

CHARACTERIZATION IN SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDIES

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0 – INTRODUCTION

Along this paper, we are going to focus on the Shakespearean comedies' characterisation. Our intention is to present a paper that goes from the most general, extrinsic and external features of a comedy to the most intrinsic and specific ones.

Firstly, we will present an introduction of the concept of comedy: a definition, its ancient history, types of comedy... Then we will focus on the most typical Shakespearean conventions that are repeated again and again throughout all his plays; conventions that used to make people laugh. Then, we will mention the most common characters and stereotypes that are repeated in almost all the comedies, such as: fools, clowns, kings and queens... Our intention is to demonstrate that one of the most important characteristics of his comedies is the concept of "ridiculisatio". Shakespeare ridiculises all the members of his society without mercy. Following this idea, we will also analyse the elements he uses in order to create that effect of the hilarious situations. We will try to explain how with the use of dressing and costumes, make-up and hairstyles and finally the voice, Shakespeare played with his audience.

It is also important to mention that this is theatre and the most important thing is the performance, more than the text itself. Actors, props, dresses, lights, sound... are essential to create that funny and unreal atmosphere that a comedy needs in order to make people laugh.

1 - SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

1.1 - Defining the terms “comedy” and “humour”.

First of all, in order to develop this paper taking a close look at the concepts of comedy and humour is required and therefore searching the dictionaries to see what the definitions for these terms are will be very useful.

According to the Wikipedia, *comedy has a classical meaning (comical theatre) and a popular one (the use of humour with an intent to provoke laughter in general). In the theater, its Western origins are in ancient Greece. Tragedy is a genre characterized by a grave fall from grace by a protagonist having high social standing. Comedy, in contrast, portrays a conflict or agon (Classical Greek ἄγων) between a young hero and an older authority, a confrontation described by Northrop Frye as a struggle between a "society of youth" and a "society of the old".*⁽¹⁾

The word "comedy" is derived from the Greek κωμοιδία, which is a compound either of κωμος (Classical Greek κῶμος) (revel) and ωιδος (singer), or of κωμη (village) and ωιδος: it is possible that κωμος itself is derived from κωμη, and originally meant a village revel.⁽¹⁾

Amongst its styles, the Black comedy, the Satire, the Parody, the Political Satire, the Adage, Irony or the Alternative Comedy can be found.⁽¹⁾

For the Oxford English Dictionary, comedy should be *a stage-play of a light and amusing character, with a happy conclusion to its plot. Such are the comedies of the ancient Greek and Latin writers, and of the modern stage. But in the Middle Ages the term was applied to other than dramatic compositions, the 'happy ending' being the essential part of the notion.*⁽²⁾

(1) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy>

(2) <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

As it can be seen, the use of humour or, at least the attempt to achieve it is an essential part of the comedy. Therefore, it is necessary to define the term humour.

Trying to find a clear explanation, it has been found the wikipedia saying that *Humour (also spelled humor) is the ability or quality of people, objects, or situations to evoke feelings of amusement in other people. The term encompasses a form of entertainment or human communication which evokes such feelings, or which makes people laugh or feel happy.*

The origin of the term derives from the humoral medicine of the ancient Greeks, which stated that a mix of fluids known as humours controlled human health and emotion.

A sense of humour is the ability to experience humour, a quality which all people share, although the extent to which an individual will personally find something humorous depends on a host of absolute and relative variables, including, but not limited to geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education and context. For example, young children (of any background) particularly favour slapstick, while satire tends to appeal to more mature audiences.⁽³⁾

Some claim that humour cannot or should not be explained. Author E. B. White once said that *"Humour can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind."* Another explanation is that *humour frequently contains an unexpected, often sudden, shift in perspective. Nearly anything can be the object of this perspective twist. This, however, does not explain why people being humiliated and verbally abused, without it being unexpected or a shift in perspective, is considered funny.* Another explanation is that *the essence of humour lies in two ingredients; the relevance factor and the surprise factor. First, something familiar (or relevant) to the audience is presented. (However, the*

(3) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humor>

relevant situation may be so familiar to the audience that it doesn't always have to be presented, as occurs in absurd humour, for example). From there, they may think they know the natural follow-through thoughts or conclusion. The next main ingredient is the presentation of something different from what the audience expected, or else the natural result of interpreting the original situation in a different, less common way.⁽³⁾

When looking at the Oxford English Dictionary, the matter turns out to be not that clear. Therefore, it can be found many different meanings for the term, going from *Any fluid or juice of an animal or plant, either natural or morbid. (Chiefly in medieval physiology; now rare)*⁽⁴⁾, the greek concept of body fluids (*In ancient and medieval physiology, one of the four chief fluids (cardinal humours) of the body (blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy or black choler), by the relative proportions of which a person's physical and mental qualities and disposition were held to be determined*)⁽⁴⁾, and finally getting to the one of major interest which is *That quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement; oddity, jocularly, facetiousness, comicality, fun. Also the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocosely imagination or treatment of a subject.*⁽⁴⁾

1.2 - Comedy conventions.

