

**MAA OMWATI DEGREE COLLEGE**  
**HASSANPUR (PALWAL)**

**SUBJECT: SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA**

**CLASS : M.A. ENGLISH**

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## HENRY IV, PART 1

Henry IV, Part 1 (often written as 1 Henry IV) is a history play by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written no later than 1597. The play dramatises part of the reign of King Henry IV of England, beginning with the battle at Homildon Hill late in 1402, and ending with King Henry's victory in the Battle of Shrewsbury in mid-1403.[1] In parallel to the political conflict between King Henry and a rebellious faction of nobles, the play depicts the escapades of King Henry's son, Prince Hal (the future King Henry V), and his eventual return to court and favour.

King Henry IV, Part I: The King to the Prince of Wales: "Thou shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein.", (Act III, Scene ii), by Edwin Austin Abbey (1905)

Henry IV, Part 1 is the first of Shakespeare's two plays that deal with the reign of Henry IV (the other being Henry IV, Part 2), and the second play in the Henriad, a modern designation for the tetralogy of plays that deal with the successive reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V. From its first performance on, it has been an extremely popular work both with the public and critics.

### **Characters**

#### *Of the King's party*

- King Henry the Fourth – King of England.
- Henry, Prince of Wales (nicknamed "Prince Hal" or "Harry") – eldest son of Henry IV
- John of Lancaster – represented in the play as the King's second son, although he was actually the third
- Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmorland - the King's brother-in-law
- Sir Walter Blount ("Blunt")

#### *Eastcheap*

- Sir John Falstaff – a knight and friend of Prince Hal's
- Ned Poins

- Bardolph
- Peto
- Mistress Quickly – hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern
- Francis – tapster
- Vintner – tavern keeper
- Gadshill
- Two Carriers (Mugs and Tom)
- Ostler

### *Rebels*

- Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland
- Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester – Northumberland's brother
- Harry Percy (nicknamed "Hotspur") – Northumberland's son
- Edmund Mortimer – Hotspur's brother-in-law and Glendower's son-in-law
- Owen Glendower – leader of the Welsh rebels
- Archibald, Earl of Douglas – leader of the Scottish rebels
- Sir Richard Vernon, 8th Baron of Shipbrook
- Richard le Scrope ("Scroop"), Archbishop of York
- Sir Michael – a friend to the Archbishop of York
- Lady Percy ("Kate", though her real name was Elizabeth) – Hotspur's wife and Mortimer's sister
- Lady Mortimer (Catrin) – Glendower's daughter and Mortimer's wife

### *Other Characters*

- Chamberlain
- Sheriff
- Travellers
- Servant to Hotspur

- Lords, Officers, Drawers, Messengers, and Attendants

#### *Mentioned only*

- Robin Ostler, deceased character who preceded the current Ostler, concerned with the price of oats
- Gilliams, courier sent by Hotspur

## **Synopsis**

The play follows three groups of characters who initially interact only indirectly. These groups grow closer as the play progresses, coming together at the climax during the Battle of Shrewsbury. The first is centred around King Henry IV and his immediate council, who contrive to suppress a growing rebellion. The second is the group of rebel lords, led by Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, and including his brother, the Earl of Northumberland, and energetic nephew, Harry Percy ("Hotspur"). The Scottish Earl of Douglas, the Welshman Owen Glendower, and Edmund Mortimer also join. The third group, the comic centre of the play, consists of the young Prince Hal (King Henry's eldest son) and his companions, Falstaff, Poins, Bardolph, and Peto.

From the play's outset, Henry IV's reign is beset by problems: His personal disquiet at having usurped the throne from Richard II would be solved by a crusade to the Holy Land, but trouble on his borders with Scotland and Wales make such an act impossible. Moreover, he is increasingly at odds with the Percy family, who helped him to his throne, and with Edmund Mortimer, Richard II's chosen heir.

King Henry is also troubled by the behaviour of his eldest son and heir, Hal (the future Henry V). Hal spends little time in the royal court, preferring instead to drink in taverns with lowborn and dishonourable companions. This makes him an object of scorn to the nobles and jeopardises his legitimacy as heir; early in the play, King Henry laments that he can "See riot and dishonour stain the brow of young Harry."<sup>[3]</sup> Hal's chief friend is Sir John Falstaff, a cowardly, drunken, but quick-witted knight whose charisma and zest for life captivate the Prince.

In the first scene, the political action of the play is set in motion. King Henry and Hotspur fall out after a disagreement over the treatment of hostages: Hotspur withholds, against the King's orders, hostages taken in recent action against the

Scots at the Battle of Homildon Hill, while King Henry refuses to pay Owen Glendower (a Welsh rebel) the ransom for Hotspur's brother-in-law, Edmund Mortimer. This disagreement, and the King's harsh treatment of the House of Percy generally, drives them to ally with Welsh and Scot rebels, resolving to depose "this ingrate and cankered Bolingbroke."

Meanwhile, Hal meets with Falstaff and his associates at the Boar's Head Tavern. Falstaff and Hal are close, but Hal enjoys insulting Falstaff, and, in a soliloquy, makes it clear that he does not plan to continue in his present lifestyle forever: Hal aims to re-assume his high place in court by proving himself to his father. Indeed, Hal reasons that by suddenly changing his ways he will be even more popular among the nobility than if he had behaved conventionally all his life. Nevertheless, he is happy to carry out a plot against Falstaff: after performing a highway robbery, Hal and Poins will slip away from Falstaff, disguise themselves, and rob Falstaff, purely for the fun of hearing the older man lie about it later, after which Hal will return the stolen money. The plot is carried out successfully.

As the revolt of Mortimer and the House of Percy grows, the Prince makes up with his father and is given the command of an army. He vows to fight and kill the rebel Hotspur, and orders Falstaff to recruit and lead a group of foot soldiers. Falstaff uses the appointment to enrich himself by taking bribes from those who do not want to be pressed into service, and, in the end, recruits only the very poor, whose wages he withholds.

All the parties meet at the Battle of Shrewsbury, a crucial moment for all involved: if the rebels are not defeated outright, they will gain a considerable advantage; other forces (under Northumberland, Glendower, Mortimer, and the Archbishop of York) can be called upon in the event of a stalemate or a victory for the rebels. Though Henry outnumbered the rebels, Hotspur, wild and skilled in battle, leads the opposing army personally. As the battle drags on, the king is hunted by Douglas. Prince Hal and Hotspur duel, and, in an important moment of noble virtue for the young prince, Hal prevails, killing Hotspur in single combat.

Left on his own during Hal's battle with Hotspur, Falstaff dishonourably feigns death to avoid an attack by Douglas. After Hal leaves Hotspur's body on the field, Falstaff revives in a mock miracle. Seeing he is alone, he stabs Hotspur's corpse in the thigh and claims credit for the kill. Hal allows Falstaff to claim the honour of the kill. Soon after Hal's generous gesture, Falstaff states that he wants to amend his life and begin "to live cleanly as a nobleman should do".

