

SHAKESPEARE
HIS WORK AND WORLD



THE COMEDIES OF
**WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE**

EDITED BY KATHLEEN KUIPER

**Britannica**
Educational Publishing

THE COMEDIES OF
WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE
HIS WORK AND WORLD

THE COMEDIES OF
**WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE**

EDITED BY KATHLEEN KUIPER, SENIOR EDITOR, ARTS AND CULTURE


Britannica[®]

Educational Publishing

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

ROSEN

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Published in 2013 by Britannica Educational Publishing
(a trademark of Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.)
in association with Rosen Educational Services, LLC
29 East 21st Street, New York, NY 10010.

Copyright © 2013 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica,
and the Thistle logo are registered trademarks of Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. All
rights reserved.

Rosen Educational Services materials copyright © 2013 Rosen Educational Services, LLC.
All rights reserved.

Distributed exclusively by Rosen Educational Services.
For a listing of additional Britannica Educational Publishing titles, call toll free (800) 237-9932.

First Edition

Britannica Educational Publishing

Adam Augustyn: Assistant Manager
J.E. Luebering: Senior Manager
Marilyn L. Barton: Senior Coordinator, Production Control
Steven Bosco: Director, Editorial Technologies
Lisa S. Braucher: Senior Producer and Data Editor
Yvette Charboneau: Senior Copy Editor
Kathy Nakamura: Manager, Media Acquisition
Kathleen Kuiper: Senior Editor, Arts and Culture

Rosen Educational Services

Jeanne Nagle: Senior Editor
Nelson Sá: Art Director
Cindy Reiman: Photography Manager
Amy Feinberg: Photo Researcher
Brian Garvey: Designer and Cover Design
Introduction by Adam Augustyn

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The comedies of William Shakespeare/edited by Kathleen Kuiper.—1st ed.
p. cm.—(Shakespeare: his work and world)
“In association with Britannica Educational Publishing, Rosen Educational Services.”
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-61530-933-7 (eBook)
1. Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616—Comedies. I. Kuiper, Kathleen.
PR2981.C58 2013
822.3'3—dc23

2012029319

On the cover: Cast members from a German production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
perform at the 2007 Salzburg Festival. *AFP/Getty Images*

Pages 1, 20, 35, 55, 76, 95, 109 Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Contents



Introduction ix

Chapter 1: The Art of Comedy 1

| | |
|---|----|
| Origins and Definitions | 1 |
| The Human Contradiction | 3 |
| Comedy, Satire, and Romance | 4 |
| <i>Tragicomedy</i> | 6 |
| Theories of Comedy | 8 |
| <i>Divine Comedies in the West and East</i> | 9 |
| Comedy as Rite | 10 |
| The Moral Force of Comedy | 12 |
| Comedy and Character | 14 |
| The Role of Wit | 16 |
| Failure of Self-knowledge | 17 |

Chapter 2: Shakespeare's Early Comedies 20

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> | 20 |
| <i>Sir Thomas Elyot</i> | 21 |
| <i>The Comedy of Errors</i> | 23 |
| <i>Plautus's Legacy</i> | 24 |
| <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> | 27 |
| <i>Commedia Dell'arte</i> | 28 |
| <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> | 30 |
| <i>Ludovico Ariosto and Latin Comedy</i> | 31 |

Chapter 3: The Later Romantic Comedies 35

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> | 35 |
| <i>Puck</i> | 36 |
| <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> | 38 |
| <i>Shylock</i> | 41 |
| <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> | 42 |
| <i>Matteo Bandello</i> | 43 |



| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| <i>As You Like It</i> | 45 |
| Thomas Lodge | 46 |
| <i>Twelfth Night</i> | 48 |
| Cross-Dressing in Shakespeare | 50 |
| <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> | 51 |
| Herne the Hunter | 53 |

