

Theater conventions

- Performances took place outside, during the day
- Boys played the female parts
- Audiences noisy, eating and drinking, so the acting had to hold their attention
- Actors used costumes donated/sold by aristocrats, so the most expensive inventory acting companies owned were the costumes
- Few props used
- No scenery, just the stage
- Acting companies owned the scripts, not the playwrights. In fact, playwrights sold their scripts to the acting companies for 5 pounds.
- Actors made quick entrances and exits, which helped make the average performance time 2 to 2 ½ hours long

Shakespeare (1564-1616, during the reign of Elizabeth I and then, James I)

- We don't "know" much about his life but scholars make reasonable guesses: he had a grammar school education, which in Shakespeare's time meant learning Latin and reading classical texts in Latin. This education provided access to ancient Roman texts rather than ancient Greek texts. Ovid's *The Metamorphoses* clearly influenced much of Shakespeare's work.
- Half of Shakespeare's plays never appeared in print until after his death when two of his friends compiled what we call the First Folio in 1623. A **folio** is a generic print distinction that refers to the size of the printed page. Single plays were more often printed in **quarto** form, a smaller page. The 1623 Folio grouped Shakespeare's plays into three categories: **comedy, tragedy, and history**.
- Shakespeare was part owner of his theater company, which is one of the reasons we have so many of his plays. For a middle class man, he was fairly wealthy. Clearly, many other playwrights were successful during his time, but few plays survive in comparison to Shakespeare.
- Shakespeare borrowed most of his plots from other sources. We don't study Shakespeare for his plots, which are pretty hackneyed!

Twelfth Night

- Designated a comedy
- One of several plays where women **cross-dress** as men: Viola, the lead character, finds herself in a strange land and disguises herself as a "boy" (young man).
- Written in the latter half of Shakespeare's career, around the same time as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*

Elizabethan-Jacobean culture (or, Shakespeare's culture)

- Religious: While the official religion of England was Protestant, Catholics still practiced, many in secret. Plays often reflect this religious tension
- Gender: Women had no legal status—they were always subject to a father, brother or husband. When a woman married, she legally became subsumed by him.
- Rising middle class
- Rising nationalism, which included antipathy towards all things not English