The play ends at Shrewsbury, after the battle. The loss of Hotspur and the fight has dealt a serious blow to the rebel cause. King Henry is pleased with the outcome, not least because it gives him a chance to execute Thomas Percy, the Earl of Worcester, one of his chief enemies (though previously one of his greatest friends). Meanwhile, Hal demonstrates his mercy by ordering Douglas—now a prisoner of war—to be released without ransom. However, the rebellion continues, now led by the Archbishop of York and the Earl of Northumberland. This inconclusive ending sets the stage for *Henry IV, Part 2*.

## Sources

Shakespeare's primary source for *Henry IV, Part 1*, as for most of his chronicle histories, was the second edition (1587) of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which in turn drew on Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York*. Scholars have also assumed that Shakespeare was familiar with Samuel Daniel's poem on the civil wars. Another source for this (and the following Henry plays) is the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V*.

## Date and text

*Henry IV* was almost certainly in performance by 1597, given the wealth of allusions and references to the Falstaff character.[further explanation needed] The earliest recorded performance occurred on the afternoon of 6 March 1600, when the play was acted at court before the Flemish Ambassador. Other court performances followed in 1612 and 1625.

The play was entered into the Register of the Stationers Company on 25 Feb. 1598 and first printed in quarto later that year by stationer Andrew Wise. The play was Shakespeare's most popular printed text: new editions appeared in 1599, 1604, 1608, 1613, 1622, 1632, 1639, and 1692.

### The Dering Manuscript

The Dering Manuscript, the earliest extant manuscript text of any Shakespeare play, provides a single-play version of both Part 1 and Part 2 of *Henry IV*. The consensus of Shakespeare scholars is that the Dering Manuscript represents a redaction prepared around 1623, perhaps for family or amateur theatrics, by Edward Dering (1598–1644), of Surrenden Manor, Pluckley, Kent, where the

manuscript was discovered. A few dissenters have argued that the Dering MS. may indicate that Shakespeare's Henry IV was originally a single play, which the poet later expanded into two parts to capitalise on the popularity of the Sir John Falstaff character. The Dering MS. is part of the collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

## **Criticism and analysis**

### **Themes and interpretations**

At its first publication in 1597 or 1598, the play was titled *The History of Henrie the Fourth*, and its title page advertised only the presence of Henry Percy and the comic Sir John Falstaff; Prince Hal was not mentioned. Indeed, throughout most of the play's performance history, Hal has been staged as a secondary figure, and popular actors, beginning with James Quin and David Garrick, often preferred to play Hotspur. It was only in the twentieth century that readers and performers began to see the central interest as the coming-of-age story of Hal, who is now seen as the starring role.

In the "coming-of-age" interpretation, Hal's acquaintance with Falstaff and the tavern lowlife humanises him and provides him with a more complete view of life. At the outset, Prince Hal seems to pale in comparison with the fiery Henry Percy, the young noble lord of the North (whom Shakespeare portrays as considerably younger than he was in history in order to provide a foil for Hal). Many readers interpret the history as a tale of Prince Hal growing up, evolving into King Henry V, in what is a tale of the prodigal son adapted to the politics of medieval England. The low proportion of scenes featuring the title character, the king, has also been noted, with some authors suggesting that the play contrasts the authority of Henry IV, and his struggle to stay in control of the situation, with the chaotic forces of the rebels and Falstaff.

### **Honor and Falstaff's Catechism**

A major theme in Henry IV Part 1 is the expression of honour and the intersection and contrasts between honour and war. In Act 5 scene 1, Falstaff delivers a soliloquy, scholastically referred to as Falstaff's Catechism, which asserts his pragmatic and matter-of-fact perspective on war. The soliloquy reads:

'Tis not due yet. I would be loath to pay Him before His day. What need I be so forward with Him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter. Honor pricks me on.

Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word "honor"? What is that "honor"? Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore, I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism. (5.1.128-142)

In this soliloquy, Falstaff dismisses honour as an abstract concept that has no tangible benefits. His repetition of the word "honor" and the subsequent reduction of it to "air" underscores his cynical perspective, suggesting that honour is an empty, meaningless concept that holds no practical value. He questions whether honour can "set to a leg" or "an arm," implying that honour cannot heal wounds or restore life. This practical viewpoint starkly contrasts with the romanticised notion of honour as a noble pursuit worth dying or seriously injuring oneself for. Falstaff's rhetorical questions serve to undermine the glorification of honour in martial society, pointing out its inability to provide any real, physical benefit to those who seek it.

The passage contrasts the other views expressed in the play, and is also unique for its deviation from Falstaff's character, giving him a moment of philosophy distinct from his usual dismissive prose. Shakespeare's intent with the soliloquy has been debated between academics. While some believe that the passage serves to juxtapose Falstaff's pragmatic philosophy with the romantic, valour driven views of the rest of the cast, others assert that Falstaff's catechism highlights his cowardice and can be played comedically.

Professor Clifford Davidson drew parallels between Philippe de Mornay's 1582 treatise *De la verité de la religion chrestienne*, which would have already been translated into English at the time of writing *Henry IV Part 1*:

They that attaine to honor, are in continuali torment, spightfull or spighted, doing mischief, or receiving mischief, over-mated, or over-mating. What is this but many evils for one, and a multiplying of miseries without number, for the obtainment of one silly shadow of felicity? We will leave the residue to declamers: what are the fruits of these hellish torments, what are they? Forsooth Honor, Reputation, and Power or Authority. What is all this but winde, which cannot fill us, nor scarcely puffe us up? I shall be saluted as I goe abroad, I shall sit highest at meetings. In having these things, what have I, which a wicked

man may not rather have than I? And if it be a good thing, how is it given to evil men?

De Moray's passage and Falstaff's catechism use similar language, both reducing honour to "air" and following a catechetical structure. As de Moray's passage highlights the dangers of pursuing honour for reputational benefits rather than out of virtue, so Shakespeare uses Falstaff to critique the ill-intentioned pursuit of honour in early modern England. Davidson writes, "Who will pursue the 'shadow' of reputation rather than the 'body' of virtue?" Falstaff seemingly rejects both the "body" and the "shadow," denouncing both the virtue of honour and the praise that comes with it. However, at the end of the play, Falstaff accepts praise for Hotspur's death, suggesting that his wisdom may in fact be a facade for pure cowardice.

In the broader context of "Henry IV, Part 1," Falstaff's soliloquy offers a counterpoint to the play's exploration of heroism and honour. His catechism challenges the audience to reconsider the true value of honour and to question the societal pressure to uphold it. Through his catechism, Falstaff juxtaposes both Hotspur's misguided and vengeful pursuit of honour and Hal's virtue.

### **Oldcastle controversy**

Henry IV, Part 1 caused controversy on its first performances in 1597, because the comic character now known as "Falstaff" was originally named "Oldcastle" and was based on John Oldcastle, a famous proto-Protestant martyr with powerful living descendants in England.

