

Applied Practice

*Shakespeare's Comedies*

**RESOURCE GUIDE**

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**APPLIED PRACTICE**  
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*Shakespeare's Comedies*  
**Pre-AP\*/AP\* Version**

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## Shakespeare's Comedies

Professor John Mullan of University College, London, has written a thorough and accessible introduction to Shakespeare's comedies. The link to this article, which is available for use under the Creative Commons License, is provided below. The article is an excellent resource for students. Some of Professor Mullan's main points are summarized here:

- In the first published collection of Shakespeare's plays (1623's First Folio), the plays were divided into three categories: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies.
- Included in the list of Comedies were darker plays, such as *Measure for Measure*, that do not seem especially "comic."
- The defining element of a Shakespeare comedy is that it ends in marriage, or at least betrothal.
- The couples in the comedies reach their happy endings only through misunderstandings and misconceptions.
- The audience's awareness of the characters' mistaken ideas creates dramatic irony and permits the audience to enjoy the sense of "knowing better" than the misguided would-be lovers.
- The plots of comedies often rely upon the use of disguise and mistaken identity, including misconceptions about gender when young women disguise themselves as young men.
- Many of Shakespeare's comedies take place in foreign or imaginary settings.
- Word play and contests of wits figure prominently in the comedies.

“An Introduction to Shakespeare’s Comedy,” by John Mullan, can be accessed via the following links:

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/an-introduction-to-shakespeares-comedy>



Read the following passage from Act I, Scene i of *Much Ado About Nothing* carefully before you choose your answers.

[Enter DON PEDRO.]

D. PEDRO. What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonato's?

BENE. I would your grace would constrain me to tell.

D. PEDRO. I charge thee on thy allegiance.

(5) BENE. You hear, Count Claudio: I can be secret as a dumb man; I would have you think so; but, on my allegiance, mark you this, on my allegiance. He is in love. With who? now that is your grace's part. Mark how short his answer is;--With Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

CLAUD. If this were so, so were it uttered.

(10) BENE. Like the old tale, my lord: "it is not so, nor 'twas not so, but, indeed, God forbid it should be so"

CLAUD. If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it should be otherwise.

D. PEDRO. Amen, if you love her; for the lady is very well worthy.

CLAUD. You speak this to fetch me in, my lord.

(15) D. PEDRO. By my troth, I speak my thought.

CLAUD. And, in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.

BENE. And, by my two faiths and troths, my lord, I spoke mine.

CLAUD. That I love her, I feel.

D. PEDRO. That she is worthy, I know.

(20) BENE. That I neither feel how she should be loved nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me: I will die in it at the stake.

D. PEDRO. Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty.

CLAUD. And never could maintain his part but in the force of his will.

(25) BENE. That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is, for the which I may go the finer, I will live a bachelor.

D. PEDRO. I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love.

(30) BENE. With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with love: prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out mine eyes with a ballad-maker's pen and hang me up at the door of a brothel-house for the sign of blind Cupid.

(35) D. PEDRO. Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou wilt prove a notable argument.

BENE. If I do, hang me in a bottle like a cat and shoot at me; and he that hits me, let him be clapped on the shoulder, and called Adam.

D. PEDRO. Well, as time shall try: "In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke."

(40) BENE. The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead: and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write "Here is good horse to hire," let them signify under my sign "Here you may see Benedick the married man."

CLAUD. If this should ever happen, thou wouldst be horn-mad.

(45) D. PEDRO. Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly.

BENE. I look for an earthquake too, then.

D. PEDRO. Well, you temporize with the hours. In the meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's: commend me to him and tell him I will not fail him at supper; for indeed he hath made great preparation.

(50) BENE. I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassy; and so I

commit you—

*CLAUD.* To the tuition of God: From my house, if I had it,—

*D. PEDRO* The sixth of July: Your loving friend, Benedick.

(55) *BENE.* Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards are but slightly basted on neither: ere you flout old ends any further, examine your conscience: and so I leave you. [*Exit*]

*CLAUD.* My liege, your highness now may do me good.

(60) *D. PEDRO* My love is thine to teach: teach it but how, And thou shalt see how apt it is to learn Any hard lesson that may do thee good.

*CLAUD.* Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

*D. PEDRO.* No child but Hero; she's his only heir.

(65) Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

*CLAUD.* O, my lord,

When you went onward on this ended action,  
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,  
That liked, but had a rougher task in hand

(70) Than to drive liking to the name of love:  
But now I am return'd and that war-thoughts  
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms  
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,  
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,

(75) Saying, I liked her ere I went to wars.

*D. PEDRO.* Thou wilt be like a lover presently

And tire the hearer with a book of words.

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,

And I will break with her and with her father,

(80) And thou shalt have her. Was't not to this end  
That thou began'st to twist so fine a story?

