



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	KING LEAR	HAMLET	MACBETH	OTHELLO	ROMEO AND JULIET	JULIUS CAESAR	CORIOLANUS
CYMBELINE	TITUS ANDRONICUS	TIMON OF ATHENS	TROILUS AND CRESSIDA	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	KING JOHN		
HENRY IV, PART 1	HENRY IV, PART 2	HENRY V	HENRY VI, PART 1	HENRY VI, PART 2	HENRY VI, PART 3	RICHARD III	
HENRY VIII	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	AS YOU LIKE IT	THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST			
MEASURE FOR MEASURE	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM				
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE	THE TEMPEST	TWELFTH NIGHT	THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA			
THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN	THE WINTER'S TALE	LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON	THE HISTORY OF CARDENIO	A LOVER'S COMPLAINT			
THE RAPE OF LUCRECE	THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM	VENUS AND ADONIS	THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE	SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS			

[WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE](#)[Comedies >](#)[WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE](#)[COMEDIES](#)[A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM](#)

[ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL](#)[AS YOU LIKE IT](#)[LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST](#)[MEASURE FOR MEASURE](#)[MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING](#)[PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE](#)[THE COMEDY OF ERRORS](#)[THE MERCHANT OF VENICE](#)[THE MERCHANT OF VENICE](#)

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

[ANALYSIS](#)[CHARACTERS](#)[SUMMARY](#)[THEMES](#)[THE TAMING OF THE SHREW](#)[THE TEMPEST](#)[THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA](#)[THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN](#)[THE WINTER'S TALE](#)[TWELFTH NIGHT](#)

HISTORIES

[HENRY IV, PART 1](#)[HENRY IV, PART 2](#)[HENRY V](#)[HENRY VI, PART 1](#)[HENRY VI, PART 2](#)

The Merry Wives of Windsor

 [Subscribe to posts](#)

Analysis

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:44 AM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:44 AM**]

Shakespeare's most middle-class play, and one of his most farcical, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was heartily admired by Friedrich Engels, co-author of the *Communist Manifesto*. Perhaps Engels enjoyed the way Shakespeare dramatized the formation of the middle class out of disparate social tensions. The play's farcical, comic intrigues create a jovial tone, which suspends hierarchies, reconciles upper- and lower-class characters, and draws them together into the burgeoning middle class.

The main plot surrounds the playful but virtuous behavior of the title characters, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, who are married to two prosperous men of Windsor. Their main point is that wives can be merry and faithful at the same time--that is, that they can lead boisterous, vivid lives without betraying their duties to their husbands--which Mr. Page understands but Mr. Ford doubts. The wives set out to dupe the sexually predatory Falstaff while curing Ford

[HENRY VI, PART 3](#)[HENRY VIII](#)[KING JOHN](#)[RICHARD II](#)[RICHARD III](#)

HISTORIES

LOST PLAYS[LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON](#)[LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON](#)[THE HISTORY OF CARDENIO](#)

POEMS[A LOVER'S COMPLAINT](#)[SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS](#)[THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM](#)[THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE](#)[THE RAPE OF LUCRECE](#)[VENUS AND ADONIS](#)[VENUS AND ADONIS](#)

TRAGEDIES[ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA](#)[CORIOLANUS](#)[CYMBELINE](#)[HAMLET](#)[JULIUS CAESAR](#)[KING LEAR](#)[MACBETH](#)[OTHELLO](#)

of his jealousy, bringing him to the same level of trust that Page feels. Meanwhile, the Pages' daughter, Anne Page, is married to Fenton, a man of higher birth but less money. This affirms romantic love as a kind of social assimilator, transcending class and enabling individuals to create new and inclusive social categories around their romantic relationships.

Merry Wives has a contemporary middle-class tone, emphasizing provinciality and kind of robust common sense, that is unique to Shakespeare's plays. The social network of the community takes a negative view of anyone with origins outside Windsor. Slender's pretensions make him look like a fool; Justice Shallow, whose authority is based in the monarchy, ends up much the same. Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh clergyman, derives his authority from outside (the church) and is heartily mocked for his foreign accent. Caius, the French doctor, is similarly teased for his external roots and source of authority.