Although the character is called Falstaff in all surviving texts of the play, there is abundant external and internal evidence that he was originally called Oldcastle. The change of names is mentioned in seventeenth-century works by Richard James ("Epistle to Sir Harry Bouchier", c. 1625) and Thomas Fuller (Worthies of England, 1662). It is also indicated in detail in the early texts of Shakespeare's plays. In the quarto text of Henry IV, Part 2 (1600), one of Falstaff's speech prefixes in Act I, Scene ii is mistakenly left uncorrected, "Old." instead of "Falst." In III, ii, 25-6 of the same play, Falstaff is said to have been a "page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk"—a statement that is true of the historical Oldcastle. In Henry IV, Part 1, I, ii, 42, Prince Hal calls Falstaff "my old lad of the castle". An iambic pentameter verse line in Henry IV, Part 1 is irregular when using the name "Falstaff", but regular with "Oldcastle". Finally, there is the explicit disclaimer at the close of Henry IV, Part 2 that discriminates between the two

figures: "for Oldcastle died [a] martyr, and this is not the man" (Epilogue, 29–32).

In Act III sc. 1, Hotspur, promised all of England north of the Trent, proposes diverting the river southwards to give him a still greater share. The plan highlights his destructive and argumentative nature.

There is evidence that Falstaff was originally called Oldcastle in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as well, the only play (outside of the two parts *Henry IV*) that contains the character. When the First Folio and quarto texts of that play are compared, it appears that the joke in V.v.85–90 is that Oldcastle/Falstaff incriminates himself by calling out the first letter of his name, "O, O, O!," when his fingertips are singed with candles—which of course works for "Oldcastle" but not "Falstaff." There is also the "castle" reference in IV.v.6 of the same play.[22]

The name change and the Epilogue disclaimer were required, it is generally thought,[by whom?] because of political pressure: the historical Oldcastle was not only a Protestant martyr but a nobleman with powerful living descendants in Elizabethan England. These were the Lords Cobham: William Brooke, 10th Baron Cobham (died 6 March 1597), Warden of the Cinque Ports (1558–97), Knight of the Order of the Garter (1584), and member of the Privy Council (1586–97); his son Henry Brooke, 11th Baron Cobham, Warden of the Cinque Ports and Knight of the Order of the Garter; and Frances Brooke, the 10th Baron's wife, and 11th Baron's mother, a close personal favourite of Queen Elizabeth I.

The elder Lord Cobham is known to have had a strongly negative impact on the lives of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the theatre. The company of actors formed by Shakespeare (the Lord Chamberlain's Men) in 1594 enjoyed the patronage of Henry Carey, first Lord Hunsdon, then serving as Lord Chamberlain. When Carey died on 22 July 1596, the post of Lord Chamberlain was given to William Brooke, Lord Cobham, who withdrew what official protection they had enjoyed. The players were left to the care of the local officials of the City of London, who had long wanted to drive the companies of actors out of the city. Thomas Nashe, in a contemporary letter, complained that the actors were "piteously persecuted by the Lord Mayor and the aldermen" during this period. The interval did not last; when Cobham died less than a year later, the post of Lord Chamberlain went to Henry Carey's son George, 2nd baron Hunsdon, and the actors regained their previous patronage.

The name was changed to "Falstaff", based on Sir John Fastolf, a historical person with a reputation for cowardice at the Battle of Patay, whom Shakespeare had previously represented in *Henry VI, Part 1*. Fastolf had died without descendants, making him safe for a playwright's use.

Shortly afterward, a team of playwrights wrote a two-part play entitled *Sir John Oldcastle*, which presents a heroic dramatisation of Oldcastle's life and was published in 1600.

In 1986, the Oxford Shakespeare edition of Shakespeare's works rendered the character's name as Oldcastle, rather than Falstaff, in *Henry IV, Part 1* (although not, confusingly, in *Part 2*), as a consequence of the editors' aim to present the plays as they would have appeared during their original performances. No other published editions have followed suit.

## **Adaptations**

There have been three BBC television films of *Henry IV, Part 1*. In the 1960 mini-series *An Age of Kings*, Tom Fleming starred as Henry IV, with Robert Hardy as Prince Hal, Frank Pettingell as Falstaff, and Sean Connery as Hotspur. The 1979 BBC Television Shakespeare version starred Jon Finch as Henry IV, David Gwillim as Prince Hal, Anthony Quayle as Falstaff, and Tim Pigott-Smith as Hotspur. In the 2012 series *The Hollow Crown*, *Henry IV, Part 1* was directed by Richard Eyre and starred Jeremy Irons as Henry IV, Tom Hiddleston as Prince Hal, Simon Russell Beale as Falstaff and Joe Armstrong as Hotspur.

Orson Welles's *Chimes at Midnight* (1965) compiles the two *Henry IV* plays into a single, condensed storyline, while adding a handful of scenes from *Henry V* and dialogue from *Richard II* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The film stars Welles himself as Falstaff, John Gielgud as King Henry, Keith Baxter as Hal, Margaret Rutherford as Mistress Quickly, Jeanne Moreau as Doll Tearsheet and Norman Rodway as Hotspur.

BBC Television's 1995 *Henry IV* also combines the two Parts into one adaptation. Ronald Pickup played the King; David Calder, Falstaff; Jonathan Firth, Hal; and Rufus Sewell, Hotspur.

Adapted scenes in flashback from *Henry IV* are included in the 1989 film version of *Henry V* (1989) with Robbie Coltrane portraying Sir John Falstaff and Kenneth Branagh playing the young Prince Hal.

Gus Van Sant's 1991 film *My Own Private Idaho* is loosely based on Part 1 of *Henry IV*, as well as *Henry IV, Part 2* and *Henry V*.

The one-man hip-hop musical *Clay* is loosely based on *Henry IV*.

In 2014, playwright and actor Herbert Sigüenza adapted the play to *El Henry*, a post-apocalyptic Chicano gang version set in "the year 2045, and to a place identified as 'Aztlan City, Aztlan. Formerly San Diego.'"

In 2015, The Michigan Shakespeare Festival produced an award-winning combined production—directed and adapted by Janice L. Blixt—of the two plays focusing on the relationship between *Henry IV* and Prince Hal.

In 2016, Graham Abbey combined *Richard II* and *Henry IV, Part 1* into a single play called *Breath of Kings: Rebellion*. *Henry IV, Part II* and *Henry V* together became *Breath of Kings: Redemption*. Both adaptations were staged at the Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario. Abbey, in the productions, played *Henry IV (Bolingbroke)*.

The 2016 app *Cycle of Kings* features the entire play *Henry IV, Part 1* in interactive form, as well as a modern English translation.

In 2019, Netflix released the film *The King*, an adaptation of the play directed by David Michôd and starring Timothée Chalamet, Robert Pattinson and Joel Edgerton.

## **Legacy**

The famous Sherlock Holmes catchphrase "The game is afoot" is taken from Act I, Scene 3, line 615, where the Earl of Northumberland says: "Before the game is afoot, thou still let'st slip."