Along this part, the main goal is to comment the comedy conventions and, specially, Shakespearean comedy conventions. There will be also an analysis of what differentiates comedy from other genres such tragedy, Historical plays... The intention is to demonstrate that a comedy, usually, has a set of rules that are important to follow in order to create the atmosphere and emotional landscapes necessary to make people laugh. Because that is the main goal of a comedy: to make people laugh so much, that they forget their real problems for a while. However, there are other aims such as social criticism, and comedies can also be used for didactic purposes since each comedy can be seen as a lesson to be applied in human lives.

(3) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humor>

(4) <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

When an author is writing a comedy, he must know that there are a set of rules that he must follow, because, indeed, those conventions/rules are what the audience is waiting for in order to start laughing. However, some authors prefer to break down those rules and shock the audience. Nevertheless, comedy itself has a set of conventions, which are less strict, than other genres. According to John Morreall⁽⁵⁾, these are the main differences between tragedy and comedy: He claims and defends the high tolerance that comedy has with chaos, different endings, different types of heroes... He states that tragedies are, somehow, less interesting than comedies, because there is no point for ambiguity: everything is good or bad; all the events are solved with violence and death and characters tend to be more psychologically flat.⁽⁶⁾

1.3 - Features of the Shakespearean comedy.

Traditionally, the plays of William Shakespeare have been grouped into three categories: tragedies, comedies, and histories. Some critics have argued for a fourth category, the romance.⁽⁷⁾

Shakespeare did not invent himself the comedy conventions. He maybe gave them a new breath, but he adapted these conventions from the Greek-Latin theatre. These conventions have been used by authors since then, and they have been repeated again and again in order to make people laugh.

Main Shakespearean comedies' conventions⁽⁸⁾ are:

(5) "Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion", Albany: State U of New York P, 1999.

(6) "Characteristics of Tragedy & Comedy", Philip Mitchell.

(7) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_comedies

(8) "Types of Drama / Plays: Comedy", Dr. Eric W. Trumbull.

- A struggle of young lovers to overcome difficulty that is often presented by elders.
- Separation and unification (reconciliation and forgiveness).
- A clever servant.
- Mistaken identities.
- Heightened tensions, often within a family.
- Multiple, intertwining plots.
- Frequent use of puns.
- Suspension of natural laws.
- Contrast between social order and individual.
- Turning the basis of things upside down.
- The element of marriage.
- A “happy ending”.

It is also important to mention that it is assumed that Shakespeare learned how to organize a comedy plot from the readings of the Latin comedies of Terence and Plautus (they were much studied in Elizabethan schools). This five-act structure moves from: 1- Exposition: A situation with tension or implicit conflict; 2- Rising Action: Implicit conflict is developed; 3- Turning point: Conflict reaches height; frequently an impasse; 4- Falling Action: Things begin to clear up; 5- Conclusion: Problem is resolved, knots untied. As it can be observed, although the plots, the characters, the events... may change, the basis and the structure of a comedy play are always repeated. For example, most of Shakespearean comedies end with the concept of “Marriage” (which is a symbol of union). Marriage is also a symbol of the upcoming and the future; it is the total union of the purely personal element, sexual attraction and romantic love. Whereas tragedy’s focus on the individual makes death the central fact of life, comedy insists in the process of love, sex and birth as a metaphor of life continuity and procreation. Life goes on after the play ends, characters do not die and they share their lives together.⁽⁹⁾

⁽⁹⁾ “Shakespeare’s Plays: Comedy/ English 339: Introduction to Shakespeare”, Debora B. Schwartz.

The plot is very important in Shakespeare's comedies. They are often very convoluted, twisted and confusing, and extremely hard to follow. Another characteristic of Shakespearean comedy is the themes of love and friendship, played within a courtly society. Songs often sung by a jester or a fool parallel the events of the plot. Also, foil and stock characters are often inserted into the plot. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Furthermore, the major genre that Shakespeare developed throughout comedies is the romantic comedy; all Shakespeare's comedies are driven by love. Love is the most important thing in all his comedies; all the obstacles presented to love are overcome, conflicts are resolved and errors are forgiven, in a typical end of reconciliation and marital bliss at the play's close. As one of the most important characteristics of comedies is the concept of forgiveness, there is no matter how wrong the events were going along a play, because at the end, there must be a happy ending, in where reconciliation and union are the basic points.

Maybe, all those assumptions seem to be contradictory: On the one hand, comedies must be a progression of chaos, disorder, exaggeration... and, on the other hand, a comedy must follow a certain structure that is totally necessary to develop the play. Somehow, the important aspect, and the most interesting, one of a comedy is not the ending which is merely the same along all the plays, but the development of the play itself.