Chapter 4: Shakespeare's Other Comedies and Romances

| | |
|--|-----------|
| | 55 |
| <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> | 56 |
| The "Bed Trick" | 57 |
| <i>Measure for Measure</i> | 58 |
| Giambattista Giraldi | 59 |
| <i>Pericles</i> | 61 |
| John Gower | 63 |
| <i>The Winter's Tale</i> | 64 |
| Robert Greene | 65 |
| <i>Cymbeline</i> | 68 |
| The Decameron | 69 |
| <i>The Tempest</i> | 71 |
| Magic in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe | 73 |

Chapter 5: Shakespeare's English Contemporaries in Comedy

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| | 76 |
| George Gascoigne | 77 |
| John Lyly | 78 |
| <i>Master of the Revels</i> | 79 |
| Ben Jonson | 80 |
| Theatrical Career | 80 |
| <i>Comedy of Humours</i> | 82 |
| Jonson's Masques at Court | 83 |
| Prime and Later Life | 84 |
| <i>Jonson on Shakespeare</i> | 86 |
| His Plays and Achievement | 86 |





| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| John Marston | 87 |
| Beaumont and Fletcher | 89 |
| Francis Beaumont | 90 |
| John Fletcher | 92 |

Chapter 6: Shakespeare's Playhouse 95

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| The Second Best Playhouse | 95 |
| The Success of the Globe | 97 |
| The Design of the Globe | 98 |
| <i>Richard Tarlton</i> | 101 |
| Playing at the Globe | 102 |
| Rebuilding the Globe | 102 |
| <i>William Kempe</i> | 103 |
| <i>Robert Armin</i> | 107 |



| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Conclusion | 109 |
| Glossary | III |
| Bibliography | II3 |
| Index | II5 |





Introduction

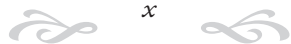
Some people do not consider William Shakespeare's comedies to be his most important works. This is not because the comedies lack merit, but because of the sheer number of great tragedies he produced. Readers generally also concede that the word *great* does not apply to a genre that, by definition, provides lighter fare. Nevertheless, it must be asserted that Shakespeare's comedies indeed contain a wealth of genius; comedic characters such as Puck (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*), and Viola (*Twelfth Night*) are among the Bard's most fully realized and lasting creations. A close examination of his comedies, as detailed in this book, lends credence to this assertion.

Comedy is a class of literature that is sometimes difficult to categorize, although that has not prevented a number of authorities from attempting to do just that, as well as to distinguish a clear line between comedy and tragedy. Most people assume that "comedy" is synonymous with "funny," but this is not necessarily so. While works in the genre usually are amusing, that is not comedy's defining feature. Instead, comedy was described by the ancient Greeks, notably Aristotle, as art that concerns humans as social beings interacting with others, as opposed to considering them as private individuals. Other unifying features of comedies are a focus on lowborn people, imitations of nature, and a grounded appraisal of the inherent contradictions of life.

Statue of a fool standing outside the Globe Theatre in London. Fools make an appearance in many of Shakespeare's plays, including his comedies Twelfth Night and As You Like It. Francie Manning/Photolibary/Getty Images

Shakespeare's first plays were primarily histories and comedies. His early works in the latter genre are often classed as romantic comedies since their plots are primarily driven by the pursuit of love, as in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which is considered by some scholars to be his very first completed play. The play's plot revolves around the titular men, Valentine and Proteus, who travel to Milan, where they are educated in courtly behaviour. Complicated relationships develop between the two gentlemen and the characters Sylvia (the Duke of Milan's daughter, who is in love with Valentine and eventually pursued by Proteus) and Julia (Proteus's love who secretly poses as his page in Milan). In the fourth act, a device that later became a prominent theme in Shakespearean comedies develops: the characters leave civilization and journey into nature, where the inhibitions of public life are stripped away. In the wild they both knowingly and unknowingly tap into primal behaviours, such as when Proteus attempts to rape Sylvia, the resistant object of his affections. The play ends after Valentine shames Proteus for his actions and thus reintroduces civilized deportment, which results in the four young lovers coupling off in their original pairs and living in "mutual happiness."

The Comedy of Errors takes the "confused identity" plotline of Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and expands it throughout the play. The plot revolves around two sets of identical twins (sons of a merchant, Egeon, and their servants) that get paired off in a storm and raised apart from their respective brothers. The four end up in the same city by happenstance years later, just as Egeon is about to be put to death for his inability to pay a ransom. A series of misidentifications ensue, but the play ends with identities sorted out, the brothers happily reunited, and Egeon pardoned.



Shakespeare tweaked the standard romantic comedy formula with his next comedy, *Love's Labour's Lost*, which tells the story of four young men who decide to focus on the life of the mind to the exclusion of romantic entanglements. Of course, they soon meet four young women who are not only comely but can easily match wits with them. The drama shows the men falling for the women, but just as the “happily ever after” moment seems at hand, Shakespeare upsets the audience’s expectations by introducing an off-stage death that forces the ladies back home. *Love's Labour's Lost* thus ends with the hope of a reunification of the couples in a year’s time, but no guarantee that the event will in fact happen.

One of Shakespeare’s most-adapted comedies is *The Taming of the Shrew*. The story of a difficult daughter who must be married off before her much-courted younger sister may marry has been the plot of countless literary works over the centuries. Shakespeare’s play revolves around the sisters Katharina, a headstrong woman who is being courted by the clever Petruchio, and Bianca, who is being wooed by three men. While modern adaptations of the play are typically light-hearted and playful, the original has a harsh denouement that sees Petruchio “tame” Katharina after their marriage by depriving her of food, sleep, and other necessities in an effort to teach her “wifely obedience.” Bianca’s plot ends with her wed and taking on her sister’s former shrewish nature. Although the principal characters are paired off, the ideal comedic happy ending is never quite reached, and the ending is far from merry.

The most popular of Shakespeare’s “return to nature” comedies is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the tale of a group of city-dwellers from Athens and their interactions with the residents of an enchanted forest. The young urban couples have their desires guided by the mischievous

magic of Puck, a forest fairy armed with a love potion. After a series of misplaced affections and comedic misunderstandings, order is restored by Oberon, the king of the fairies, and the play ends with a celebratory triple wedding for the Athenians. Once again, the removal of the trappings of contemporary society and the immersion into a “natural” rural space acts as a catalyst to compel the principals into conventional (and, pointedly, male-dominated) heterosexual coupling.

A much less conventional comedy is *The Merchant of Venice*. The play tells the story of Bassanio who requests a loan from his friend Antonio (the titular merchant) who, in turn, borrows money from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. Shylock famously demands a pound of Antonio’s flesh if he cannot repay the loan on time, which is indeed what comes to pass. Antonio escapes his certain death when Portia, Bassanio’s beloved, saves the day. Posing as a lawyer, she points out that Shylock may have Antonio’s flesh only, but if he spills any blood in the process he faces punishment under Venetian law. A compromise is then reached and Shylock is forced to convert to Christianity as part of his penance. However, Bassanio and Antonio’s victory rings hollow as the play makes it clear that Shylock was first put into his vengeful mindset after years of mistreatment by Venice’s Christians, and his punishment is simply additional humiliation. A second plot that follows Bassanio as he woos and eventually wins Portia gives the play its comedic character, but Shylock’s tragic story and his poignant pleas for equal treatment of Jews (“If you prick us, do we not bleed?”) overshadows the Portia-Bassanio story line and pushes the play into the category of tragicomedy.

