver, Tinted satin, silk, or cloth mixed or embroidered with any gold	●
Barons' sons, Knights and gentlemen in ordinary office attendant upon her majesty's person, and such as have been employed in Embassages to foreign princes.	Velvet Fur of leopards Embroidery with any silk	N/A
Justices, Barons of the Exchequer, Master of the Rolls, sergeants at law, Masters of the Chancery, of the Queen's council, apprentices of law, physicians of the King, mayors and other head officers of any towns corporate	Cottons and taffeta All Except silk, velvet, damask or satin	● ● ● ●
Lower Class Men	Wool, linen and sheepskin	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

LITERACY BY TRADE/CRAFT IN RURAL ENGLAND (1580-1700)



Ojima, Fumita. Money in Shakespeare. 2004. Holland, Peter. "Shakespeare, William (1564-1616)." Peter Holland Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Ed. M. C. G. Mathews and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2013. 28 July 2015. Retrieved April 19 2015 from www.oxforddnb.com. Statistics from David Chesay, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England (1990), ch. 6. [oup.com/Shakespeare](http://oup.com/Shakespeare)

- + At the turn of the century in London, the cost of 1 kilogram of tobacco was over four times more expensive than the cost of Shakespeare's First Folio. A horse cost only 10 shillings more than the First Folio.
- + To restrict the upwardly mobile classes from imitating the aristocracy, the English government passed laws (called sumptuary laws) that dictated who could wear particular clothes, fabrics and colors. For example, only royalty and a distinct, distinguished people could wear the color purple—hence “royal purple” or “royal blue.”
- + The weekly wages for an actor were only 6 shillings, but at least the acting company often provided free food.

## The Beauties of Shakespeare / Shakespeare on Beauty

In 1755, the Clergyman William Dodd published a compendium of what he called the *Poetical Beauties of Shakespeare*, which he felt were being “obsured” by “bungling critics to show their clumsy activity upon” (v). Even in the eighteenth century, there was a sense that scholarship failed to notice what was best about Shakespeare—the loveliness of his language.

The *Beauties of Shakespeare* was devised to skim the cream off the top of the plays and poems so as to not bog readers down in larger questions of context or meaning. But though the perfection of the Bard was to Dodd inarguable—“every tongue is big with his boundless fame”—he encountered some difficulty in his process of selection. For one thing, he found that some plays simply refused excerpting because each line was “so closely connected with the plot and characters” that no single verse could be isolated from the whole. Another problem was catering to all tastes. Dodd defined the beautiful via Longinus as that “which always pleases and takes equally with all sorts of men,” and he feared his inclusion of bits from Shakespeare’s “trifling love tales” would be disdained by “the old, the grave, and the severe.” Finally, he found it challenging to stick to his own parameters; in his Preface he apologized for including “some passages merely on account of their peculiarity” which he thought indicated “the vast stretch, and sometimes particular turn, of the poet’s imagination.” Beauty, even for Dodd, is both too pervasive and too elusive in Shakespeare. Even for a man who wants nothing to do with the petty categorizing and qualifying work of scholarship, its quality is ever strained by the act of trying to decipher it.

Chief among the passages Dodd selects from *The Merchant of Venice* is Portia’s famous plea for mercy. While this passage was so beloved in the 19th century that schoolchildren routinely learned it by rote, it’s worth noticing that the beautiful sentiment it describes is not sustained by the play. Not only does Shylock refuse to show Antonio any mercy, Portia herself fails to offer any when she subjects Shylock to the Venetian state’s retribution: the

forfeit of half of his estate and the demand that he convert.

*The quality of mercy is not strained.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this scepterèd sway.  
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute to God Himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:  
That in the course of justice none of us  
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.*

The “Beauties” of Shakespeare are often troublesome in this way. Indeed, when Shakespeare turns his pen to the idea of beauty, he reveals its longstanding association with injustice. A fabulous example is Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*, who intercepts the midwife who would murder his illegitimate offspring with the Queen to dote on the babe and tell its outraged half-brothers that black is more beautiful than white:

*'Why, there's the privilege your beauty bears:  
Fie, treacherous hue, that will betray with blushing  
The close enacts and counsels of the heart!  
Here's a young lad framed of another leer:  
Look, how the black slave smiles upon the father,  
As who should say 'Old lad, I am thine own.'  
(Aaron, Titus Andronicus, 4.2)*

For Aaron, to be fair, meaning white of hue, means wearing your thoughts on your face with every blush or blanch. Blackness, on the other hand, safeguards private thoughts from public knowledge.

If beauty in the English Renaissance is unattainable for a figure like Aaron owing to a racist preference for fair over dark, Shakespeare shows that it is also cruel to

those who fit within its cultural norms.

As a vanishing property of buxom youth, beauty is a cruel feature of the well-favored maid. *The Passionate Pilgrim*, a longer poem sometimes ascribed to Shakespeare, sets out its limitations quite bluntly:

*Beauty is but a vain and doubtful good;  
A shining gloss that vadeth suddenly;  
A flower that dies when first it gins to bud;  
A brittle glass that's broken presently:  
A doubtful good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,  
Lost, vaded, broken, dead within an hour.  
(179-184)*

Even women in its full flush are not always blessed by beauty. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the sexual predator King Tarquin tells Lucrece that his assault is her fault, since her beauty set him on.

*Thus I forestall thee, if thou mean to chide:  
Thy beauty hath ensnared thee to this night,  
Where thou with patience must my will abide;  
My will that marks thee for my earth's delight,  
Which I to conquer sought with all my might;  
But as reproof and reason beat it dead,  
By thy bright beauty was it newly bred.*

A caustic scene in *Troilus and Cressida* has Paris arguing with the princes of Troy using a similar logic. When faced with the question of why, after a multi-year siege, they should not just give Helen back to her husband Menelaus, Paris argues that keeping the beautiful Helen within Troy’s walls is somehow honorable, though she is, by his own commission, “ransack’d.”

*Sir, I propose not merely to myself  
The pleasures such a beauty brings with it;  
But I would have the soil of her fair rape  
Wiped off, in honourable keeping her.  
What treason were it to the ransack'd queen,  
Disgrace to your great worths and shame to me,  
Now to deliver her possession up  
On terms of base compulsion! (2.2)*

A culture that glorifies beauty to extenuate rape turns women into cynics. One of the finest expressions of this



Mr. Ira Aldridge as Aaron from a Daguerrotype by Paine of Islington, 1852. Courtesy of Folger Library.



But perhaps the most infamous expression of beauty's treacherous hold on women comes at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*, when the bold and independent Katherina preaches the virtue of a placid, submissive wife.

*Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow,  
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes  
To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor.  
It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,  
Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,  
And in no sense is meet or amiable.  
A woman mov'd is like a fountain troubled-  
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty;  
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty  
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.*  
(*Taming of the Shrew*, 5.2)

Some critics think this is a hollow performance and that Katherina and Petruchio are actually exploiting a ferociously hierarchical culture by playing it to the hilt. But others read her as suffering from Stockholm syndrome after she spends her first weeks of marriage in a household where she is denied sleep, food, and clothing. Either way, the sermon she preaches is so out of character as to forever taint the "beauty" of an unmov'd woman with the possibility of satire.

For Shakespeare, beauty is never only a delightful prospect or the transporting feeling of being struck by it. It is also always linked to the question of whose beauty, or beauty for whom, and at whose expense? Its only stable expression is found in the poet's lasting works, which preserve its fleeting and contingent form for posterity.

*Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?  
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?  
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?  
O, none, unless this miracle have might,  
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.*  
(*Sonnet 65*)

exasperation is Olivia's response to the Duke Orsino's wooing. When, though his emissary, he calls her cruel for withholding her beauty from the world, she offers this snappy comeback.

*O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted; I will give out divers schedules of my beauty: it shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will: as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth.*  
(*Twelfth Night*, 1.5)

If this feels a bit harsh, remember that even Romeo, Shakespeare's most

beloved romantic hero, acts the victim of a beautiful woman's disdain, claiming that no party crammed with attractive women can cure him of his great love for Rosaline:

*Show me a mistress that is passing fair,  
What doth her beauty serve, but as a note  
Where I may read who pass'd that passing fair?  
Farewell: thou canst not teach me to forget.*  
(1.1)

Until he sees Juliet, and Rosaline is utterly forgotten:

*Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.* (1.5)

## Beautiful Poetry

If it is easy to know that Shakespeare's poetry is held in high esteem, it is harder, if not impossible, to assess what keeps poetry alive in the minds of its readers. The excerpts that follow are examples of poetic beauty as suggested by a broad sample of IU teachers of English. They are here not to dictate norms but to inspire your own collection, for beauty lies not only within the poem, but also in the impression it makes upon the reader. We in the English Department hope something from the excerpts below finds a home in you.

