



SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRE

WORKSHEET 1: SHAKESPEARE AND EARLY MODERN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

I. Shakespeare's Life

Please read Andrew Dickson's chapter "Shakespeare's Life" from *The Rough Guide to Shakespeare: The Plays; The Poems; The Life* (2005) and then answer the following questions:

1. Which two monarchs ruled during Shakespeare's lifetime? Which dynasties did they belong to?
2. What is known of Shakespeare's origins and early life in Stratford-upon-Avon?
3. Describe Shakespeare's London career in the theatre. Which companies was he a member of and in which theatres did they perform?
4. What different types of works did Shakespeare write?
5. What was the type of verse most used by Shakespeare?
6. What do the anti-Stratfordian arguments claim about Shakespeare's identity? According to them, who wrote Shakespeare?

Please read the pages on Judith Shakespeare from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and then answer the following questions:

1. Why would it have been impossible for a woman "to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare" (p. 48)?
2. What were the differences in the upbringing of William and Judith?
3. How did she react to the life that was prepared for her?
4. How did things go for her in London?

Please read Stephen Greenblatt's "The Death of Hamlet and the Making of *Hamlet*" (2004) and then answer the following questions:

1. Shakespeare is 'the invent[or] of the human' (Bloom, 1998, pp. 4-13), the writer who has most deeply probed into human passions and desires, yet Shakespeare scholarship has not been able to explain the causes behind such a great achievement. What explanation does

Greenblatt propose in order to account for Shakespeare's unrivalled skill in representing human feelings, which, according to him, became consolidated by the time he wrote *Hamlet*?

2. Greenblatt traces the evolution of Shakespeare's increasingly successful skill at representing inwardness, especially as reflected in his characters' soliloquies, and he does so by comparing specific fragments of the soliloquies in *Richard III*, *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*. According to Greenblatt, how can each play be considered a step in Shakespeare's perfecting of the means to represent the characters' feelings and self-consciousness?

3. Greenblatt claims that, from *Hamlet* onwards, Shakespeare's playwriting experienced a great shift, thus "re-launch[ing] his career" (p. 47) and becoming an unrivalled writer in representing human feelings. What specific events in his life caused for Shakespeare to undergo such a change as a dramatist, according to him, and what writing strategies did he start to follow that "immeasurably deepen[ed] the effect of his plays" (p. 47)?

II. Early Modern Theatre and Performance

Please read Russ McDonald's chapter "Performances, Playhouses, and Players" in *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents* (2001) and then answer the following questions:

1. What types of playhouses existed in Shakespeare's time and where were they located? What was the attitude of the municipal government and the Crown with respect to the public theatre? Why did the Puritans attack the Elizabethan stage?

2. Draw a diagram of an early modern outdoor playhouse and describe its architecture.

3. Describe the conventions and performance practices at outdoor playhouses. What type of audiences attended the performances?

4. What was the status of actors at the time? Why has Elizabethan theatre been named a 'transvestite theatre' and what implications did this have for the plays?

5. What types of companies existed at the time? How were they structured and how did they work? What was the main effect of the establishing of companies at specific theatres?

6. What is the difference between a 'presentational' and a 'representational' style of performance? Why could the Elizabethan stage be considered a precursor of Peter Brook's notion of 'the empty space', according to McDonald?

Please read Clare McManus's "Women and English Renaissance Drama: Making and Unmaking 'The All-Male Stage'" (2007) and then answer the following questions:

1. What is the article's main point about the Renaissance 'all-male stage', 'English stage' paradigms/critical constructs and why is that subversive? What connections do these

paradigms establish between stage, gender and nation? Which “different history of the English theatre” emerges as a consequence of challenging such paradigms?

2. What range of forms did early modern women performers encompass?

3. What does the figure of the foreign actress allow us to see?

Reference List

Dickson, A. (2005). Shakespeare's Life. In *The Rough Guide to Shakespeare: The Plays; The Poems; The Life* (pp. 449-467). London and New York: Rough Guides.

Greenblatt, S. (2004). The Death of Hamnet and the Making of *Hamlet*. *The New York Review* (21 October), 42-47.

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McManus, C. (2007). Women and English Renaissance Drama: Making and Unmaking 'The All-Male Stage'. *Literature Compass* 4(3), 784-796.

Woolf, V. (1945). *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin.