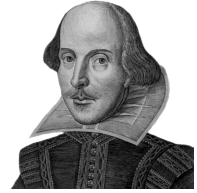


Summer Homework: Lit of an Author 1 & 2 2023-2024

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Due: first day of class



IMPORTANT: Join the Shakespeare Classes' Google Classroom page ASAP FOR IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE ASHLAND FIELD TRIP. There will also be resources posted there to help you with the summer homework.

CLASS CODE: zgsmbkf

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Read** the plot summary of William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. (Pages 2 & 3 of this packet) **Find an image that represents an important theme, symbol, or moment from each act** (for a total of 5 images) **and write a brief explanation for each image**. These images *cannot* be from previous productions or films, but they may be pictures you have taken yourself or downloaded from the internet. Bring them to our first class on paper or electronically; we will do an activity with these images!
2. **Read** the analysis of *Merry Wives* ("Let the Sky Rain Potatoes," pages 4-6 of this packet) and **write a one-paragraph response**--questions, connections, further thoughts, how it enhanced/changed your understanding of the play, etc.
3. **Listen** to the *Shakespeare for All* podcast episode "The Merry Wives of Windsor Part 2 - The Characters and the Place"(from July 27, 2022). Listening to Part 1 is strongly recommended but not required. **Write a one-paragraph response to the podcast** noting questions, connections, further thoughts, how it enhanced/changed your understanding of the play, etc. [Listen on Spotify](#) [Listen on Apple Podcasts](#) [Podcast website](#).

GOOGLE CLASSROOM

We will be using a shared class on Google Classroom to communicate with both the junior and senior Shakespeare classes. A digital version of the summer homework, as well as helpful resources will be posted there for all students in the Lit of an Author classes to utilize. To join, use the class code: **zgsmbkf**

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK: EXTRA CREDIT

There are many opportunities in our area to see Shakespeare performances from Valley Shakespeare Company (WOU), Penguin Productions (right here in Newberg!), Oregon State University, and OPS Fest (to name a few). You are encouraged to go experience Shakespeare's works over the summer to help prepare you for the course, and extra credit will be given to students who provide evidence that they attended (such as a program or picture of you at the performance). Consider coordinating with classmates or family and make it a fun group outing! While some are free to attend, there are often refreshments for sale, and the organizations putting on the performances are funded mostly by donations so you may want to bring some cash if you are able.

Check <https://www.penguinonstage.org>, www.opsfest.org, wou.edu/valley-shakespeare-company, portlandshakes.org, and <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/svpda/theatre/events/bard-quad> for full calendars and information about the shows. If you are travelling over the summer, you might also try to find some Shakespeare in the Park wherever you're going!

PART 1: IMAGES & PLOT SUMMARY of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

from The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Act I

Justice Shallow arrives at Windsor with his young cousin Slender. Shallow proclaims that he is angry at Sir John Falstaff over a personal dispute. Hugh Evans, the local school-master and parson, attempts unsuccessfully to calm him down. He suggests that Slender pursue the young Mistress Anne Page. After travelling to the Page house, Shallow confronts Falstaff, who confesses to his wrongdoing.

Later, at the Garter Inn, Falstaff discloses his resolve to pursue the wives of two wealthy merchants, Page and Ford. When his companions, Nim and Pistol, refuse to help, he sends his page with a letter to each wife. Nim and Pistol, meanwhile, decide to tell the husbands of Falstaff's plot.

Act II

The wives meet and compare their letters and find that they are identical. They decide to teach Falstaff a lesson. To begin, they invite him to come to Mistress Ford's house when her husband is out shooting birds with his friends. Pistol and Nim inform her husband, Ford, of Falstaff's intentions. The jealous Ford, distrustful of his wife, decides to catch her in her infidelity. He disguises himself as a man called Master Brook, seeks out Falstaff, and declares his love for Mistress Ford. He bribes Falstaff to pursue her on his behalf. Falstaff agrees before disclosing that a meeting is already arranged. This makes Ford even angrier at his wife.

Act III

Parson Evans has befriended Slender, who now seeks the love of Page's daughter Anne. Anne, meanwhile, is already meeting with the gentleman Fenton in secret since her father disapproves of him. Anne's mother hopes that the French doctor Caius will become Anne's husband. When Caius learns of Slender's rival suit, he challenges Parson Evans to a duel. The host of the Garter Inn sets different meeting places to confuse the antagonists. Eventually, they are persuaded to make up their differences.

Act IV

When Falstaff reaches Mistress Ford's house, he begins his flirtation. But he is interrupted when Mistress Page announces that the menfolk are returning. They convince Falstaff to hide in a large laundry basket, and he is carried out to the river while Ford ransacks the house in search of him. The delighted wives decide to repeat the trick (especially after seeing the reaction of the jealous Ford) and invite Falstaff to call again.

