

SHAKESPEARE AND THE POET'S PEN

By Ken Jones

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Narration and Compilation by Ken Jones

SYNOPSIS: An exploration of the life and times of William Shakespeare as told through his own words. A ragged- tagged group of vagabond actors present the tale of William Shakespeare, narrating the story from his birth to his death, filling in the drama, tragedy and comedy with the Bard's own poetic words! Moving at a quick- fire pace as they pull costumes pieces from a trunk, these players transform into multiple roles right before the audiences' eyes. The actors move between the roles of story narrator to Shakespeare's most famous characters including: Jaques, Oberon, Romeo, Hamlet, Juliet, Cordelia, Charmian, Henry V, Duke, Antipholous, Mercutio, Petruchio, King Lear, Puck, Cleopatra, Viola, Kate, Gaolers Daughter, Mark Antony, Richard III, Dromio, Theseus, Macbeth and the Witches! A great show for actors to perform, and a great way to teach the magic of Shakespeare.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 3 males)

ACTOR 1 (m)	Plays Jaques, Oberon, Romeo, Hamlet, Sonnet. <i>(39 lines)</i>
ACTRESS 1 (f)	Plays Jaques, Juliet, Witch, Cordelia. <i>(43 lines)</i>
ACTOR 2 (m)	Plays Jaques, Charmian, Henry V, Duke, Antipholous, Mercutio, Petruchio, King Lear. <i>(70 lines)</i>
ACTRESS 2 (f)	Plays Jaques, Puck, Cleopatra, Viola, Kate, Witch, Gaoler's Daughter. <i>(43 lines)</i>
ACTOR 3 (m)	Plays Jaques, Mark Antony, Richard III, Dromio, Theseus, Witch, Macbeth. <i>(38 lines)</i>

DURATION: 40 minutes

COSTUMES: Each of the actors should be costumed in Elizabethan period, and to facilitate the changing of characters, they can add hats, capes or scarves. This will allow for the quick pace of the storytelling.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The stage directions listed in the script are to specify entrances, exits and needed actions for the characters. The stage directions provide a basic blueprint for the show structure, but it should be noted that additional stage movement is the director's choice. The stage director should feel free to explore and create.

QUOTED SELECTIONS FROM: *As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Julius Caesar, Antony And Cleopatra, Henry The Fifth, Richard The Third, Twelfth Night, Romeo And Juliet, A Comedy Of Errors, Hamlet, The Taming Of The Shrew, Macbeth, King Lear, Two Noble Kinsmen, Sonnets* (also phrases taken from many other plays.)

SETTING: *A trunk containing props and costumes should be located upstage. A large wooden chair and an assortment of banners are suggested.*

AT START: *Music is heard. The steady beat of a drum slowly begins to develop into an upbeat English tavern song. A group of five actors drag a large chest onto the bare stage. The actors open the chest and begin to assemble a makeshift acting area. ACTOR 1 steps downstage.*

ACTOR 1: Imagine... if you will. England in the year of our Lord 1564.
A brisk morning on the day of the 23rd in the month of April. A child was born in Stratford near the Avon river. His name was William Shakespeare.

ACTOR 2: All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

ACTRESS 1: At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

ACTRESS 2: And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow.

ACTOR 3: Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.

ACTOR 2: And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part.

ACTRESS 2: The sixth age shifts

Into lean and slipper'd pantaloons,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.

ACTOR 3: Last scene of all,

That ends the strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

ACTOR 1, ACTOR 2, ACTOR 3, and ACTRESS 2 step upstage.

ACTRESS 1: William Shakespeare grew to a young man in the beautiful Warwickshire county of central England.

ACTOR 1 steps downstage.

ACTOR 1: I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows;
Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
With sweet musk roses, and with eglantine...

ACTRESS 1: At seven years of age the young Shakespeare would have entered grammar school and would have been taught the elements of Latin grammar and a list of common words. The young scholars were then exposed to fables and stories of fantasy.

ACTRESS 2 steps downstage.

ACTRESS 2: Captain of our fairy band,

Helena is here at hand,
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

ACTRESS 1: The older boys focused their attentions on history. A history of the Greeks and Romans.

ACTOR 3 steps downstage with a Roman helmet.

ACTOR 3: Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar.

ACTRESS 1: Ancient history... a history of heroes and heroines...
Romans and Egyptians—

ACTRESS 2 steps downstage as CLEOPATRA with ACTOR 2.

ACTRESS 2: Be chok'd with such another emphasis!
Say "the brave Antony."