### Henry Vaughan, "The World," c.1678

I saw Eternity the other night,  
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,  
All calm, as it was bright;  
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,  
Driv'n by the spheres  
Like a vast shadow mov'd; in which the world  
And all her train were hurl'd.

*The simile of using light for time, two measurable yet elusive quantities, gives a breadth to the opening of the poem. The sheer expanse of Eternity invites the reader to engage in a practice of fancy, bringing their own joys and griefs to the cosmic processes. The simple rhyme scheme belies the complex imaginative force.*

—Mary Helen Truglia, PhD candidate

### Basho, "under the spilled cup," 17th Century, tr. Jane Reichhold

under the spilled cup  
flows the chrysanthemum  
on the flowered tray

*When I was working a horrible job at a call center, Basho's lines were the breath of life to me. In those brief, precious breaks between angry assaults of verbiage, I could escape into a world that celebrated small, wonderful things, where nature's beauty in the chrysanthemum met the gentle grace of objects formed by human hands. The poem, like so many other things, is the beauty of a mistake.*

—Nathan Schmidt, PhD candidate

### William Dunbar, "Goldyn Targe," ca. 1508

Full angellike thir birdis sang thair houris  
[Like angels sang the birds their hours]  
Within thair courtyns grene in to thair bouris.

[Within green curtains in their bowers.]

**Apparalit quhite and rede wyth blomes suete**

[Appareled white and red with blooms sweet,]

**Anamalit was the felde wyth all colouris**

[Enameled was the field with all colors]

**The perly droppis schake in silvir schouris.**

[The pearly drops shake in silver showers.]

*To me, this is one of the most beautiful garden scenes in British poetry. The colors are arresting. I love how the green leaves are "curtains" for the birds' "bowers," or "rooms" up in the tree branches. Even more striking is the "enameling." The raindrops on the red and white flowers give the field a pearly, opalescent beauty that almost outstrips nature itself.*

—Trevor Babcock, PhD candidate.

### Richard Siken "Scheherazade," 2005

Tell me about the dream where we pull the bodies out of the lake  
and dress them in warm clothes again.  
How it was late, and no one could sleep, the horses running  
until they forget that they are horses.

*I love that this poem calls upon the legend of Scheherazade in 1001 Arabian Nights—in the legend, Scheherazade must tell a king, her captor, stories in order to stay alive. I think in some way, all of our poems and stories are a means of survival. Sometimes a poem keeps us in denial, but it makes us feel better; that dressing of our hopelessly dead in sweaters. Sometimes we forget why we're doing it and who we are, like Siken's horses. Because this poem is fragmented like a dream it lets us piece together narrative; it relies on the reader to find continuity between images. This poem is magical.*

—Yael Massen, MFA Poetry Candidate



Scheherazade continued telling her story.



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**Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish,” 1946**

I stared and stared  
and victory filled up  
the little rented boat,  
from the pool of bilge  
where oil had spread a rainbow  
around the rusted engine  
to the bailer rusted orange,  
the sun-cracked thwarts,  
the oarlocks on their strings,  
the gunnels—until everything  
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!

*This passage builds beautifully from small simple spare language to the wonderfully estranging diction of “thwarts,” “oarlocks,” and “gunnels” to the transcendent repetition that closes the moment.*

—Richard Nash, Professor, English; the same poem was suggested by Ivan Krielkamp, Associate Professor of English

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**Ralph Nash, “First Piscatorial: China Beach (ME),” c. 1949**

To push out  
(from the shore)  
to push  
the solid earth away . with no more  
than a clumsy oar . the boat rocking  
without guidance sidewise  
into the weeds . And to pull  
that heaviness rasping the very  
weeds it must escape:  
to pull by the very weed  
(rasping the hands) till the weed break  
or give, without effort, yielding  
its slender hold:  
and what comes of it?

Freed  
to resume direction . to push out  
in the early mist . without knowledge  
without landmark lacking the sense  
of direction

*I am, of course, a biased reader of this next passage. But I find poetry, as I said, in repetition with variation; and the scene described, in verse that makes palpable what it describes, is one that is at once mundane and familiar, and charged with all the uncertainty and possibility of all moments when we begin something with the beautiful fear of the unknown we are entering.*

—Richard Nash, Professor of English

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**Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Frost at Midnight,” 1798**

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch  
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall  
Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
Or if the secret ministry of frost  
Shall hang them in silent icicles,  
Quietly shining to the quiet moon.