The hostility of the locals to the aristocracy appears offstage in Page's rejection of Fenton's request for Anne's hand; Page suspects Fenton of having only financial desires for Anne, which is untrue. Yet the most marked resistance to the aristocracy lies in the repeated abuse of the impoverished knight, Falstaff. By the end, Falstaff has become a scapegoat for the whole town to mock because of financially-motivated attempts to seduce the Mistresses. Yet by the end, Fenton's successful marriage to Anne marks the reconciliation of the middle class and aristocracy.

This play makes use of far more prose than any other Shakespeare

[ROMEO AND JULIET](#)[SITEMAP.XML](#)[TIMON OF ATHENS](#)[TITUS ANDRONICUS](#)[TROILUS AND CRESSIDA](#)

RECENT SITE ACTIVITY

play. As befits its middle-class tone, it reproduces many proverbs and cliches; Slender and Mistress Quickly particularly depend on cliché. Quickly also misunderstands and mishears words throughout the play, hearing sexual innuendo in Latin conjugations and declensions. Throwaway insults against foreigners show a kind of casual linguistic ethnocentrism, which reaches its heights in the ridicule of the fragmented English and unusual pronunciation of Evans and Caius.

The title of the play declares the primacy of the women's roles: the play is literally the story of the two merry wives. The conflicts in which Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are involved are, to an extent, related to gender--but what do they accomplish? Is their triumph over Falstaff's seduction attempts and Ford's jealousy a victory for them as women, or as members of the middle class, or both? Mistress Ford proves that Ford shouldn't be jealous, but in a certain way he was right to be--if he had arrived home at the right moment, he would have found Falstaff, and nothing would have convinced him that his wife was merely playing a trick. And while Mistress Page is blessed with an unjealous husband, she too has problems; she and her husband have each chosen a different man for their daughter to marry. While the play celebrates the Mistresses' autonomy (which is, in part, created by their husbands' wealth--social roles, gender roles, and economic hierarchy are very intermingled in the fabric of the comedy), the only woman who shows herself to be truly free is Anne, who manages to create a companionable marriage like that of her parents, but against their will.

A pattern of sexual allusion develops in events, as well as language.

Falstaff has to escape his second visit to Mistress Ford's house in disguise as a fat aunt of a servant. Ford's hatred of this aunt brings him to beat Falstaff as he flees. This moment of transvestitism looks ahead to the conclusion, where Slender and Caius both elope mistakenly with young boys instead of with Anne, as they had intended. These silly suitors are punished for their behavior by finding themselves in scenarios that suggest a threat of homosexuality, which, like adultery or financially-motivated arranged marriages, falls outside the alleged norm of a happy romantic wedding at a comedy's conclusion.

Additionally, this cross-dressing gives Shakespeare a chance to poke fun at the theatrical conventions of his day. In Elizabethan times, young boys played the roles of women on-stage. So in fact Fenton, though he is leaving with the real Anne, goes off at the end with a boy who is dressed as a girl, because the actor who played Anne would have been a boy; Fenton is, in the eyes of the audience, in exactly the same position as Slender and Caius. The boy gets the girl in an audience-pleasing fashion, yet at that same moment Shakespeare reminds the audience that they have willfully believed the same falsehood accepted by some of the play's most foolish characters.

By the end of the play, the efforts of the main plot to humiliate and expose Falstaff have unraveled. The predatory character is not ejected from the unified town; rather, Ford and Page decide to humiliate Falstaff one more time, even though they believe he is already harmless, and then invite him to their wedding feast. The Pages have managed to humiliate Falstaff, but they too are humiliated in his presence when they find that Anne has married neither of their

choices for her husband. The tricksters have been tricked, bringing about a kind of moral leveling. Hierarchies are resolved, ending in a universally inclusive conclusion. The middle class cheerfully absorbs all comers, despite the conscious efforts of most of the leading characters, and the final unity is felt to be more profound than the various conflicts throughout the play.

Themes

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:42 AM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:42 AM**]

Marriage and Wealth

It turns out that you can't talk about marriage in this play without talking about wealth, too. That's not so surprising because 16th and 17th century nuptials were mostly business transactions. (Go read about "[Marriage](#)" in *The Taming of the Shrew* if you don't believe us.) And *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is no different: in the subplot, the daughter of a rich citizen is pursued by three suitors primarily motivated by her family's bank account. In the play's main plot, a down-and-out nobleman tries to seduce two housewives in order to gain access to their husbands' cash. That gives the [Kardashian/Humphries](#) marriage a run for its money. (So to speak.) But don't worry: in the end, a young, crazy-in-love couple manages to run off and elope. Why does that matter? Well, in its final moments, the play supports the idea that holy matrimony should be motivated by one thing: love. Oh, that Shakespeare. He sure is a softy.

Jealousy

Shakespeare has obviously got a thing for writing about the dangers of male sexual jealousy. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a mistrustful husband learns that another man plans to seduce his wife. The wife is faithful, of course, but the husband believes that all women are dishonest and, therefore, all wives cheat on their husbands. Basically, 16th and 17th century literature reads like a [Men's Rights pamphlet](#), full of anxiety about cheating and lying women. If this were another play, we'd be in for a blood bath. But here, we're just in for a good time. In the play, a jealous husband becomes a figure of comedy when his wife exploits his suspicions in order to

make him look foolish in front of the entire community. LOL!

Lies and Deceit

Watching *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is like channel surfing between back-to-back episodes of *Punk'd!* and *Cheaters*. In other words, when people get duped in this play, they often end up looking like chumps in front of a very large audience of people. When a lusty knight tries to seduce two "honest" housewives, they stage a series of elaborate pranks designed to teach him a lesson in front of the entire community. The tricks are also designed to punish a pathologically jealous husband, who thinks his wife is messing around behind his back. Meanwhile, just about every other minor character in the play engages in some sort of scheme or deception that's designed to make a victim look foolish in front of an audience. Shakespeare doesn't stop there. When it comes to pranks and intrigue, another pattern emerges in this play—the would-be trickster is usually the one who winds up getting duped in the end. All in all, pranking seems to be a way to work out social tensions and power struggles between various groups: husbands and wives, parents and children, middle-class citizens and aristocrats, Englishmen and foreigners, and so on. Hey, it's better than domestic violence.

Society and Class

Ever read this play and thought, "Gee, Windsor seems like an Elizabethan version of [Wisteria Lane](#)"? You're not alone, because plenty of scholars agree that this is Shakespeare's take on middle-class domesticity. In other words, the play portrays the day-to-day lives, activities, interests, and moral values of England's middle class. In fact, Shakespeare goes out of his way to try to define what it means to be a member of this new socio-economic group—neither members of the aristocracy nor the peasantry ([source](#)). They were mostly merchants and businessmen who were making big bucks in commerce and maritime trade. All those aristocrats and servants running around Windsor? Outsiders who threaten the middle-class way of life.

Gender

Let's face it. Reading just about any one of Shakespeare's plays can offer a depressing glimpse into the kinds of gender inequalities faced by 16th- and 17th-century women. (Just ask

[Katherine Minola](#) if you don't believe us.) That said, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a little different. Sure, its leading ladies are up against guys who think all women are either untrustworthy, promiscuous, or simply a means of securing s financial future. (Falstaff and Ford, we're talking to you.) But, the coolest thing about *Merry Wives* is that its women always end up on top. No wives were harmed or "tamed" during the production of this play. In fact, it's the men who are taught a thing or two about how to behave.

Language and Communication

In this play, mastery of the English language is a matter of national pride. No big surprise there, right? After all, Shakespeare is the guy responsible for putting English on the map. (No offense, Chaucer.) That's why *Merry Wives of Windsor* is full of the kind of clever word-play, innuendo, and snazzy banter that celebrates the potential of the English language. At the same time, the play also goes out of its way to mock characters (especially foreigners and members of the lower class) for butchering the queen's English. At the end of the day, Shakespeare wants to show us that English defines England

Characters

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:38 AM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:38 AM**]

Mistress Ford

A resident of Windsor, Mistress Ford is married to Ford and is a friend of Mistress Page. When she and Mistress Page receive a seductive letter from Falstaff, they decide to lead him on and ruin him. In the meantime, Mistress Ford hopes to prove to her husband that she is entirely faithful, so that he will get over his oppressive jealousy.

Mistress Page

A resident of Windsor, Mistress Page is married to Page and is a friend of Mistress Ford. When she and Mistress Ford receive a seductive letter from Falstaff, they decide to lead him on and ruin him. Meanwhile, Mistress Page and her husband disagree about who should marry their daughter, Anne Page. She favors Caius, but her husband favors Slender; Anne herself likes

neither. However, both must learn the lesson to listen to the romantic desires of their daughter.

Falstaff

Falstaff is a knight, but he is also a scoundrel and occasionally a thief. In *Henry IV, Part I*, he was a drinking buddy of the young Prince Henry. Falstaff is boisterous, lively, cowardly, funny, and mischievous; he is one of Shakespeare's most beloved creations, appearing in several of his plays. In *Wives*, outside his element in the countryside, Falstaff thinks he can get away with seducing married women in order to gain access to their husbands' cash. Hence he launches a plan to seduce Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. However, they are cleverer than he is and, on three separate occasions, cause him to be humiliated, beaten, or dunked in a river.

Ford

Husband of Mistress Ford. Ford is very jealous of his wife. When he learns that Falstaff intends to try to seduce his wife, he is sure she'll fall for Falstaff and shame him. Hence he puts on a disguise, calls himself Brooke, and goes to the Garter Inn to find out about Falstaff's plans and his wife's responses. During the play, he must learn to let go of his jealousy, which he eventually manages to do.

Page

Husband of Mistress Page. Page is not jealous of his wife, so when he hears about Falstaff's plan, he doesn't think she's likely to find Falstaff interesting. In comparison to Ford, his easygoing attitude makes him look like a wonderful husband, but he has other problems. He and his wife disagree about who should marry their daughter Anne, and neither are able to choose the suitor she likes, namely Fenton. He must learn that he should listen to his daughter's opinions.

Sir Hugh Evans

Sir Hugh Evans is the local clergyman. He's Welsh, so he speaks in an accent that the other English citizens find very amusing. They make fun of him constantly for it; finally he and Caius band together to humiliate the Host after he makes fools of them.

Caius

The local doctor, Caius is Mistress Quickly's master. He is French, so he suffers the same humiliation as Evans because of his accent and broken English. He hopes to marry Anne Page, and Mistress Page favors him, but Page doesn't, and their conflicting schemes--combined with the fact that Anne does not like him--disrupt his marriage plans. He and Evans also make plans to get back at the Host for making fun of them.

Anne Page

Daughter of Page and Mistress Page, Anne is sought for marriage by an array of idiots, including Caius and Slender. Yet she chooses Fenton and tricks her parents by managing to

elope with him. She defends her own choice and returns triumphant to show up her parents, who were too busy debating their own preferences to listen to her.

Fenton

A suitor for Anne Page's hand, Page denies his suit because he fears that Fenton's interest is purely financial, being high-born but poor. Fenton admits he felt this way at first, but once he got to know Anne, he fell in love with her. She likes him best, and the two marry at the end.

Slender

The third suitor for Anne Page's hand, Slender is urged on by Shallow, but he is unable to speak anything but nonsense to Anne. Page favors him as a good match for his daughter, but Anne does not, and in the end he doesn't get to marry her.

Shallow - Shallow is a figure of the law, but nevertheless a foolish character of misplaced authority. He urges Slender to try to seduce Anne Page, even speaking for him at times.

Mistress Quickly

Caius's servant, Mistress Quickly is everyone's messenger. She goes to Falstaff at the behest of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, and she speaks to Anne Page on behalf of all three of her suitors. Yet she prefers Fenton and supports his suit most readily. Mistress Quickly chronically misunderstands or mishears other people, hearing sexually charged conversations where there are none.

Bardolph

One of Falstaff's men, Bardolph takes over as the bartender of the Garter Inn in order to pay for Falstaff's entourage's room and board.

Nim

One of Falstaff's men, Nim wants to stay honest, and he refuses to deliver Falstaff's seductive letters to Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. Instead, he and Pistol decide to let the husbands know of Falstaff's scheme.

Pistol

One of Falstaff's men, Pistol wants to stay honest, and he refuses to deliver Falstaff's seductive letters to Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. Instead, he and Nim decide to let the husbands know of Falstaff's scheme.

Host

Host of the Garter Inn, the Host makes fun of Evans and Caius's broken and accented English, so they decide to get back at him by tricking him. Their ploy results in the loss of three of the Host's horses.

William Page

Page's son, he meets Evans, who gives him an impromptu Latin lesson which Mistress Quickly entirely mishears as sexual innuendo.

Simple

Slender's servant.