Much Ado About Nothing returns to Shakespeare’s familiar milieu of the battle of the sexes. The play centres

on two couples: Hero and Claudio, a conventional love-struck pair, and Beatrice and Benedick, two jaded individuals with little interest in marriage who engage in a battle of wits over the course of the drama. The clever interaction between Beatrice and Benedick is the most compelling aspect of the play; the two former cynics eventually fall in love via their constant bantering. Meanwhile, Claudio's jealous friend Don John convinces him that Hero has been unfaithful, and Claudio publicly jilts her at their wedding ceremony. The plot takes a somber turn as Hero's humiliated family fakes her death and her cousin Beatrice attempts to convince her new lover Benedick to kill Claudio. However, Don John's treachery is uncovered in time to produce a typically light comedic ending. The play is especially notable for its depiction of equal intellectual footing in the Beatrice-Benedick relationship, which acts as a progressive counterbalance to Shakespeare's earlier treatment of women in his *Taming of the Shrew*.

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* takes place primarily in one of his familiar pastoral spaces, the Forest of Arden. The forest is home to a Duke and his followers, who were forced into exile when the Duke's brother usurped his court. The group is soon joined by Orlando, who fled the court to escape his own treacherous brother, and Rosalind, the Duke's daughter. For her safety while in the forest, Rosalind disguises herself as a young man named Ganymede. Thus disguised she befriends Orlando, her lover at court. "Ganymede" counsels Orlando and directs him toward a more realistic conception of love. Orlando's brother Oliver arrives at camp intending to kill Orlando but has a change of heart after his brother saves him from an attack by wild animals. A penitent Oliver then falls for Rosalind's disguised cousin, and a group wedding ends the work once the young women reveal their true identities.

The prevailing through-line of *As You Like It* is that true love is not formal and prescribed but delightfully foolish, more at home in the wilds of Arden than in the courts of lords and ladies.

The main plot of *Twelfth Night; or, What You Will* also centres on a female disguised as a male. In this play, a shipwrecked Viola, who was separated from her presumed-lost twin brother Sebastian in the accident, dresses as a young man and takes on the name Cesario in order to join the court of Duke Orsino. There, she falls for Orsino, who later sends “Cesario” to express his love to the lady Olivia. She instead becomes enamoured of “Cesario,” and Orsino and “Cesario” enter into an unwitting competition for Olivia’s hand, a circumstance further complicated by the burgeoning camaraderie between the two. Once again Shakespeare features the disguised female giving cloaked love advice to the target of her affections. A miraculously saved Sebastian arrives on the scene, and Olivia immediately proposes to him, initially thinking that he is his disguised sister. Viola’s true identity is revealed and, once again, same-sex friendship is transformed into lasting heterosexual union.

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a departure from Shakespeare’s comedies of this era in that it takes place not in a fictional location, but in Windsor, England. It is also unusual in that he brings back characters from his earlier history plays—notably the bawdy and popular Falstaff—and inserts them into the action. The play’s plot revolves around Falstaff’s romantic pursuit of two married women (Mistress Ford and Mistress Page) in the hopes of swindling money from them. The two wives learn of his scheme plan a series of ruses to trick Falstaff. The play resolves with a humiliated Falstaff being forgiven and Mistress Page’s daughter paired off with a worthy suitor.

At the turn of the century, Shakespeare began exploring darker subject matter in his dramas. This period saw him produce his great tragedies, as well as a selection of dramas known as the “problem plays” that scholars have had difficulty classifying for centuries. Two of these works—*All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*—are traditionally grouped with the comedies. (The third problem play, *Troilus and Cressida*, is usually classed as a tragedy.) The “comedic” problem plays share many plot elements, including hidden identities, broken engagements, characters surreptitiously replacing others in their desired partner’s bed, and nominally happy resolutions reached via morally ambiguous means.

