

## Shakespeare: Comedies and Tragedies

### Memo1 Introduction and theatre-going

1. Shakespeare's contemporaries
  - 1546-1616
  - Queen Elizabeth I of England, Christopher Marlowe 剧作家, Michelangelo 雕塑家, John Calvin 新教 (Calvinism) 创始人
  - 汤显祖, 嘉靖、隆庆、万历
2. Theatre-going in Shakespeare's time
  - **structure of the theatre**: open air and natural light
  - **audience-actor relationship**: audience are not separated from players by the dropping of a curtain
  - **social hierarchy**: some audience paid extra to sit or stand in the 2 or 3 levels of roofed galleries that extended; people standing in the yard face the open-aired environment
  - **a mixture of taste**
3. Iambic pentameter
  - a line of 10 syllables in 5 metrical feet, each of which consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one (轻重-轻重-轻重-轻重-轻重)
  - the language is not Anglo-Saxon, but **early modern English**

### Memo2 Twelfth Night

1. Theatre in Shakespeare's time (Elizabethan drama)
  - church service, **mystery** play (stories from the Bible), **miracle** play (stories taken from the lives of the Saints), **morality** play (didactic, having abstractions and allegories, characterization of evil and kind), interludes (for amusement and entertainment)
2. Images in Orsino's opening lines
  - hunt-hart-heart (allusion of moon goddess Diana's tale, turned into a hart), love as a pestilence (Olivia "Even so quickly may one catch the plague")
3. Characters
  - Olivia and Viola's conversation: power struggle
  - prose (w/ dirty jokes) v.s. verse (poetic), irony v.s. sincerity, praising v.s. reducing
  - Viola: practical, w/ monetary concerns ("here is gold"), double identity: beauty + damsel in distress (Venus born on the sea), resourceful, planful
  - **4 elements** (fire, water, air/sky and earth/dirt), **season** brother's death (keep fresh), **golden shaft** (Cupid's golden arrow)
4. Elements of love
  - **poetic** or **playful** (the poetic lines are ironic in exaggerations, but enticing in rhythms)
  - **melancholic** or **hopeful** (love is related to death and transiency, and brings trouble)
  - **sensational** or **rational** (love at first sight, or with practical considerations)
  - **spiritual** or **sensual** (soulmate, disguise)
  - **social** or **anti-social**
5. Meaning of the title 12<sup>th</sup> night
  - the 12<sup>th</sup> night after Christmas, Epiphany 主显节 (Jan 6th), a Christian festival
  - epiphany 顿悟: a moment of sudden realisation
  - **double-sidedness** of Shakespeare
  - festival and indulgence v.s. suppression and order, realistic v.s. romantic
  - contrast of life attitude (life for festivity v.s. life for serious work, doing nothing v.s. actively reaching out for opportunities)
6. The idea of "**Norm**" and **Order** in Comedy
  - Antonio: a threat to social norm and gender stability (his homo-erotic relationship w/ Sebastian)
  - disguise (appearance v.s. reality), challenges the conventionality/prejudice of gender
  - reversals of established order: Malvolio challenges the social hierarchy
  - Toby and Feste: the carnival elements
7. Malvolio
  - Arrogant, self-conceited, day-dreaming, challenges the social hierarchy
  - both a comic and tragic figure

## 8. Shakespeare's sources

- Shakespeare changed the way of revelation of the heroine's sex

## Memo3 As You Like It

### 1. Poetry in the forest, literary traditions, and genres

- **Literary tradition**: pastoral literature 田园牧歌 (opposed to political), new comedy (centred around wooing, ordinary people as protagonists), tragi-comedy, folktale and romance, comedies written in prose for the Elizabethan court 散文体传奇故事
- Shakespeare's source: Rosalinde and adaptations
- Forest of Arden v.s. Castle: Critics often describe it as a satire on the pastoral ideal; and a celebration of the pastoral spirit that cannot be bound. The audience loves some scenes, particularly in the forest of Arden, where **love-oriented and cheerful banter** dominates. In comparison to scenes at Frederick's court and Oliver's home, which are dominated by **gloom and battle-filled air**.

### 2. The talk of love, Rosalind's jokes and the problem of gender

- theatricality, "love is merely a madness", Rosalind's love lessons: to break Orlando's fantasy of love and teach him the **harsh reality**, and to test Orlando
- the ambiguity of gender, stereotypes of women
- views on gender: homological sex theory (women are inferior) v.s. women are different

### 3. **Nature** v.s. **nurture**

- whether "gentleness" is born or achieved  
"You gentleness shall force more than you force moves us to gentleness."
- Orlando is "not schooled yet learned"

### 4. Seven ages ("All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players")

- **Jaques** is a melancholic, purely contemplative character, pessimistic (v.s. Touchstone, the optimistic)
- life contemplative (the observer, traveler) v.s. life active (being an active participant)
- infant, school boy, lover, soldier, judge, old man, oblivion (nothingness)  
corresponding to Moon, Mercury, Venus, [Sun (no match)], Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn

### 5. The tragic and the comic, **the turning point**, and the transformation

- change comes from within instead of by external forces
- original story (Orlando educated himself and decided to take the action after reasoning) the adaptation of S (Orlando is good by nature and made the decision by instinct)
- the highest form of love (the spontaneous, unmotivated love), nature v.s. nurture
- In Mencius' philosophy, Ren is part of human nature ("All ten thousand things are complete in me")
- **the transformation**: marriage, return of power, Orlando gets fortune and heir from marriage, the old system (primogeniture) being confirmed