Despite being tipped out on a muddy river bank during the previous trip, Falstaff is persuaded to accept by Brook, who is the disguised Ford. Like the first occurrence, he is interrupted by Ford's return. This time, however, the women convince Falstaff to disguise himself in the

clothes of a servant's elderly aunt while Ford searches the contents of the linen basket. It turns out that Ford hates the elderly aunt that Falstaff is impersonating, and he begins to beat Falstaff out of the house, much to the delight of the wives.

Successful in their attempt, the wives reveal the hoax to their husbands. Page suggests Falstaff should be publicly humiliated to stop his seduction attempts on honest women. They arrange one last prank for the entire community to put on.

Act V

Mistress Ford invites Falstaff to meet her at night in Windsor Park with him disguised as Herne the Hunter. They plan to scare him with children dressed up as fairies. Parson Evans organises Anne, her brother, and other children to carry out the plan. Anne uses the occasion to elope with Fenton, while her mother and father both plot for Anne to be stolen away by the respective suitors of their choice (Caius and Slender).

All meet in the woods, and the fairies tease and pinch Falstaff as Anne escapes. Falstaff recognises the plot and realises that he has deserved his punishment. He makes up with Page and Ford, and their wives, while Ford is also reprimanded for mistrusting his wife. Anne returns married to Fenton, while Caius and Slender realise they eloped with boys, whom they mistook for Anne in the dark woods. Page and Mistress Page accept Fenton as their new son-in-law, and all return home laughing over the night's activities.

PART 2: ANALYSIS RESPONSE

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the below analysis of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's study guide on the play) and write a one-paragraph response--questions, connections, further thoughts, how it enhanced/changed your understanding of the play, etc. You may use the space on page 6 or type your response in another document.

LET THE SKY RAIN POTATOES

By Diana Major Spencer

Queen Elizabeth may have asked to see Falstaff in love, but Shakespeare gave her Falstaff in lust—not for the merry wives, but for food and drink. His seduction letter begins with three “sympathies”: we’re similar in age; we both are merry; and “you love sack, and so do I” (2.1.9; all line references are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974]). He ends the play with a posset, hot milk curdled with wine or ale and flavored with spices (true eggnog is a posset). Between, greeting the wives in the forest, he prays, “Let the sky rain potatoes; let it . . . hail kissing-comfits, and snow eringoes” (5.5.18–20), all aphrodisiac sweetmeats. Protestations of love come from Slender, Dr. Caius, and Fenton, only Fenton’s ringing true. But the abundance of references throughout the play to food and drink, meals and manners, and Falstaff’s bulk demonstrates where the focus lies.

Falstaff’s motive for wooing the women is not love, but his own penury—or scarcity of pounds, if we use the British monetary system—which threatens to lead to a physical loss of pounds and a pun: Just before bringing out the buck-basket, Mistress Ford avows, “I had rather than a thousand pounds he were out of the house” (3.3.123–24). These wives are attractive to Falstaff primarily because they control their husbands’ purses. They can solve his cash-flow problem.

In Act 1, Scene 3, Falstaff, complaining of his expenses of ten pounds per week, dismisses Bardolph and devises the plan to improve his means. Pistol agrees that “young ravens must have food” (1.3.35), a proverb about necessity which also underscores their role as scavengers. Falstaff then begins to tell Pistol and Nym “what [he is] about,” to which Pistol answers, “Two yards, and more.” Falstaff acknowledges that indeed he is “in the waist two yards about; but I am now about no waste; I am about thrift” (1.3.40-42).

His girth demands something to wash down his food or grease its way. When he isn’t courting, he is drinking, usually sack (dry [sec] sherry), though mine Host of the Garter hopes to drink canary (wine from the Canary Islands, similar to sherry) with him, while Ford thinks pipe wine (new wine from the cask) will “make him dance” (3.2.88–89) to the piper.

Liquor figures in puns, characterizations, and stereotypes. Ford, posing as Brook, introduces himself to Falstaff via a “morning’s draft of sack” (2.2.146-47). Falstaff slurps, “Such Brooks are welcome to me that o’erflows such liquor” (2.2.150-51). Bardolph was “gotten in drink” (1.3.22), which explains his red complexion, his

propensity for drink, and his suitability for tapstering. Mistress Page calls Falstaff a “Flemish drunkard” (2.1.23), and Master Ford wouldn’t trust “an Irishman with [his] aqua-vitae bottle” (2.2.304).