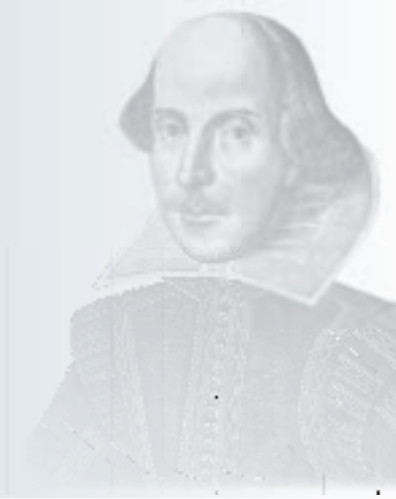
After the problem plays, Shakespeare wrote the last of his comedies, producing four plays that are known as the romances for their common plots involving separation and reunions, as well as for an abundant use of mythic and fantastical elements. The first of the romances, *Pericles*, presages a common theme of Shakespeare’s later tragedies: the relationship between parents and their children, particularly that of fathers and daughters. While sailing back to his homeland, Tyre, after his wedding, Pericles encounters a violent storm, during which his wife gives birth to a daughter, Marina. Believing that his wife has died in childbirth, he buries her at sea. Still alive, she is rescued and joins a temple of the goddess Diana. The grief-stricken Pericles leaves Marina to be raised by the governor of Tarsus, and he returns to Tyre to rule. The plot is picked up years later as Marina is kidnapped by pirates and sold to a brothel. There, she meets up with her sickly father, who then has a vision of Diana. He and Marina sail to his wife’s temple and the play ends with a joyous family reunion.

The other romances—*The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*—follow a similar pattern of familial

separation, disconsolation, and bittersweet reunion. The most notable of this trio is *The Tempest*, which not only features the most prevalent introduction of the supernatural in the play's protagonist, the magician Prospero, but also contains the strongest father-daughter connection of all the romances. The play also makes explicit the connection between Prospero, whose machinations drive the play's plot, and Shakespeare himself. *The Tempest* was intended to be his farewell to theatre, and it is therefore filled with reflective passages on the power of art and a prevailing sense of closure. Because Shakespeare's valedictory work hews closely to the Classical definition of drama, it seems clear that he intended to end his own career with the standard comedic denouement that he wrote for his on-stage surrogate: a happy ending.

Chapter 1

THE ART OF COMEDY



The classic conception of comedy—which began with Aristotle in ancient Greece of the 4th century BCE, continued through Shakespeare’s time, and persists to the present—holds that comedy is primarily concerned with humans as social beings, rather than as private persons, and that its function is frankly corrective. The comic artist’s purpose is to hold a mirror up to society to reflect its follies and vices in the hope that they will, as a result, be mended. The 20th-century French philosopher Henri Bergson shared this view of the corrective purpose of laughter; specifically, he felt, laughter is intended to bring the comic character back into conformity with his society, whose logic and conventions he abandons when “he slackens in the attention that is due to life.”

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

The word *comedy* seems to be connected by derivation with the Greek verb meaning “to revel,” and comedy arose out of the revels associated with the rites of Dionysus, the god of nature, wine, and ecstasy. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, states that comedy originated in phallic songs and that, like tragedy, it began in improvisation. Though tragedy evolved by stages that can be traced, the progress of comedy passed unnoticed because—poetically enough—it was not taken seriously. When the concepts of tragedy and comedy





Gold mask representing comedy, usually paired with a mask representing tragedy as a universal symbol of the theatre. iStockphoto/Thinkstock

arose, poets wrote one or the other, according to their natural bent. Those of the graver sort, who might previously have been inclined to celebrate the actions of the great in epic poetry, turned to tragedy. Poets who had set forth the doings of the ignoble commoner using invectives (insults) typically turned to comedy. The distinction is basic to the Aristotelian differentiation between tragedy and comedy: Tragedy imitates those who are better than the average and comedy those who are worse.

For centuries, efforts at defining comedy were to be along the lines set down by Aristotle: the view that tragedy deals with personages of high estate, and comedy deals with lowly types; that tragedy deals with matters of great public import, while comedy is concerned with the private affairs of mundane, ordinary life; and that the

characters and events of tragedy are historic and so, in some sense, true, while the humbler materials of comedy are but feigned. Implicit, too, in Aristotle is the distinction in styles deemed appropriate to the treatment of tragic and comic story. As long as there was at least a theoretical separation of comic and tragic styles, either genre could, on occasion, appropriate the stylistic manner of the other to a striking effect; the effect lost its lustre after the crossing of stylistic lines became commonplace.