*“Frost at Midnight”: The prayer occurs after the moody, stewing poet is interrupted by the sound of his infant son breathing in the cradle next to him, and the poem is in some ways a celebration of interruptions, being open to things in the environment that one can't control. The form of interruption seems to be carried into the imagery of this prayer, with the robin interrupting two tufts of snow with a splash of red and the eave drops occurring in the “trances of the blast,” interrupting the wind.*

**John Keats, “Ode to Autumn,” 1819**

Where are the songs of spring? Aye, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue:  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs bleat from hilly bourn,  
Hedge-crickets sing, and now with treble soft  
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

*This last stanza seems like an unsurpassable achievement because in it Keats (perhaps the poet who more than any other embraces mortality and rejects an afterlife) approaches what seems a pure naturalism, natural detail that supports no bigger thesis but just exists of itself. Our human habits want to read those gnats rising or falling according to some allegory, but they finally have their own rhythm beyond our concerns, and the final twittering of the swallows is an unobtrusive sound that exceeds human cultural schemes and timespans.*

—Nick Williams, Associate Professor of English,  
Director of the Individualized Majors Program.

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**Anonymous, “The Seafarer,” ca 970-990, tr. Elaine Treharne**

...Ic, earmcearig, iscealdne sæ / winter wunade wræccan lastum, /  
winemægum bidroren, bihongen hrimgecelum; hægl scurum fleag.

I, wretched and sad, dwelt a winter on the ice-cold sea on the paths  
of the exile, deprived of dear kinsmen, hung round with icicles; hail  
flew in storms.

*Old English poetry values the repetition of sounds (alliteration),  
among other things. I particularly, although perhaps  
anachronistically, find beautiful the repetition of [s], [w], and [h] in  
these lines. Breathily and sustained, these consonants (along with the  
end-to-end multi-syllabic words) aurally evoke the environment that  
the forlorn narrator describes: one that is both empty and yet also  
constantly assaults the body’s senses.*

—Erin Sweany, PhD Candidate.

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**Donne, “The Good Morrow,” 1633**

“If ever any beauty I did see,  
Which I desired, and got, ‘twas but a dream of thee.”

—Kathy Smith, Associate Professor of English

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**John Ashbery, “Daffy Duck in Hollywood”  
from *Houseboat Days*, 1977**

Not what we see but how we see it matters; all’s  
Alike, the same, and we greet him who announces  
The change as we would greet the change itself.  
All life is but a figment; conversely, the tiny  
Tome that slips from your hand is not perhaps the  
Missing link in this invisible picnic whose leverage  
Shrouds our sense of it. Therefore bivouac we  
On this great, blond highway, unimpeded by  
Veiled scruples, worn conundrums. Morning is  
Impermanent. Grab sex things, swing up  
Over the horizon like a boy  
On a fishing expedition. No one really knows  
Or cares whether this is the whole of which parts  
Were vouchsafed—once—but to be ambling on’s  
The tradition more than the safekeeping of it. This mulch for  
Play keeps them interested and busy while the big,  
Vaguer stuff can decide what it wants—what maps, what  
Model cities, how much waste space. Life, our  
Life anyway, is between.

*What draws me to these lines is the celebratory tone. The speaker  
sees the lack of stable truths not as a burden or as a source of misery,*

*but as an excuse to play, to explore without need for “progress,” to live.  
If there’s a whiff of nihilism here—“big,” important things apparently  
don’t mater too much to the speaker—there’s also an absence of dread  
and fear that always feels energizing and beautiful to me.*

—John McGlothlin, PhD candidate

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**Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover,” 1877**

“Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!”

—Max Nagano, PhD Candidate

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**from Emily Dickinson’s letters, 1860**

“This world is just a little place, just red in the sky, before the sun  
rises, so let us keep fast hold of hands, that when the birds begin,  
none of us be missing.”

—Melinda Kingsbury, PhD Candidate

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**Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” 1849**

Strange friend, past, present, and to be;  
Loved deeplier, darklier understood;  
Behold, I dream a dream of good,  
And mingle all the world with thee.

*If I paraphrased this verse it might seem awfully trite and  
anticlimactic, but in Tennyson’s words it vibrates with a kind of  
lovely mystery: a vision of a world that isn’t made poorer by death,  
but that still contains those we love, mingled in the everyday.*

—Mallory Cohn, PhD candidate

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**William Butler Yeats, “Cloths of Heaven,” 1899**

Had I the heavens’ embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

—Catherine Bowman, Poet, Professor of Poetry



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**Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*,  
late 14th century**

“The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne”

—Jennifer Lopatin, PhD candidate

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**Mark Doty, “Nocturne in Black and Gold,” 1995**

If we’re only volatile essence,  
permeable, leaking out,

pouring into any vessel bright enough  
to lure us, why be afraid?  
Having been a thousand things,

why not be endless?