ACTOR 2: The valiant Caesar!

ACTRESS 2: By Isis, I will give thee bloody teeth,
If thou with Caesar paragon again
My man of men.

ACTOR 2: By your most gracious pardon,
I sing but after you.

ACTRESS 2: My salad days,
When I was green in judgment, cold in blood,
To say as I said then!

ACTOR 2 and ACTRESS 2 step upstage. ACTOR 1 steps downstage.

ACTOR 1: The young Shakespeare absorbed the past and its legends
like a sponge. History became the heartbeat of his story, and the
words its breath. Tales of knights and maidens, Kings and Queens!

ACTOR 2 steps downstage as HENRY V.

ACTOR 2: Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger. (*Steps upstage.*)

ACTRESS 1: Memories of times lost filled his head. Noble and good. Twisted and treacherous. The voices of the past began to speak through his pen. The frown of a brokenhearted youth or the smile of evil-hearted villain were etched with black ink on the yellowed page.

ACTOR 3 steps downstage as RICHARD III.

ACTOR 3: Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York;
And all the clouds that lower'd upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
Grim-visaged hath smooth'd his wrinkled front;
And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasings of a lute.
But I—that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity;
And therefore—since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain. (*Steps upstage.*)

ACTRESS 2 steps downstage.

ACTRESS 2: In the year 1581, an eighteen year old William Shakespeare fell in love.

ACTOR 2: Her name was Anne Hathaway.

ACTOR 3: And she was beautiful. Older by eight to ten years...but still beautiful.

Steps downstage ACTOR 2.

ACTOR 2: Let still the woman take

An elder than herself: so wears she to him;
So sways she level in her husband's heart:
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are.

ACTRESS 2: The young man was in love, and this young man could speak the words of love like no other.

ACTOR 1 steps downstage. ACTRESS 1 in balcony.

ACTOR 1: But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

ACTRESS 1: Ah me!

ACTOR 1: She speaks!

O, speak again, bright angel! For thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
As a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

ACTRESS 1: O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ACTOR 1: Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

ACTRESS 1: 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
What's in a name? that which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd.
Romeo doff thy name;
And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

ACTOR 1: I take thee at thy word;
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized.

ACTRESS 1: My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

ACTOR 1: Neither fair saint, if either thee dislike.

ACTRESS 1: How can'st thou hither, tell me,
And wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb;
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ACTOR 1: With love's light wings did I overperch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out;
And what love can do, that dares love attempt;
Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

ACTRESS 1: If they do see thee they will murder thee.

ACTOR 1: Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords; look thou but sweet
And I am proof against their enmity.

ACTRESS 1: Good night, good night! As sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

ACTOR 1: O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

ACTRESS 1: What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?

ACTOR 1: The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

ACTRESS 1: I gave thee mine before you didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.

ACTOR 1: O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard.

Being in night, all this is but a dream,
Too flattering sweet to be substantial.

ACTRESS 1: Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow.

ACTOR 1 and ACTRESS 1 step upstage. ACTRESS 2 steps downstage.

ACTRESS 2: And young Shakespeare's youthful love soon turned to "thy purpose marriage." 1582—William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. "Star crossed lover's" now joined in the bond of Holy Matrimony.

ACTOR 2 and ACTOR 3 step downstage.

ACTOR 3: I am an ass, I am a woman's man, and beside myself.

ACTOR 2: What a woman's man? and how beside thyself?

ACTOR 3: Marry, sir, beside myself, I am due to a woman; one that claims me, one that haunts me, one that will have me.

ACTOR 2: What claim lays she to thee?

ACTOR 3: Marry, sir, such claim as you would have to your horse; and she would have me as a beast; not that, I being a beast, she would have me; but that she, being a very beastly creature, lays claim to me.

ACTOR 2: What is she?

ACTOR 3: A very reverent body; ay, such a one as a man may not speak of without he say sir—reverence: I have but lean luck in the match, and yet she is a wondrous fat marriage.

ACTOR 2: How dost thou mean? -- a fat marriage?

ACTOR 3: Marry, sir, she's the kitchen—wrench, and all grease; and I know not what use to put her to, but to make a lamp of her, and run from her by her own light. I warrant, her rags, and the tallow in them, will burn a Poland winter: if she lives til doomsday, she'll burn a week longer than the whole world.

ACTOR 2: What complexion is she of?

ACTOR 3: Swart, like my shoe; but her face nothing like so clean kept; for why? she sweats, a man may go over shoes in the grime of it.