The ancient Roman poet Horace, who wrote on such stylistic differences, noted the special effects that can be achieved when comedy lifts its voice in pseudotragic rant or when tragedy adopts the prosaic but affecting language of comedy. Consciously combined, the mixture of styles produces the burlesque, in which the grand manner (epic or tragic) is applied to a trivial subject, or the serious subject is subjected to a vulgar treatment, to ludicrous effect.

The English novelist Henry Fielding, in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742), was careful to distinguish between the comic and the burlesque. The latter centres on the monstrous and unnatural, and gives pleasure through the surprising absurdity exhibited in appropriating the manners of the highest to the lowest, or vice versa. Comedy, on the other hand, confines itself to the imitation of nature, and, according to Fielding, the comic artist is not to be excused for deviating from it. The comic artist's subject is the ridiculous, not the monstrous, and the nature that artist is to imitate is human nature, as viewed in the ordinary scenes of civilized society.

THE HUMAN CONTRADICTION

In dealing with humans as social beings, all great comic artists—with Shakespeare among the greatest—have known that they are in the presence of a contradiction: that behind

the social being lurks an animal being, whose behaviour often accords very ill with the canons dictated by society. Comedy, from its ritual beginnings, has celebrated creative energy. The primitive revels out of which comedy arose frankly acknowledged the animal nature of human beings; the animal masquerades and the phallic processions are the obvious witnesses to it. Comedy testifies to physical vitality, delight in life, and the will to go on living. In Shakespeare's plays in particular, comedy is at its merriest, its most festive, when this rhythm of life can be affirmed within the civilized context of human society. In the absence of this sort of harmony between creatural instincts and the dictates of civilization, sundry strains and discontents arise, all bearing witness to the contradictory nature of humanity, which in the comic view is a radical dualism; efforts to follow the way of rational sobriety are forever being interrupted by the infirmities of the flesh. The duality that tragedy views as a fatal contradiction in the nature of things, comedy views as one more instance of the incongruous reality that everyone must live with as best they can.

"Wherever there is life, there is contradiction," says Søren Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish existentialist, in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), "and wherever there is contradiction, the comical is present." He went on to say that the tragic and the comic are both based on contradiction but "the tragic is the suffering contradiction, comical, painless contradiction." Comedy makes the contradiction manifest along with a way out, which is why the contradiction is painless. Tragedy, on the other hand, despairs of a way out of the contradiction.

COMEDY, SATIRE, AND ROMANCE

Comedy's dualistic view of the individual as an incongruous mixture of bodily instinct and rational intellect is



an essentially ironic view—implying the capacity to see things in a double aspect. The comic drama takes on the features of satire as it fixes on professions of virtue and the practices that contradict them. Satire assumes standards against which professions and practices are judged. To the extent that the professions prove hollow and the practices vicious, the ironic perception darkens and deepens. The element of the incongruous points in the direction of the grotesque, which implies an admixture of elements that do not match. The ironic gaze eventually penetrates to a vision of the grotesque quality of experience, marked by the discontinuity of word and deed and the total lack of coherence between appearance and reality. This suggests one of the extreme limits of comedy, the satiric extreme, in which the sense of the discrepancy between things as they are and things as they might be or ought to be has reached to the borders of tragedy. For the tragic apprehension, as Kierkegaard states, despairs of a way out of the contradictions that life presents.

As satire may be said to govern the movement of comedy in one direction, romance governs its movement in the other. Satiric comedy dramatizes the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality and condemns the pretensions that would mask reality's hollowness and viciousness. Romantic comedy also regularly presents the conflict between the ideal shape of things as the hero or heroine could wish them to be and the hard realities with which they are confronted, but typically it ends by invoking the ideal, despite whatever difficulties reality has put in its way. This is never managed without a good deal of contrivance, and the plot of the typical romantic comedy is a medley of clever scheming, calculated coincidence, and wondrous discovery, all of which contribute ultimately to making the events answer precisely to the hero's or heroine's wishes.

TRAGICOMEDY

Since about 1580, dramatic works incorporating both tragic and comic elements generally have been referred to as tragicomedies. When coined by the Roman dramatist Plautus in the 2nd century BCE, the word denoted a play in which gods and mortals, masters, and slaves reverse the roles traditionally assigned to them, gods and heroes acting in comic burlesque and slaves adopting tragic dignity. This startling innovation may be seen in Plautus's *Amphitryon*.

In the Renaissance, tragicomedy became a genre of play that mixed tragic elements into drama that was mainly comic. The Italian writer Battista Guarini defined tragicomedy as having most of tragedy's elements—e.g., a certain gravity of diction, the depiction of important public events, and the arousal of compassion—but never carrying the action to tragedy's conclusion, and judiciously including such comic elements as low-born characters, laughter, and jests. Central to this kind of tragicomedy were danger, reversal, and a happy ending. Despite its affront to the strict Neoclassicism of the day, which forbade the mixing of genres, tragicomedy flourished, especially in England, whose writers largely ignored the edicts of Neoclassicism. John Fletcher provides a good example of the genre in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (c. 1608), itself a reworking of Guarini's *Il pastor fido*, first published in 1590. Notable examples of tragicomedy by William Shakespeare are *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

Nineteenth-century Romantic writers espoused Shakespeare's use of tragicomedy in the belief that his plays closely mirrored nature, and they used him as a model for their works. The dramas of Georg Büchner, Victor Hugo, and Christian Dietrich Grabbe reflect his influence. With the advent of realism later in the 19th century, tragicomedy underwent yet another revision. Still intermingling the two elements, comic interludes now

highlighted the ironic counterpoints inherent in a play, making the tragedy seem even more devastating. Such works as Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) and *The Wild Duck* (1884) reflect this technique. George Bernard Shaw said of Ibsen's work that it established tragicomedy as a more meaningful and serious entertainment than tragedy. Anton Chekhov's tragicomedies include *Uncle Vanya* (1897) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904).

In the 20th century, tragicomedy was sometimes used synonymously with absurdist drama, which suggested that laughter is the only response left to humans when they are faced with the tragic emptiness and meaninglessness of existence. Important midcentury examples of this modern type of tragicomedy are Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1958) and Harold Pinter's *The Dumb-Waiter* (1960).

Shakespeare perhaps most fully explored the wide range of dramatic possibilities of the romantic mode of comedy. But plotting of the sort that appears in his plays has had a long stage tradition and not exclusively in comedy. It is first encountered in the tragicomedies of the ancient Greek dramatist Euripides (e.g., *Alcestis*, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, *Ion*, *Helen*). The means by which the happy ending is accomplished in romantic comedy—the document or the bodily mark that establishes identities to the satisfaction of all the characters of goodwill—are part of the stock-in-trade of all comic dramatists, even such 20th-century playwrights as Jean Anouilh (in *Traveler Without Luggage*, 1937) and T.S. Eliot (in *The Confidential Clerk*, 1953).

There is nothing necessarily inconsistent in the use of a calculatedly artificial dramatic design to convey a serious dramatic statement. The contrived artifice of Shakespeare's mature comic plots is the perfect foil against which the reality of the characters' feelings and attitudes assumes the greater

- [The Philosophy of Pornography: Contemporary Perspectives here](#)
- [read online German for Reading Knowledge \(7th Edition\)](#)
- [read The Wee Free Men \(Discworld, Book 30\) \(UK Edition\)](#)
- [The Getaway here](#)

- <http://pittiger.com/lib/The-Philosophy-of-Pornography--Contemporary-Perspectives.pdf>
- <http://musor.ruspb.info/?library/German-for-Reading-Knowledge--7th-Edition-.pdf>
- <http://rodrigocaporal.com/library/Modern-Romance.pdf>
- <http://www.1973vision.com/?library/Encyclopedia-of-Archaeology.pdf>