While Falstaff drinks, the middle-class folks of Windsor gather for meals. Five separate meals occur during the play—none on stage. Master Page seals Anne’s betrothal to Slender over a meal at which venison pasty will be served and “we shall drink down all unkindness” (1.1.195-97). Slender’s triple lack—of intelligence, passion for Anne, and manners—is shown in his lengthy refusal of the invitation (1.1.261-313). Later, to cool Caius’s choler at his failed duel, the Host offers to take him where Anne is “at a farm-house a-feasting” (2.3.87).

In Act 3, Scene 2, two meals occur simultaneously: Ford invites the other men to share his “good cheer” (3.2.51); they decline because they “have appointed to dine with Mistress Anne” (3.2.54–55). Ford persuades Caius, Page, and Evans to accompany him, but dinner is postponed by the buck-basket episode. Ford also invites his friends to breakfast the next morning (3.2.230). Finally, Ford’s concern about his absurd jealousy is that he might become “table-sport” (4.2.62).

Named foods are plain fare rather than aristocratic: “bread and cheese” (2.1.36), now found as “Plowman’s Lunch” on pub menus; “a mess of porridge” (3.1.63), any thickened, boiled concoction from stew to mush; “fritters” (5.5.143), bits and pieces of anything, bound by a batter and fried; and “puddings” (2.1.31–32; 5.5.151), sausages or stuffings for whole animals.

Mistress Ford calls Falstaff a “gross wat’ry pompion [pumpkin]” (3.3.41). Anne Page “had rather be set quick i’ the earth/ And bowl’d to death with turnips” (3.4.87) than marry Slender. Evans, while waiting for his duel with Caius, threatens to “kno[ck] his urinals about his knave’s costard [country apple; i.e., Caius’s head]” (3.1.14). Evans mispronounces “words” as “worts,” meaning “vegetables,” which prompts Falstaff’s “good cabbage” (1.1.120-21), short for “cabbage head,” or fool. Finally, “the world is [Pistol’s] oyster” (2.2.3).

In the dairy case, Slender’s pale, phlegmatic complexion reminds the red-faced tinderbox Bardolph of a “Banbury cheese” (1.1.128), a particularly thin and pallid type of cream cheese from Banbury, where stands the Banbury Cross of nursery rhymes, only fifteen miles from Stratford. Simple describes Slender to Mistress Quickly as “whey-face” (1.4.22), the pale liquid drained from curds in cheese-making. More robust cheeses are associated with the Welsh: by Ford, who will not trust “Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese” (2.2.302–303), and by Falstaff twice in the forest: “Heavens defend me from that Welsh fairy, lest he transform me to a piece of cheese!” (5.5.82), and “Am I ridden with a Welsh goat too? . . . ’Tis time I were chok’d with a piece of toasted cheese” (5.5.139). Remember, Welsh rabbit (the original name for Welsh rarebit) is made of cheese, an English sneer at Welsh poverty.

The final food category—butter, grease and oil—mostly characterizes Falstaff, “this whale (with so many tuns of oil in his belly)” (2.1.64–65), “this greasy knight”

(2.1.107-108), whose “wicked fire of lust [will] melt . . . him in his own grease” (2.1.67-68). He will be “ramm’d” in the buck-basket with “foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings, greasy napkins” (3.5.91), “stinking clothes that fretted in their own grease” (3.5.113-14). “Think of that,” he laments, “that am as subject to heat as butter; . . . (when I was more than half stew’d in grease, like a Dutch dish) to be thrown into the Thames” (3.5.118-19).

Falstaff never quite falls in love, though he falls into a lot of other places. Perhaps Shakespeare showed him in the only love of which he was capable: food, drink, and the means to procure them. Elizabeth would not have been disappointed, however, for she loved the “potatoes,” “kissing-comfits,” and “eringoes” Falstaff wished for the wives (5.5.19–20). These candies, made from sweet potatoes, anise and caraway seeds, and roots of sea-holly, respectively, sweetened the breath and aroused sexual desire. They also blackened Liz’s teeth.

PART 3: PODCAST

Shakespeare for All: “The Merry Wives of Windsor Part 2 - The Characters and the Place”

Listen to “The Merry Wives of Windsor Part 2 - The Characters and the Place” from the podcast, *Shakespeare for All*. While the first episode (Part 1) is not required, it is strongly recommended that you listen to it to help you understand the plot of the play.

Follow one of the URLs below, or visit the Shakespeare classes’ Google Classroom page for a link. Write a one-paragraph response to the podcast noting questions, connections, further thoughts, how it enhanced/changed your understanding of the play, etc.

- [Listen on Spotify](#)
- [Listen on Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Podcast website](#)

You may write your response paragraph, as well as any notes you take while listening, below, write on your own paper, or type your response.
