

Hairstyle and make-up in Shakespearean times and comedies.

Ana Isabel Bordas del Prado.

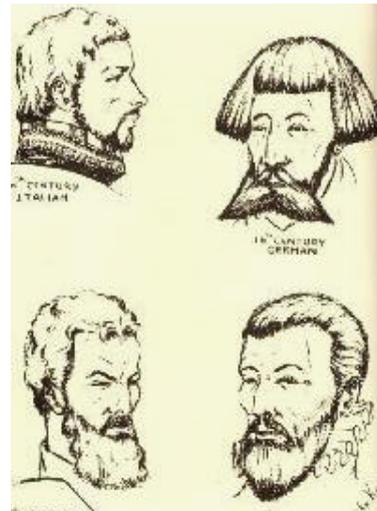
Queen Elizabeth was a referent in fashion that created a very personal trend during her period of reign. Both men and women were very hair-conscious; they spent a lot of time and money getting their hair dyed red or blond, the most fashionable colours. Men would trim and style their beards, and women wore their hair in combs, nets, or jewelled pins (<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/exploring/randj/england/england.html>). The make-up would also become important in a very radicalised, even bizarre way. The model of the Elizabethan woman's fair hair, snow-white skin and red cheeks and lips would be emphasised or achieved through a wide variety of cosmetics.

Hairstyle in men vs. hair“style” in Shakespearean comic characters.

Upper class fashion, which included hairstyles, was highly elaborate, and necessary to achieve attention and success at court. It was referred to as *the Peacock age*, as the Upper class Elizabethan men were often more elaborately dressed than the women, and their hair and beards received a similar amount of attention. (<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>). It is for granted that Shakespeare took Elizabethan fashions to create his characters, but while hairstyles remained more or less the same for “serious” characters, deformations or exaggerations of those hairstyles were present in comic characters.

Men's hair styles varied greatly. Sometimes the hair was cut closely at the sides, but it could be brushed up and held with gum, or perhaps curled over the head. The length of hair varied during the Elizabethan era. It started as short closely cropped hairstyles and increased in length during the period.

(<http://www.erasofelegance.com/fashion/hairstyles.html>).



It was fashionable for men to sport beards during the Elizabethan era. The styles and cut of beards changed with the fashion of the day. The beards could be cut in various styles including pointed, square, round or oblong, and starch was applied to keep them in place. Beards were also kept long. (<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>).



More remarkable and probably used by Shakespeare were the wigs. When the men of this time went bald, they depended upon wigs to help them keep up the latest fashion. The wigs worn at his time were usually a fashionable white or yellow colour.

(<http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/springfield/eliz/hairstyles.html>). Wigs, symbol of richness and power in the Elizabethan society, were used as they were by a lot of characters, but in comic characters the shape was exaggerated, or the colour was artificial. Comic effects could also be obtained by combing the natural hair in a messy way or with hats. Beards and moustaches were also extended or given an eccentric shape, as in these Shakespearean characters.



Hairstyle in women and its representation in Shakespearean comedies.

The style of Queen Elizabeth was obviously more influential in women. The Queen had red hair, so this colour became a real vogue. Women emulated this colour or the yellow as the ideals of beauty with a mixture of saffron, cumin seed, celandine and oil. Another tendency was the idea that a high forehead was considered very attractive, so women shaved the hair from their front hairlines. (<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>).



Two main styles were predominant in hair: the “padded” style and the “frizzed” style, both worn by the Queen. The first one had to be done with two pieces called “rats” -by its resemblance with those animals-, and framed the face with a heart-shape form. The second one was a curly and rather casual hairdo. Most of the hairdos wore accessories like hairnets (“cauls”) or hats called “coifs”.

Many of the hats were adorned with feathers, pearls, glass jewels, spangles, gold thread, embroidery and lace (<http://www.extremecostuming.com/articles/twoelizabethanhairstyles.html>).



In these characters we see the padded style, the frizzed style and one of the many different types of hat in Elizabethan times. In order to achieve the desired hair, women also resorted to wigs and false hair. In Shakespeare comedies, female characters usually follow these patterns, although we should think that just the fact that a woman was represented by a man was a reason for laughing. Women characters, however, could be represented dishevelled or with weird hairdos depending on their social condition or mental state. (<http://www.springfield.k12il.us/schools/sp/eliz/hairstyles.html>)

The importance of make-up in theatre.

Pale skin, sought after by many, was a sign of nobility, wealth and, for women, delicacy. This pale skin could be achieved by a number of means, many of them poisonous. The most popular was “ceruse”, a mixture of white lead and vinegar applied to the face, the neck and bosom. By the time of Elizabeth's reign it was well-established as an essential item for the fashionable woman. Once an ideal whiteness was achieved, colouring was applied in a variety of reds upon the cheeks and lips, being vermilion (mercuric sulfide) the most popular choice of the court lady. Kohl was also used to darken the eyelashes. ([http://www.rencentral.com/jul aug voll/makeup101.shtml](http://www.rencentral.com/jul_aug_voll/makeup101.shtml)).



One of Shakespeare's most popular sonnets pokes fun at the common metaphors used to describe the ideal beauty of those days:

'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
Coral is far more fair than her lips fair
If snow be white, why then, her breast is dun,
If hair be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks...'

(http://www.rencentral.com/jul_aug_voll/makeup101.shtml).

This sonnet could be one example of how Shakespeare saw that tendency of Elizabethan women to “hide” their real identity. And one way to show it to the audience was in part by dressing men as women, where everybody knew that behind that make-up was hidden a totally different person. We can find that “ideal” of beauty in the gentle, pure and virginal female characters, whereas the wretched women could be depicted as the contrary. Mad women wore their hair loose and mad people of both sexes had disordered clothing and make-up. (<http://shakespearean.org.uk/elizthea1.htm>).

Another aspect dealing with make-up was to characterise the actors (and later, actresses). For example, to represent the “clown” or “joker”, the “old man” or a “blackamoors” or “Turks” some painting was required.



This way, physic stereotypes were reinforced, thus creating a bigger sense of identification and empathy in the audience. At the same time, some face features such as noses, wrinkles or eyes were highlighted with a good effect. The make-up was combined with false noses, beards, wigs and other props, and its effect could go even further with the use of prosthetic parts of the face or the body.

(<http://www.rsc.org.uk/home/235.aspx>).

Finally, actors could also wear partial or total masks to produce a greater effect and emphasize funny or comic traits.



As we have seen, what appears to be simple, easy or left to the imagination has behind a whole set of conventions and rules. Shakespeare's magnificence also was present in this field, since he observed those models and stereotypes and decided among them to create his characters. Just by preserving or deforming those models -with the use of hairstyle and make-up- he made people feel and laugh, without the need of words, which would be the culmination of his talent and his wit.



Hairstyle and make-up web references:

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- “Elizabethan Make-up”, Elizabethan Era. Ed. L.K. Alchin. 5 November 2006. <www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>.
- “Elizabethan Make-Up 101”, Renaissance-Central. Ed. Drea Lee. 5 November 2006. <http://www.rencentral.com/jul_aug_voll/makeup101.shtml>.
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Photolinks:

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