The phrase was also later used by Shakespeare in *Henry V*, Act III, Scene 1, by the title character:

"I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,

Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:

Follow your spirit, and upon this charge

Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'"

## HAMLET

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, often shortened to Hamlet (/ˈhæmlɪt/), is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare sometime between 1599 and 1601. It is Shakespeare's longest play, with 29,551 words. Set in Denmark, the play depicts Prince Hamlet and his attempts to exact revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother.

Hamlet is considered among the "most powerful and influential tragedies in the English language", with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others".[1]

There are many works that have been pointed to as possible sources for Shakespeare's play—from ancient Greek tragedies to Elizabethan plays. The editors of the Arden Shakespeare question the idea of "source hunting", pointing out that it presupposes that authors always require ideas from other works for their own, and suggests that no author can have an original idea or be an originator. When Shakespeare wrote, there were many stories about sons avenging the murder of their fathers, and many about clever avenging sons pretending to be foolish in order to outsmart their foes. This would include the story of the ancient Roman, Lucius Junius Brutus, which Shakespeare apparently knew, as well as the story of Amleth, which was preserved in Latin by 13th-century chronicler Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, and printed in Paris in 1514. The Amleth story was subsequently adapted and then published in French in 1570 by the 16th-century scholar François de Belleforest. It has a number of plot elements and major characters in common with Shakespeare's Hamlet, and lacks others that are found in Shakespeare. Belleforest's story was first published in English in 1608, after Hamlet had been written, though it's possible that Shakespeare had encountered it in the French-language version.[2]

Three different early versions of the play are extant: the First Quarto (Q1, 1603); the Second Quarto (Q2, 1604); and the First Folio (F1, 1623). Each version includes lines and passages missing from the others.[3]

### Plot

#### Act I

Prince Hamlet of Denmark is the son of the recently deceased King Hamlet, and nephew of King Claudius, his father's brother and successor. Claudius hastily married King Hamlet's widow, Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, and took the throne for himself. Denmark has a long-standing feud with neighbouring Norway, in which King Hamlet slew King Fortinbras of Norway in a battle some years ago. Although Denmark defeated Norway and the Norwegian throne fell to King Fortinbras's infirm brother, Denmark fears that an invasion led by the dead Norwegian king's son, Prince Fortinbras, is imminent. On a cold night on the ramparts of Elsinore, the Danish royal castle, the sentries Bernardo and Marcellus discuss a ghost resembling the late King Hamlet which they have recently seen, and bring Prince Hamlet's friend Horatio as a witness. After the ghost appears again, the three vow to tell Prince Hamlet what they have witnessed.

The court gathers the next day, and King Claudius and Queen Gertrude discuss affairs of state with their elderly adviser Polonius. Claudius grants permission for Polonius's son Laertes to return to school in France, and he sends envoys to inform the King of Norway about Fortinbras. Claudius also questions Hamlet regarding his continuing to grieve for his father, and forbids him to return to his university in Wittenberg. After the court exits, Hamlet despairs of his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage. Learning of the ghost from Horatio, Hamlet resolves to see it himself.

#### Act II

Ophelia rushes to her father, telling him that Hamlet arrived at her door the prior night half-undressed and behaving erratically. Polonius blames love for Hamlet's madness and resolves to inform Claudius and Gertrude. As he enters to do so, the king and queen are welcoming Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,

two student acquaintances of Hamlet, to Elsinore. The royal couple has requested that the two students investigate the cause of Hamlet's mood and behaviour. Additional news requires that Polonius wait to be heard: messengers from Norway inform Claudius that the king of Norway has rebuked Prince Fortinbras for attempting to re-fight his father's battles. The forces that Fortinbras had conscripted to march against Denmark will instead be sent against Poland, though they will pass through Danish territory to get there.

### Act III

Polonius forces Ophelia to return Hamlet's love letters to the prince while he and Claudius secretly watch in order to evaluate Hamlet's reaction. Hamlet is walking alone in the hall as the King and Polonius await Ophelia's entrance. Hamlet muses on thoughts of life versus death. When Ophelia enters and tries to return Hamlet's things, Hamlet accuses her of immodesty and cries "get thee to a nunnery", though it is unclear whether this, too, is a show of madness or genuine distress. His reaction convinces Claudius that Hamlet is not mad for love. Shortly thereafter, the court assembles to watch the play Hamlet has commissioned. After seeing the Player King murdered by his rival pouring poison in his ear, Claudius abruptly rises and runs from the room; for Hamlet, this is proof of his uncle's guilt.

### Act IV

Hamlet jokes with Claudius about where he has hidden Polonius's body, and the king, fearing for his life, sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany Hamlet to England with a sealed letter to the English king requesting that Hamlet be executed immediately.

Unhinged by grief at Polonius's death, Ophelia wanders Elsinore. Laertes arrives back from France, enraged by his father's death and his sister's madness. Claudius convinces Laertes that Hamlet is solely responsible, but a letter soon arrives indicating that Hamlet has returned to Denmark, foiling Claudius's plan. Claudius switches tactics, proposing a fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet to settle their differences. Laertes will be given a poison-tipped foil, and, if that fails, Claudius will offer Hamlet poisoned wine as a congratulation. Gertrude interrupts to report that Ophelia has drowned, though it is unclear whether it was suicide or an accident caused by her madness.

### Act V

Horatio has received a letter from Hamlet, explaining that the prince escaped by negotiating with pirates who attempted to attack his England-bound ship, and the friends reunite offstage.

Two gravediggers discuss Ophelia's apparent suicide while digging her grave. Hamlet arrives with Horatio and banter with one of the gravediggers, who unearths the skull of a jester from Hamlet's childhood, Yorick. Hamlet picks up the skull, saying "Alas, poor Yorick" as he contemplates mortality. Ophelia's funeral procession approaches, led by Laertes. Hamlet and Horatio initially hide, but when Hamlet realizes that Ophelia is the one being buried, he reveals himself, proclaiming his love for her. Laertes and Hamlet fight by Ophelia's graveside, but the brawl is broken up.

Back at Elsinore, Hamlet explains to Horatio that he had discovered Claudius's letter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's belongings and replaced it with a forged copy indicating that his former friends should be killed instead. A foppish courtier, Osric, interrupts the conversation to deliver the fencing challenge to Hamlet. Hamlet, despite Horatio's pleas, accepts it. Hamlet does well at first, leading the match by two hits to none, and Gertrude raises a toast to him using the poisoned glass of wine Claudius had set aside for Hamlet. Claudius tries to stop her but is too late: she drinks, and Laertes realizes the plot will be revealed. Laertes slashes Hamlet with his poisoned blade. In the ensuing scuffle, they switch weapons, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with his own poisoned sword.