—Scot Barnett, Assistant Professor of English

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**ee cummings, “somewhere I have never traveled, gladly,  
beyond,” 1931**

(i do not know what it is about you that closes  
and opens; only something in me understands  
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)  
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

*This passage makes me think of a person opening and closing with  
each breath, and how it’s that movement which makes for intimacy,  
not just the open blossom of a rose. And when the rain hits my face, I  
think of its fingers and something even more delicate.*

—Stephani Li, Susan Gubar Professor of English

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**Derek Walcott, “Eulogy for W. H. Auden,” 1983**

O craft, that strangely chooses  
one mouth to speak for all,  
O Light no dark refuses,  
O Space impenetrable,

fix, among constellations,  
the spark we honour here,  
whose planetary patience  
repeats his earthly prayer

that the City may be Just,  
and humankind be kind.  
A barge moves, caked with rust  
in the East River wind,

and the mouths of all the rivers  
are still, and the estuaries  
shine with the wake that gives the  
craftsman the gift of peace.

*This lives in my mind as the very sign of beauty. These are the  
closing quatrains.*

—Walton Muyumba, Associate Professor, English.

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**Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Spring,” 1877**

Thrush’s eggs look little low heavens, and thrush  
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring  
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;

*“Rinse and wring / the ear” is such a vivid image that I often think  
of it when I hear birds singing in the woods. It’s so cleansing and  
refreshing it almost hurts.*

—Mary Christian, IU PhD English 2016

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**Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro,” 1926**

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

—Judith Brown, Associate Professor,  
Director of Undergraduate Studies, English

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**William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850**

A diamond light  
(Whene’er the summer sun, declining, smote  
A smooth rock wet with constant springs) was seen  
Sparkling from out a copse-clad bank that rose  
Fronting our cottage. Oft beside the hearth  
Seated, with open door, often and long  
Upon this restless lustre have I gazed,  
That made my fancy restless as itself.  
‘Twas now for me a burnished silver shield  
Suspended over a knight’s tomb, who lay  
Inglorious, buried in the dusky wood:  
An entrance now into some magic cave  
Or palace built by fairies of the rock;  
Nor could I have been bribed to disenchant  
The spectacle, by visiting the spot

—Kate Blake, PhD candidate

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**Anonymous, Untitled, ca. early 1500s**

Westron wind, when will thou blow?  
The small rain down can rain.  
Christ, that my love were in my arms,  
And I in my bed again.

*This is not a poem that aggrandizes the human. Just the opposite, in fact: it asks us to look away from the grand and appreciate the fullness and intensity of meaning in the small, the ordinary, the cozy. And it makes every word count: you can let yourself rest on any word and find an explosion of emotion in it.*

—Ranu Samantrai, Associate Professor, English

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**Maria Rainer Rilke, “The Flamingos,” 1907/1908, trans. Len Krisak**

THE FLAMINGOS.  
Jardin des Plantes, Paris

In Fragonard-reflections such as these,  
one sees no more of true flamingo red  
or white than if some messenger had said  
about the image of his lover, “She’s

still soft with sleep.” For when they’ve walked green grass,  
and stood together, lightly turned on pink  
stalks—blooms in flower beds—they seem to think  
themselves seductive; that their charms surpass

a Phryne’s . . . till they curl their necks to hide  
pale eyes in softness all their own (inside,  
there lie concealed both berry-red and black).

Then, through the bird-house: envy’s sudden scream.  
But they have stretched the wings that were pinned back,  
and stride, alone, into the world of dream.

*For me beauty is not an abstract category, but an experience, something that lifts me up and out of my limited life while still validating the ordinary things that happen, whether it’s falling in love or falling asleep. It’s a visceral experience—an image that touches me, a sound that moves me, a feeling that makes my heart beat faster.*

—Christoph Irmscher, Professor of English,  
Director of the Wells Scholars Program.

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**Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 1855**

And I know that the hand of God is the eldest brother of my own  
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers...and the  
women are sisters and lovers,  
And that a kelson of the creation is love;  
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,  
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and elder  
and mullen and poke-weed.

*From the hand of God to poke-weed in six lines. The poke-weed just slays me every time*

—Jonathan Elmer, Professor of English,  
Director of the College of Arts and Humanities Institute

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