*CLAUD.* How sweetly you do minister to love,

That know love's grief by his complexion!

But lest my liking might too sudden seem,

(85) I would have salved it with a longer treatise.

*D. PEDRO.* What need the bridge much broader than the flood?

The fairest grant is the necessity.

Look, what will serve is fit: 'tis once, thou lovest,

And I will fit thee with the remedy.

(90) I know we shall have revelling to-night:

I will assume thy part in some disguise

And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,

And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart

And take her hearing prisoner with the force

(95) And strong encounter of my amorous tale:

Then after to her father will I break;

And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.

In practise let us put it presently. [*Exeunt*]

1. According to Benedick, he tells Don Pedro about Claudio's love for Hero because
  - (A) he thinks Don Pedro can help Claudio
  - (B) he is unable to keep secrets
  - (C) it is his duty to tell
  - (D) he is worried about Claudio
  - (E) Claudio did not ask him to keep quiet
  
2. Which of the following statements best describes the effect of Don Pedro's words in line 22?
  - (A) Doubt is cast on Don Pedro's truthfulness.
  - (B) Symbolism suggests a devaluing of beauty.
  - (C) A negative tone suggests criticism of Hero.
  - (D) An agreement with Benedick is highlighted.
  - (E) A metaphor introduced by Benedick is continued.
  
3. The humor of Benedick's speech in lines 24-28 is heightened primarily by means of his
  - (A) obvious naïveté
  - (B) chivalrous tone
  - (C) mock gratitude
  - (D) ironic self-aggrandizement
  - (E) dismissal of his own mother
  
4. Benedick's series of protests to the sentiments Don Pedro expresses in line 29 are most notable for
  - (A) mythological references suggesting supernatural forces at work
  - (B) Biblical allusions used to appeal to the audience
  - (C) parallel structure providing emphasis for the speaker's message
  - (D) inverted syntax demonstrating the speaker's confusion
  - (E) alliteration intended to convey wit
  
5. In lines 53-54, Don Pedro and Claudio "mock" Benedick for his
  - (A) attitude about love
  - (B) servility
  - (C) stubbornness
  - (D) enthusiasm
  - (E) rhetoric
  
6. Don Pedro's rhetorical question in line 86 is a comment on
  - (A) Claudio's sudden love for Hero
  - (B) the depth of Claudio's affection
  - (C) the ease with which Hero will be won
  - (D) Claudio's inclination to be loquacious
  - (E) his own eagerness to assist Claudio

## Practice 11

*Twelfth Night*, Act III, scene ii

Background:

As Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, and Feste (Olivia's Fool) are laughing and drinking in Olivia's palace, Malvolio enters. He chastises Sir Toby and Sir Andrew for their drunkenness and threatens to tell Olivia about their behavior so that they will be ejected from her home. After he leaves, Sir Andrew suggests challenging Malvolio to a duel, but Maria has a better idea. Since she can imitate Olivia's handwriting, she will write a letter professing Olivia's love for Malvolio and leave it lying where the egotistical Malvolio will find it. In the letter, "Olivia" will bid Malvolio to come to her "cross-gartered" in yellow stockings (a style and color Olivia hates) and to smile at her incessantly (a behavior Olivia cannot stand since she is still in mourning for her brother).

At Orsino's home, Orsino and Cesario discuss love. Cesario (Viola) confesses that "he" loves someone around Orsino's height and about Orsino's age. Orsino counsels Cesario to love a younger woman. He sends Cesario once more to plead for Olivia's love on his behalf. Cesario tells Orsino that Olivia is determined to reject him and adds that his own "father's daughter" (Viola herself) once loved a man who would not return her affections.

Meanwhile, Malvolio has discovered the forged letter and is determined to approach Olivia cross-gartered, in yellow stockings, and continuously smiling. The servants, who overhear his reaction to the letter, are delighted.

Viola/Cesario appears once more at Olivia's home. Olivia begs Cesario not to continue pleading on Duke Orsino's behalf. She confesses her love for Cesario, who replies that no woman will ever win his love. Olivia begs Cesario to return, even hinting that perhaps he might be successful in convincing her to love Orsino. Having witnessed this scene, Sir Andrew has decided to leave Olivia's, but Sir Toby is determined to keep him there, where he supports Sir Toby's drinking and other indulgences.

Extension:

In these two clips, Mark Rylance discusses playing Olivia and Richard III in the all-male Globe repertory performances on Broadway, and members of the cast and audience discuss Rylance's performances.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG2uzMGYKDw>



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtoUeVjP\\_rs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtoUeVjP_rs)



Performance:

In this scene from the Globe production, Malvolio appears before the astonished Olivia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=RDPT2e26SgY>