### Sources

Hamlet-like legends are so widely found (for example in Italy, Spain, Scandinavia, Byzantium, and Arabia) that the core "hero-as-fool" theme is possibly Indo-European in origin.[7] Several ancient written

precursors to Hamlet can be identified. The first is the anonymous Scandinavian Saga of Hrolf Kraki. In this, the murdered king has two sons—Hroar and Helgi—who spend most of the story in disguise, under false names, rather than feigning madness, in a sequence of events that differs from Shakespeare's.[8] The second is the Roman legend of Brutus, recorded in two separate Latin works. Its hero, Lucius ("shining, light"), changes his name and persona to Brutus ("dull, stupid"), playing the role of a fool to avoid the fate of his father and brothers, and eventually slaying his family's killer, King Tarquinius. A 17th-century Nordic scholar, Torfaeus, compared the Icelandic hero Amlóði (Amlodi) and the hero Prince Ambales (from the Ambales Saga) to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Similarities include the prince's feigned madness, his accidental killing of the king's counsellor in his mother's bedroom, and the eventual slaying of his uncle.[9]

Many of the earlier legendary elements are interwoven in the 13th-century "Life of Amleth" (Latin: *Vita Amlethi*) by Saxo Grammaticus, part of *Gesta Danorum*.<sup>[10]</sup> Written in Latin, it reflects classical Roman concepts of virtue and heroism, and was widely available in Shakespeare's day.<sup>[11]</sup> Significant parallels include the prince feigning madness, his mother's hasty marriage to the usurper, the prince killing a hidden spy, and the prince substituting the execution of two retainers for his own. A reasonably faithful version of Saxo's story was translated into French in 1570 by François de Belleforest, in his *Histoires tragiques*.<sup>[12]</sup> Belleforest embellished Saxo's text substantially, almost doubling its length, and introduced the hero's melancholy.<sup>[13]</sup>

#### Analysis and criticism

##### Critical history

From the early 17th century, the play was famous for its ghost and vivid dramatisation of melancholy and insanity, leading to a procession of mad courtiers and ladies in Jacobean and Caroline drama.<sup>[66]</sup><sup>[67]</sup> Though it remained popular with mass audiences, late 17th-century Restoration critics saw Hamlet as primitive and disapproved of its lack of unity and decorum.<sup>[68]</sup><sup>[69]</sup> This view changed drastically in the 18th century, when critics regarded Hamlet as a hero—a pure, brilliant young man thrust into unfortunate circumstances.<sup>[70]</sup> By the mid-18th century, however, the advent of Gothic literature brought psychological and mystical readings, returning madness and the ghost to the forefront.<sup>[71]</sup> Not until the late 18th century did critics and performers begin to view Hamlet as confusing and inconsistent. Before then, he was either mad, or not; either a hero, or not; with no in-betweens.<sup>[72]</sup> These developments represented a fundamental change in literary criticism, which came to focus more on character and less on plot.<sup>[73]</sup> By the 19th century, Romantic critics valued Hamlet for its internal, individual conflict reflecting the strong contemporary emphasis on internal struggles and inner character in general.<sup>[74]</sup> Then too, critics started to focus on Hamlet's delay as a character trait, rather than a plot device.<sup>[73]</sup> This focus on character and internal struggle continued into the 20th century, when criticism branched in several directions, discussed in context and interpretation below.

##### Dramatic structure

Modern editors have divided the play into five acts, and each act into scenes. The First Folio marks the first two acts only. The quartos do not have such divisions. The division into five acts follows Seneca, who in his plays, regularized the way ancient Greek tragedies contain five episodes, which are separated by four choral odes. In Hamlet the development of the plot or the action are determined by the unfolding of Hamlet's character. The soliloquies do not interrupt the plot, instead they are highlights of each block of action. The plot is the developing revelation of Hamlet's view of what is "rotten in the state of Denmark." The action of the play is driven forward in dialogue; but in the soliloquies time and action stop, the meaning of action is questioned, fog of illusion is broached, and truths are exposed. The contrast between appearance and reality is a significant theme. Hamlet is presented with an image, and then interprets its deeper or darker meaning. Examples begin with Hamlet questioning the reality of

the ghost. It continues with Hamlet's taking on an "antic disposition" in order to appear mad, though he is not. The contrast (appearance and reality) is also expressed in several "spying scenes": Act two begins with Polonius sending Reynaldo to spy on his son, Laertes. Claudius and Polonius spy on Ophelia as she meets with Hamlet. In act two, Claudius asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet. Similarly, the play-within-a-play is used by Hamlet to reveal his step-father's hidden nature.

#### Length

The First Quarto (1603) text of Hamlet contains 15,983 words, the Second Quarto (1604) contains 28,628 words, and the First Folio (1623) contains 27,602 words. Counting the number of lines varies between editions, partly because prose sections in the play may be formatted with varied lengths.[78] Editions of Hamlet that are created by conflating the texts of the Second Quarto and the Folio are said to have approximately 3,900 lines;[79] the number of lines varies between those editions based on formatting the prose sections, counting methods, and how the editors have joined the texts together.[80] Hamlet is by far the longest play that Shakespeare wrote, and one of the longest plays in the Western canon. It might require more than four hours to stage;[81] a typical Elizabethan play would need two to three hours.[82] It is speculated that the because of the considerable length of Q2 and F1, there was an expectation that those texts would be abridged for performance, or that Q2 and F1 may have been aimed at a reading audience.[83]

#### Language

Much of Hamlet's language is courtly: elaborate, witty discourse, as recommended by Baldassare Castiglione's 1528 etiquette guide, *The Courtier*. This work specifically advises royal retainers to amuse their masters with inventive language. Osric and Polonius, especially, seem to respect this injunction. Claudius's speech is rich with rhetorical figures—as is Hamlet's and, at times, Ophelia's—while the language of Horatio, the guards, and the gravediggers is simpler. Claudius's high status is reinforced by using the royal first person plural ("we" or "us"), and anaphora mixed with metaphor to resonate with Greek political speeches.[84]

Of all the characters, Hamlet has the greatest rhetorical skill. He uses highly developed metaphors, stichomythia, and in nine memorable words deploys both anaphora and asyndeton: "to die: to sleep— / To sleep, perchance to dream".[85] In contrast, when occasion demands, he is precise and straightforward, as when he explains his inward emotion to his mother: "But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe".[86] At times, he relies heavily on puns to express his true thoughts while simultaneously concealing them.[87] Pauline Kiernan argues that Shakespeare changed English drama forever in Hamlet because he "showed how a character's language can often be saying several things at once, and contradictory meanings at that, to reflect fragmented thoughts and disturbed feelings". She gives the example of Hamlet's advice to Ophelia, "get thee to a nunnery", [88] which, she claims, is simultaneously a reference to a place of chastity and a slang term for a brothel, reflecting Hamlet's confused feelings about female sexuality.[89] However Harold Jenkins does not agree, having studied the few examples that are used to support that idea, and finds that there is no support for the assumption that "nunnery" was used that way in slang, or that Hamlet intended such a meaning. The context of the scene suggests that a nunnery would not be a brothel, but instead a place of renunciation and a "sanctuary from marriage and from the world's contamination".[90] Thompson and Taylor consider the brothel idea incorrect considering that "Hamlet is trying to deter Ophelia from breeding".[91]