ACTOR 2: That's a fault that water will mend.

ACTOR 3: No, sir, 'tis in grain; Noah's flood could not do it.

ACTOR 2: And her breadth?

ACTOR 3: No longer from head to foot than from hip to hip; she is spherical like a globe. I could find out countries in her.

ACTOR 2 and ACTOR 3 step upstage. ACTOR 1 steps downstage.

ACTOR 1: Very little is known about William Shakespeare. His birth. His marriage. His three children—Judith, Hamnet and Susanna. Susanna and Judith lived to raise children of their own. Hamnet, Judith's twin, did not live to adulthood. We know that Shakespeare's father was named John Shakespeare, and that John was a glove-maker. And what we are quite clear about is the fact that William Shakespeare ventured to London to become an actor and a playwright.

ACTRESS 2 step downstage.

ACTRESS 2: This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit:
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time.
And, like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art:
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;
But wise men, folly'fall'n, quite taint their wit.

ALL step downstage and join ACTRESS 2.

ACTOR 3: Arriving in London, Shakespeare soon met up with two men also from Warwickshire, James Burbage, owner of the circle-shaped stage called the Theatre, and his son, Richard Burbage. Under the guidance of James Burbage, Shakespeare began to develop his abilities as an actor.

ACTOR 1 steps downstage.

ACTOR 1: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as life the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air with your hand, thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent tempest, and, As I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'er-step not the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as twere, the mirror up to her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

ACTRESS 1 steps downstage.

ACTRESS 1: The company of actors was known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and in the year 1597, they moved their talents to a theatre located across the Thames River from London. The theatre was called the Globe. In the restructuring of the company the young actor William Shakespeare began to emerge as the group's playwright. His mixture of comedy and tragedy, laughter and tears, drew the audiences across the old London Bridge to the small wooden theatre. Like no playwright before him, Shakespeare was able to breathe new life into old tales. He had a gift for reaching the hearts of those well-to-do and touching the souls of those who had nothing.

ACTOR 2 steps downstage with a foil. ACTOR 1 steps downstage dressed as a clown. He also carries a foil.

ACTOR 2: O, the prince of cats!

ACTOR 1: Me, sir?

ACTOR 2: O, he is the courageous captain of compliments. (*Circles ACTOR 1.*)

He fights as you sing prick-song...

ACTOR 2 thrusts. ACTOR 1 accidently blocks the lunge.

ACTOR 2: ...keeps time—

They fight.

ACTOR 2: —distance—

They fight.

ACTOR 2: —and proportion;

They fight. ACTOR 1 is pinned.

ACTOR 2: Rests me his minim rest, on—

ACTOR 1 slashes back.

ACTOR 2: —two—

ACTOR 1 seems to be winning.

ACTOR 2: —and the third in your bosom!

ACTOR 1 suddenly finds ACTOR 2'S sword in his chest.

ACTOR 2: The very butcher of a silk button—

They fight on.

ACTOR 2: A duelist, a duelist; a gentleman of the very first house,—

ACTOR 1 is chased around the stage.

ACTOR 2: —of the first and second cause.

ACTOR 1 is caught.

ACTOR 2: Ah, the immortal passado! the punto reverse!

ACTOR 2 spins ACTOR 1 into a headlock.

ACTOR 2: The hay!

ACTOR 1: The what?

Throughout the following speech ACTOR 1 frantically attacks ACTOR 2 while he calmly fends him off.

ACTOR 2: The pox of such antic, lipping, affecting, fantasticoes; these new tuners of accents! —By Jesu, a very good blade! —a very tall man! Why, is not this a lamentable thing, grandsire, that we should be this, afflicted with these strange flies, these fashion-mongers, these pardon nez mois, who stand so much on the new form that they cannot sit at ease on the old bench?

ACTOR 2 catches ACTOR 1 off guard.

ACTOR 2: O, their bons, their bons!

ACTOR 2 ends up with both swords.

ACTOR 2: O, flesh, flesh, art thou fishified!

ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 step upstage with their foils. ACTOR 3 steps downstage.

ACTOR 3: The young playwright began as an actor, and therefore, he knew how to write for the actor. Shakespeare may never have written his most famous roles, if the acting company had not consisted of such great performers like Phillips, Heminge, Kempe, Condell, Sly, Allyn, Cowley, and of course, Burbage. Shakespeare was inspired by the acting ability of Richard Burbage to create the most famous dramatic roles of theatrical history.

ACTOR 1 steps downstage.

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