Summary

posted Aug 7, 2013, 10:35 AM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 7, 2013, 10:35 AM**]

Sir John Falstaff has rolled into the town of Windsor, England, with his posse of "cony-catching rascals" and he's at it again. (What's that? You haven't met Falstaff, yet? No problem. Allow us to introduce you. He's the "fat," jolly knight who spends 99% of his time eating, boozing, thieving, "whoring," and causing mayhem in [Henry IV Part 1](#) and [Henry IV Part 2](#).)

When we catch up with Falstaff in this play, he's completely broke, which has put quite a damper on his rock-star lifestyle. But Falstaff's got a plan. He'll put the moves on a couple of rich housewives named Mistress Ford and Mistress Page (i.e., the "merry wives" of Windsor). The housewives have total access to their husbands' money so Falstaff thinks he can solve all his financial troubles by luring them into bed with a couple of super-steamy (okay, super-cheesy) love notes.

Since Falstaff's such a busy guy, the love notes are identical except that one says "Dear Mistress Page" and the other says "Dear Mistress Ford." There's just one hitch. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford are BFFs, which means they tell each other EVERYTHING. When they find out that Falstaff has sent them identical letters, they're seriously offended that (1) Falstaff just assumes they'll cheat on their husbands and (2) Falstaff has sent them the same, ridiculous letter.

Our "merry wives" hatch a plot to teach Falstaff a lesson he won't forget. They pretend to like him and invite him over for a secret rendezvous with Mistress Ford while her husband is away. To complicate matters, Falstaff's frenemies, Pistol and Nim, have decided to rat out Falstaff to the women's husbands. Master Page trusts his wife and couldn't care less about Falstaff but,

Master Ford is *crazy* jealous.

Ford assumes his wife will get down and dirty with Falstaff since all women are liars and cheats, so he disguises himself as a guy named "Brooke" and becomes Falstaff's newest drinking buddy. When "Brooke" offers Falstaff a boatload of money to help him seduce Mistress Ford, Falstaff takes it and tells "Brooke" that, actually, he's going to hook up with Mistress Ford when her husband's away from home.

Meanwhile, over in the [B-plot](#), the Pages' teenage daughter Anne has three guys (Slender, Caius, and Fenton) falling all over themselves to marry her because she's (1) rich, (2) still a virgin, and (3) smokin' hot. (In that order.)

Back to the main plot. Soon enough, Falstaff shows up at Mistress Ford's house looking to score. When Master Ford comes home, the wives stash the "fat" knight in a basket of stinky laundry that hasn't been washed in months and then dump it—and him—into the Thames River. Punk'd!

It's so much fun that our merry wives lure Falstaff back to the Ford house a second time. When Master Ford shows up (again), the wives disguise Falstaff as a local "witch" named "the old woman of Brentford." Master Ford goes nuts and beats "her" black and blue. The women think this is absolutely hilarious and let their husbands in on their little joke, which makes Master Ford all apologetic.

Now the couples get together to hatch a new plot. The plan is to get Falstaff to wear a silly costume ("Herne the Hunter") and have him meet them at the old haunted oak tree. Then, a bunch of townspeople and local kids dressed up as creepy little fairies will jump out of the bushes and terrorize him.

Got all that? Okay, good. This is where Shakespeare ties in his subplot to the main action of the play. Master Page tells Slender to elope with Anne on the same night, and tell him that's he'll be the "fairy" dressed in white. Mistress Page tells Caius the same thing, except that Anne will be the "fairy" dressed in green. Way to pimp out your daughter, guys.

Everything seems to be going as planned. Falstaff is terrified, and Caius and Slender each run off with green and white fairies. Falstaff tries to run away from the fairies but, before he can get away, Ashton Kutcher runs out and shoves a video camera in Falstaff's face.

Just kidding. The Fords and the Pages run out and confront him. Falstaff knows he's been had so he admits that he's been made into an "ass" and all is forgiven.

Just as we're wondering what happened to Caius and Slender, they both show up with two boys in green and white fairy costumes, griping about almost getting accidentally hitched to a couple of kids. Then Anne and Fenton show up and are all "Fooled you! We're married and there's nothing you can do about it." The Pages have a good-natured laugh about the whole thing and invite everyone back to their house for a wedding feast

1-4 of 4



[Sign in](#) | [Recent Site Activity](#) | [Report Abuse](#) | [Print Page](#) | Powered By [Google Sites](#)