#### Context and interpretation

##### Religious

Written at a time of religious upheaval and in the wake of the English Reformation, the play is alternately Catholic (or piously medieval) and Protestant (or consciously modern). The ghost describes himself as being in purgatory and as dying without last rites. This and Ophelia's burial ceremony, which is characteristically Catholic, make up most of the play's Catholic connections. Some scholars have

observed that revenge tragedies come from Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, where the revenge tragedies present contradictions of motives, since according to Catholic doctrine the duty to God and family precedes civil justice. Hamlet's conundrum then is whether to avenge his father and kill Claudius or to leave the vengeance to God, as his religion requires.[97][b]

## Philosophical

Hamlet is often perceived as a philosophical character, expounding ideas that are now described as relativist, existentialist, and sceptical. For example, he expresses a subjectivistic idea when he says to Rosencrantz: "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". [99] The idea that nothing is real except in the mind of the individual finds its roots in the Greek Sophists, who argued that since nothing can be perceived except through the senses—and since all individuals sense, and therefore perceive things differently—there is no absolute truth, but rather only relative truth.[100] The clearest alleged instance of existentialism is in the "to be, or not to be"[101] speech, where Hamlet is thought by some to use "being" to allude to life and action, and "not being" to death and inaction.

## Psychoanalytic

### Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud's thoughts regarding Hamlet were first published in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), as a footnote to a discussion of Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, all of which is part of his consideration of the causes of neurosis. Freud does not offer over-all interpretations of the plays, but uses the two tragedies to illustrate and corroborate his psychological theories, which are based on his treatments of his patients and on his studies. Productions of *Hamlet* have used Freud's ideas to support their own interpretations.[105][106] In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud says that according to his experience "parents play a leading part in the infantile psychology of all persons who subsequently become psychoneurotics," and that "falling in love with one parent and hating the other" is a common impulse in early childhood, and is important source material of "subsequent neurosis". He says that "in their amorous or hostile attitude toward their parents" neurotics reveal something that occurs with less intensity "in the minds of the majority of children". Freud considered that Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, with its story that involves crimes of parricide and incest, "has furnished us with legendary matter which corroborates" these ideas, and that the "profound and universal validity of the old legends" is understandable only by recognizing the validity of these theories of "infantile psychology".[107]

### Jacques Lacan

#### Feminist

In the 20th century, feminist critics opened up new approaches to Gertrude and Ophelia. New historicist and cultural materialist critics examined the play in its historical context, attempting to piece together its original cultural environment.[126] They focused on the gender system of early modern England, pointing to the common trinity of maid, wife, or widow, with whores outside of that stereotype. In this analysis, the essence of *Hamlet* is the central character's changed perception of his mother as a whore because of her failure to remain faithful to Old Hamlet. In consequence, Hamlet loses his faith in all women, treating Ophelia as if she too were a whore and dishonest with Hamlet. Ophelia, by some critics, can be seen as honest and fair; however, it is virtually impossible to link these two traits, since 'fairness' is an outward trait, while 'honesty' is an inward trait.[127]

#### Influence

*Hamlet* is one of the most quoted works in the English language, and is often included on lists of the world's greatest literature.[d] As such, it reverberates through the writing of later centuries. Academic Laurie Osborne identifies the direct influence of *Hamlet* in numerous modern narratives, and divides

them into four main categories: fictional accounts of the play's composition, simplifications of the story for young readers, stories expanding the role of one or more characters, and narratives featuring performances of the play.[134]

English poet John Milton was an early admirer of Shakespeare and took evident inspiration from his work. As John Kerrigan discusses, Milton originally considered writing his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) as a tragedy.[135] While Milton did not ultimately go that route, the poem still shows distinct echoes of Shakespearean revenge tragedy, and of *Hamlet* in particular. As scholar Christopher N. Warren argues, *Paradise Lost*'s Satan "undergoes a transformation in the poem from a Hamlet-like avenger into a Claudius-like usurper," a plot device that supports Milton's larger Republican internationalist project.[136] The poem also reworks theatrical language from *Hamlet*, especially around the idea of "putting on" certain dispositions, as when Hamlet puts on "an antic disposition," similarly to the Son in *Paradise Lost* who "can put on / [God's] terrors." [137]

### 18th century

The play was revived early in the Restoration. When the existing stock of pre-civil war plays was divided between the two newly created patent theatre companies, *Hamlet* was the only Shakespearean favourite that Sir William Davenant's Duke's Company secured.[158] It became the first of Shakespeare's plays to be presented with movable flats painted with generic scenery behind the proscenium arch of Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre.[f] This new stage convention highlighted the frequency with which Shakespeare shifts dramatic location, encouraging the recurrent criticism of his failure to maintain unity of place.[160] In the title role, Davenant cast Thomas Betterton, who continued to play the Dane until he was 74.[161] David Garrick at Drury Lane produced a version that adapted Shakespeare heavily; he declared: "I had sworn I would not leave the stage till I had rescued that noble play from all the rubbish of the fifth act. I have brought it forth without the grave-digger's trick, Osrick, & the fencing match".[g] The first actor known to have played *Hamlet* in North America is Lewis Hallam Jr., in the American Company's production in Philadelphia in 1759.[163]

### 19th century

From around 1810 to 1840, the best-known Shakespearean performances in the United States were tours by leading London actors—including George Frederick Cooke, Junius Brutus Booth, Edmund Kean, William Charles Macready, and Charles Kemble. Of these, Booth remained to make his career in the States, fathering the nation's most notorious actor, John Wilkes Booth (who later assassinated Abraham Lincoln), and its most famous *Hamlet*, Edwin Booth.[169] Edwin Booth's *Hamlet* at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in 1875 was described as "... the dark, sad, dreamy, mysterious hero of a poem. [... acted] in an ideal manner, as far removed as possible from the plane of actual life".[170][171] Booth played *Hamlet* for 100 nights in the 1864/5 season at the Winter Garden Theatre, inaugurating the era of long-run Shakespeare in America.[171]

In the United Kingdom, the actor-managers of the Victorian era (including Kean, Samuel Phelps, Macready, and Henry Irving) staged Shakespeare in a grand manner, with elaborate scenery and costumes.[172] The tendency of actor-managers to emphasise the importance of their own central character did not always meet with the critics' approval. George Bernard Shaw's praise for Johnston Forbes-Robertson's performance contains a sideswipe at Irving: "The story of the play was perfectly intelligible, and quite took the attention of the audience off the principal actor at moments. What is the Lyceum coming to?"[h]

### 20th century

Apart from some western troupes' 19th-century visits, the first professional performance of *Hamlet* in Japan was Otojirō Kawakami's 1903 *Shinpa* ("new school theatre") adaptation.[180] Tsubouchi Shōyō translated *Hamlet* and produced a performance in 1911 that blended *Shingeki* ("new drama") and *Kabuki* styles.[180] This hybrid-genre reached its peak in Tsuneari Fukuda's 1955 *Hamlet*. [180] In