### 6. Reality, dear and political ideas in the Forest of Arden

- **Robin Hood** style of life: resistance to social hierarchy, deer hunting, enclosure
- "what's the new news at the new court?": **a change of political powers**
- the penalty of Adam (before expulsion from **Eden**, the good old days)

## Memo4 The Merchant of Venice

### 1. Belmont and Venice

- fairy-tale, folkloric elements leads to the sense of remoteness
- graphical explorations in 15x-16c: broad horizon, wealth, unexpected fortune
- expectations of love: jewels, a remote place, pilgrimage adventure
- (Bassanio's introduction of Portia) love as fortune-hunters: beauty + dowry

### 2. Antonio and Shylock

- their conflict has economic and religious reasons ("The devil can cite scripture for his purpose")

### 3. The idea of a Jew in Shakespeare's context

- Jews were expelled from Europe since 1290, they are merely symbolic figure in the drama

### 4. The 3 caskets

- Shakespeare's source was Christopher Marlowe, and he turned the bedtest into this fairy-tale like casket test
- 5. Melancholy and humorism
  - Antonio: "In sooth I know not why I am so sad", Portia: "My little body is a-weary of this great world"
  - Humorism: 4 humors: blood (brave and cheerful), yellow bile (quick to anger), phlegm (tranquil), black boil (melancholy) corresponding to 4 elements
  - to strike a balance in between: "There's no mean happiness, to be seated in the mean"
  - 2 "means" : little, middle; the golden middle doctrine by Aristotle
- 6. The moral lesson: **compassion**
  - "If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces."
  - difficult to know ourselves and to those that are different from us
  - Socrates: "Know thyself, and no excess"
  - how to know thyself and others: The Book of the Courtier, "senses, reasoning, intellect"
  - senses ("Has not a Jew eyes?"), intellect ("The quality of mercy is not strained")
- 7. Janus-faced love
  - For Jessica, love is **romanticized** ("love is blind")  
"you must be my torchbearer", "must I hold a candle to my shame?"
  - For Portia, love is **rationalized**, love + monetary concerns, "the semblance of my soul"
- 8. The meaning of act 5
  - music of the spheres, perfection of God's universe

## **Memo5 King Lear**

1. The tradition of tragedy
2. A discussion of Act1 Scene1
  - the division of the kingdom echoes to the political situation in contemporary England
  - Before James I ascended the English throne, there was a lot of anxiety about who the next heir would be after Elizabeth I died. This is because she had no male heirs, and people feared that a war over the title would ensue.
  - Elizabethan England's social and political structure depended on very strict hierarchy determined by status, wealth, and, most importantly, bloodline. Thus, family and political affairs were constantly at odds. King Lear emphasizes this, as well as the prevalent fear that children of monarchs would take advantage of their vulnerable, elderly parents to attain wealth or power.
  - The king's two bodies: "body natural" grow old, while "body political" cannot be invalidated or frustrated
  - what Lear expected: public ceremony (flattery words heard at the court), fear of growing old, the cycling of generations in life
3. Need, nature and Lear's shadow
  - the **knights** are sign of dignity, "Allow nature no more than nature needs, man's life's as cheap as beast's", human's needs are beyond animal needs
  - **Lear's shadow**: Since abdicating his throne Lear has also become **a shadow of the man he once was** and is beginning to **lose grip on reality** (just before this passage he asks Goneril: "Are you my daughter?"). There is a sadness of despair in the words of Lear and the Fool's reply, as Lear searches for some meaning to his life in an existence that now appears increasingly meaningless to him.
  - "O without a figure" = nothing, nuncle = non + uncle
4. The idea of a bastard
  - the legitimate child v.s. the nature child
  - Edmund decided to shape and make himself into a self-made hero
  - against his father's superstition, shouldn't blame the stars for our misfortunes
5. The role of **nature** and the meaning of natural
  - a) natural bond between parent and children, or between brothers
  - b) natural cycling of growing old and death, "Nature in you stands on the very verge of her confine.", Lear is at the edge of his lifespan

- c) natural need of human beings, human nature v.s. animal nature, Lear realized the need of the poverty in his difficulties
  - d) the nature that governs the illegitimate son Edmund, deviated from conventions, unbounded by legal rules
6. The death of Cordelia and Shakespeare's sources
- violating our natural idea of justice, conventions overturned
  - through upsetting our naive expectations, Shakespeare revealed the cruel reality in life  
What comes after suffering might not necessarily be happiness/reward, it may be a renewal of suffering or a different kind of absurdity.
7. The Fool, the Blind, and the Biblical
- The fool: his closeness to Lear, the transferring of folly on stage
  - Function1 of a court fool: He made **witty social comments** and **wise criticism** without fear of retribution, trying to make Lear understand the grave mistakes he has made and his current situation.
  - Audiences could feel his **deep loyalty**, and the **trust** between them (He is the only that Lear listens to, even when he's speaking difficult truth).
  - Function2: he provides a sense of **humor** that cuts through intense, tragic moments, offering the audience a sense of **relief** as well as an **alternative perspective**.
  - The blind: the importance of seeing yourself and the world clearly.
  - The fool sums up Lear's folly neatly with a metaphor, "So out went the candle and we were left darkling". Gloucester and Lear do now "see how the world goes". They both "stumbled" when they saw. Gloucester's blinding is the physical manifestation of the mental torture Lear endured on the heath.
  - Kent, "See better, Lear, and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye."
  - Biblical meanings: A-bibal, praises the natural virtues of Cordelia
8. The ending
- "The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. / The oldest hath borne most: we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long."
- The younger generation shall never need to pay so much to attain wisdom.
  - the importance of feeling, empathy for others  
Feel the pain of others, speak after we could feel for those who are suffering