1998, Yukio Ninagawa produced an acclaimed version of Hamlet in the style of Nō theatre, which he took to London.[181]

Konstantin Stanislavski and Edward Gordon Craig—two of the 20th century's most influential theatre practitioners—collaborated on the Moscow Art Theatre's seminal production of 1911–12.[j] While Craig favoured stylised abstraction, Stanislavski, armed with his 'system,' explored psychological motivation.[183] Craig conceived of the play as a symbolist monodrama, offering a dream-like vision as seen through Hamlet's eyes alone.[k] This was most evident in the staging of the first court scene.[187][l] The most famous aspect of the production is Craig's use of large, abstract screens that altered the size and shape of the acting area for each scene, representing the character's state of mind spatially or visualising a dramaturgical progression.[189] The production attracted enthusiastic and unprecedented worldwide attention for the theatre and placed it "on the cultural map for Western Europe".[190][191]

The first modern dress stagings of Hamlet happened in 1925 in London and then New York. Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre opened their production, directed by H.K. Ayliff at the Kingsway Theatre on August 25, 1925.[192] Ivor Brown reported, "Many of the first night audience came to scoff and remained to hold its breath, to marvel and enjoy..... Shakespeare's victory over time and tailoring was swift and sweeping." [193] Horace Brisbin Liveright's modern dress production opened at the Booth Theater in New York on November 9, 1925, the same night that the London production moved to Birmingham. It was known "more dryly, and perhaps with a touch of something more sinister, as 'the plain-clothes Hamlet'" and did not reach the same level of success.[192]

#### 21st century

Hamlet continues to be staged regularly. Actors performing the lead role have included: Simon Russell Beale, Ben Whishaw, David Tennant, Tom Hiddleston, Angela Winkler, Samuel West, Christopher Eccleston, Maxine Peake, Rory Kinnear, Oscar Isaac, Michael Sheen, Christian Camargo, Paapa Essiedu and Michael Urie.[216][217][218][219]

In May 2009, Hamlet opened with Jude Law in the title role at the Donmar Warehouse West End season at Wyndham's Theatre. The production officially opened on 3 June and ran through 22 August 2009.[220][221] A further production with Jude Law ran at Elsinore Castle in Denmark from 25–30 August 2009,[222] and then moved to Broadway, and ran for 12 weeks at the Broadhurst Theatre in New York.[223][224]

In October 2011, a production starring Michael Sheen opened at the Young Vic, in which the play was set inside a psychiatric hospital.[225]

In 2013, American actor Paul Giamatti played the title role of Hamlet in modern dress, at the Yale Repertory Theatre, at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.[226][227]

The Globe Theatre of London initiated a project in 2014 to perform Hamlet in every country in the world in the space of two years. Titled Globe to Globe Hamlet, it began its tour on 23 April 2014, the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, and performed in 197 countries.[228]

Benedict Cumberbatch played the role for a 12-week run in a production at the Barbican Theatre, opening on 25 August 2015. The play was produced by Sonia Friedman, and directed by Lyndsey Turner, with set design by Es Devlin. It was called the "most in-demand theatre production of all time" and sold out in seven hours after tickets went on sale 11 August 2014, more than a year before the play

#### Film and TV performances

An early film version of Hamlet is Sarah Bernhardt's five-minute film of the fencing scene,[236] which was produced in 1900. The film was an early attempt at combining sound and film; music and words were recorded on phonograph records, to be played along with the film.[237] Silent versions were released in 1907, 1908, 1910, 1913, 1917, and 1920.[238] In the 1921 film Hamlet, Danish actress Asta Nielsen played the role of Hamlet as a woman who spends her life disguised as a man.[237]

Laurence Olivier's 1948 moody black-and-white Hamlet won Best Picture and Best Actor Academy Awards, and is, as of 2020, the only Shakespeare film to have done so. His interpretation stressed the Oedipal overtones of the play, and cast 28-year-old Eileen Herlie as Hamlet's mother, opposite himself, at 41, as Hamlet.[239]

In 1953, actor Jack Manning performed the play in 15-minute segments over two weeks in the short-lived late night DuMont series Monodrama Theater. New York Times TV critic Jack Gould praised Manning's performance as Hamlet.[240]

The 1964 Soviet film Hamlet (Russian: Гамлет) is based on a translation by Boris Pasternak and directed by Grigori Kozintsev, with a score by Dmitri Shostakovich.[241] Innokenty Smoktunovsky was cast in the role of Hamlet.

#### Derivative works

This section is limited to derivative works written for the stage.

Tom Stoppard's 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* retells many of the events of the story from the point of view of the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and gives them a backstory of their own. Several times since 1995, the American Shakespeare Center has mounted repertories that included both *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, with the same actors performing the same roles in each; in their 2001 and 2009 seasons the two plays were "directed, designed, and rehearsed together to make the most out of the shared scenes and situations".[250]

W. S. Gilbert wrote a short comic play titled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, in which Hamlet's play is presented as a tragedy written by Claudius in his youth of which he is greatly embarrassed. Through the chaos triggered by Hamlet's staging of it, Guildenstern helps Rosencrantz vie with Hamlet to make Ophelia his bride.[251]

Lee Blessing's *Fortinbras* is a comical sequel to *Hamlet* in which all the deceased characters come back as ghosts. The New York Times reviewed the play, saying it is "scarcely more than an extended comedy sketch, lacking the portent and linguistic complexity of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. *Fortinbras* operates on a far less ambitious plane, but it is a ripping yarn and offers Keith Reddin a role in which he can commit comic mayhem".[252]

## THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

**Antonio, an antisemitic merchant, takes a loan from the Jew Shylock to help his friend to court Portia. Antonio can't repay the loan, and without mercy, Shylock demands a pound of his flesh. The heiress Portia, now the wife of Antonio's friend, dresses as a lawyer and saves Antonio."**

### **Act-I**

In Venice, a merchant named Antonio worries that his ships are overdue. As his colleagues offer comfort, his young friends—Bassanio, Graziano, and Lorenzo—arrive. Bassanio asks Antonio for a loan, so that he can pursue the wealthy Portia, who lives in Belmont. Antonio cannot afford the loan. Instead, he sends Bassanio to borrow the money on the security of Antonio's expected shipments.

At Belmont, Portia and her maid, Nerissa, discuss the suitors who have come in response to Portia's father's strange will. The will says Portia may only marry a man who chooses the correct casket made from three possible options: gold, silver, and lead. Much to Portia's distress, all her suitors are unsatisfactory. However, she does fondly remember a time when Bassanio came to Belmont, and that leaves her with some hope.

Bassanio approaches Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, about the loan. Shylock holds a grudge against Antonio for his lending practices and apparent antisemitism. Still he offers Bassanio the loan. Instead of charging interest, seemingly as a kind of joke, he asks for a pound of Antonio's flesh if the loan isn't repaid within three months. The bond is agreed to (who wouldn't agree to that?) and Bassanio prepares to leave for Belmont with his friend Graziano.

### **Act-II**

Meanwhile, one of Shylock's servants, Launcelot, wishes to change masters and persuades Bassanio to employ him. Shylock's daughter, Jessica, also longs to leave home. She wants to become a Christian and marry Antonio's friend Lorenzo. Before he departs to serve his new master, Launcelot takes a letter to Lorenzo that contains plans for Lorenzo and Jessica to elope that night. When Shylock goes out, Jessica escapes to elope, taking gold and jewels with her. The

following day, Bassanio sets sail for Belmont, while Shylock rages over the loss of his daughter and the treasures she has stolen.

In Belmont, one of Portia's suitors (the Prince of Morocco) chooses the golden casket, while another (the Prince of Aragon) selects silver. Both chose the wrong casket and are unsuccessful. As Aragon leaves, Bassanio is announced. Portia eagerly goes to greet him.

### **Act III**

After a few days, Shylock hears that his daughter Jessica is squandering her stolen wealth in Genoa. He begins to rail bitterly against Christians. He reminds Antonio's friends that if the loan is not repaid on time, he will insist on the original agreement of one pound of flesh.

Back in Belmont, Bassanio chooses the lead casket, and in so doing, he wins Portia. His friend Graziano asks for Portia's maid Nerissa to be his wife. Portia gives her ring to Bassanio, making him promise never to give it to another. As Lorenzo and Jessica come to Belmont, news arrives that Antonio's ships have been lost at sea, and he is now bankrupt. They are also told Shylock insists on the fulfilment of his bond and has had Antonio arrested. Bassanio and Graziano leave in haste to help Antonio. Portia and Nerissa resolve to follow afterwards, disguised as lawyers.

### **Act IV**

In the court in Venice, Shylock demands his pound of flesh. The Duke, presiding over the court, seeks legal advice from the lawyer "Balthazar," who is Portia in disguise. Portia pleads for Shylock to have mercy on Antonio. Bassanio offers his wife's money, which would more than pay the debt, but Shylock refuses to accept. Antonio's death is only prevented as Balthazar explains the bond is for flesh but not for a single drop of blood. So Shylock cannot collect the pound of flesh.

For threatening the life of a Venetian, Shylock forfeits his goods to Antonio and Bassanio. Antonio refuses his share of compensation and asks for it to be put in a trust for Lorenzo and Jessica. He also demands that Shylock becomes a Christian. Broken and in submission, Shylock leaves the court. Bassanio and

Graziano thank the lawyers, who ask for their rings as legal fees. Bassanio and Graziano refuse until Antonio intervenes and makes them give the rings to the lawyers.

### **Act V**

Undisguised, Portia and Nerissa return home at night to find Lorenzo and Jessica enjoying the tranquillity of Belmont. When their husbands arrive, Portia and Nerissa scold them for giving away their rings, pretending they had been given away to other women. Before long, they reveal themselves as the lawyers from the trial. Antonio receives news that his ships have returned safely after all (looks like we didn't need to go through all this mess in the first place!). The play ends as the three couples prepare to celebrate their marriages.

## **As You Like It Summary**

Rosalind and her cousin escape into the forest and find Orlando, Rosalind's love. Disguised as a boy shepherd, Rosalind has Orlando woo her under the guise of "curing" him of his love for Rosalind. Rosalind reveals she is a girl and marries Orlando during a group wedding at the end of the play.

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### **Act I**

Orlando, the youngest son of the recently-deceased Sir Roland de Boys, is treated harshly by his eldest brother, Oliver. Bitter and angry, Orlando challenges the court wrestler, Charles, to a fight. When Oliver learns of the fight, Oliver tells Charles to injure Orlando if possible.

Duke Frederick has recently deposed his brother, Duke Senior, as head of the court. But he allowed Senior's daughter, Rosalind, to remain, and she and Celia, the new Duke's daughter, watch the wrestling competition. During the match, Rosalind falls in love with

Orlando, who beats Charles. Rosalind gives Orlando a chain to wear; in turn, he is overcome with love.

## **Act II**

Shortly after, Orlando is warned of his brother's plot against him and seeks refuge in the Forest of Arden. At the same time, and seemingly without cause, Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind. She decides to seek shelter in the Forest of Arden with Celia. They both disguise themselves: Rosalind as the young man Ganymede and Celia as his shepherdess sister Aliena. Touchstone, the court fool, also goes with them.

### **Act III**

In the Forest of Arden, the weary cousins happen upon Silvius, a lovesick shepherd. Silvius was in the act of declaring his feelings for Phoebe, a scornful shepherdess. Ganymede buys the lease to the property of an old shepherd who needs someone to manage his estate. Ganymede and Aliena set up home in the forest. Not far away, and unaware of the newcomers, Duke Senior is living a simple outdoor life with his fellow exiled courtiers and huntsmen. Their merriment is interrupted by the arrival of Orlando, who seeks nourishment for himself and his servant. The two men are welcomed by the outlaw courtiers.

Ganymede and Aliena find verses addressed to Rosalind hung on the forest branches by Orlando. Ganymede finds Orlando and proposes to cure Orlando of his love. To do this, Orlando will woo Ganymede as if he were Rosalind (even though "he" really is . . . Rosalind). Orlando consents and visits Ganymede/Rosalind every day for his lessons. In the meantime, the shepherdess Phoebe has fallen for Ganymede while the shepherd Silvius still pursues her. Furthermore, Touchstone, the court fool, has dazzled a country girl, Audrey, with his courtly manners. Audrey deserts her young suitor, William, for him.

### **Act IV**

When Duke Frederick hears Orlando disappeared at the same time as Rosalind and Celia, he orders Oliver to the forest to seek his brother. In the forest, Orlando saves Oliver's life, injuring his arm in the process. Oliver runs into Ganymede and Aliena in the forest and relates this news. Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) is overcome with her feelings for Orlando. Celia (disguised as Aliena) and Oliver quickly fall in love with one another. Rosalind decides that it is time to end her game with Orlando and devises a plan in which everyone will get married.

## **Act V**

As Ganymede, Rosalind promises Phoebe that they will marry, Celia will marry Oliver, Touchstone will marry Audrey, and Orlando will marry Rosalind. She makes Phoebe promise that if they, for some reason, don't get married, Phoebe will marry Silvius instead.

On the day of the wedding, and with the help of the god Hymen, Rosalind reappears in her female clothes. Duke Senior gives her away to Orlando, while Phoebe accepts Silvius. Orlando's other older brother returns from college with the news that Celia's father, Duke Frederick, has left court to become a hermit. Thus, everyone is happy (except maybe Phoebe, who marries someone she doesn't love and Silvius, who marries someone who doesn't love him). The play ends with a joyful dance to celebrate





the four marriages.