(10)

<http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/Springfield/eliz/Shakcomedies.html>

2 – SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY STEREOTYPES

2.1 – Stock Characters.

In Shakespearean comedies many characters are repeated through different plays. This is especially easy to see in the case of “fools”, “clowns”, “buffoons”, or “vices”, for instance. These repeated characters are usually called stereotypes or stock characters.

A tradition in British comedy dating back to Shakespeare is to laugh at lack of intellect of a character. Shakespeare always uses fools who are considered to be lacking of intellect by the other characters but are actually wiser. Fools and clowns who have important roles (at least two can be seen in each play) in early plays of Shakespeare share certain characteristics. They are clumsy, ridiculous and slow witted. The function of the clowns and fools is to keep the comic action going throughout the play. However the function of clowns and fools is not only to get the audience or reader started laughing but also to show the important truths often ignored by the others: the deepest secrets hidden from the wise may be revealed by a child or a fool. Actually they don't appeal to the intellect but to the emotions.

Some characters in Shakespearean comedies show us that there are two kinds of fools: the conscious fool and the unconscious one. The most interesting example of a fool can be that of Feste from “Twelfth Night”. There is an ironic situation since the licensed fool (Feste) is not actually a fool but a wise character who contributes to the meaning of the play, and the actual fool (Sir Andrews or Molvolio) is the most entertaining character with his foolish actions. By acting as a fool, Feste becomes privileged in telling the truth of the people around him.

The clown is used as a free observer that mocks the faults of the other characters. Feste (clown in “Twelfth Night”) with his intelligence is aware of what others do and criticizes the actual fools, the characters who are not seen as witty at all. Lack of self-knowledge makes the characters fools as Molvolio or Sir Andrews in ‘Twelfth Night’.

Also the clown Touchstone in 'As You Like It' can be considered as wise as Feste. Shakespeare explains the importance of such characters in his plays with these words: "It is meat and drink for me to see a clown"⁽¹¹⁾.

When we have a look at the roles of the clowns and fools in the comedies of Shakespeare, almost all of them are the servants of heroes or heroines. This can be seen in the clowns Touchstone and Feste, the servants Dromios (servants of Antipholus in "The Comedy of Errors"), in the character of Tranio (servant of Lucentio in "The Taming of the Shrew"), in Grumio (servant of Petruchio in "The Taming of the Shrew"), or in Maria (servant of Olivia in "Twelfth Night"). On the other hand, Ariel (the spirit helper of Prospero in "The Tempest") and Puck (the servant fairy of Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream") are the vices whose role is to cause a great deal of disguising. In two plays they cause the misunderstandings and make the play more complex.

Shakespeare gives place to buffoons and vices in his comedies. His aim in creating buffoons is to increase the mood of festivity rather than contribute to the plot. A few examples can be seen in some Shakespearean comedies: Nell, who is the fat maid of Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus' wife ("The Comedy of Errors"), Snug ("A Midsummer Night's Dream") or Tinculo and Stefano ("The Tempest").

The other stereotypes in Shakespearean comedies can be considered the "blocking characters" which are seen in most of the comedies. They always put boundaries or some rules that can cause a chaos in the play. Generally these blocking characters are seen in the beginning of the play and the comedy starts with the problem caused by them. If they were not in the comedies, the events would not be like what can be read in the plays. If Egeus were not in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", the lovers Hermia and Lysander would not have escaped to the forest and there would not be a chaotic situation that makes us laugh, or if Minola Baptista, the father in "The Taming of the Shrew", had not decided that Kate would have to marry before Bianca, all those events would not have taken place.

(11) "As You Like It" - V, 1, 2198 (Touchstone)

Duke Frederic who banishes his brother and his niece in “As You Like It” or Solinus, the duke of Ephesus, in “The Comedy of Errors” can be considered as “blocking characters” as well.

Shakespeare sometimes uses disguises and mistaken identity that makes the play more complex and funny. Viola in ‘Twelfth Night’ and Rosalind in ‘As You Like It’ can be the best examples of stereotypes of women living in Elizabethan times. Adriana and Luciana in “The Comedy of Errors” are the contrast female stereotypes of that time, and also Bianca, who is admired by gentlemen and her father, in “The Taming of the Shrew” is the stereotype of a “young modest girl”, but after marrying she reveals her true face. By creating Bianca, Shakespeare criticizes the social roles of people, especially the role of women in marriage. However, Kate is far from being the stereotype of the modest maiden, and by creating Kate, Shakespeare also shows that he rejects the social roles of people at that time.

3 – CHARACTERIZATION

3.1 – Costumes in Shakespearean plays.

3.1.1 – Elizabethan clothing.

Clothes in the Elizabethan era were dazzlingly beautiful and elaborate. It was a time when sumptuous fabrics, new dyes and exuberant dress prevailed. In the 16th century there was an improvement in the economy and the richness of the country so there was a greater elaboration in dress.

Clothing functioned as a mirror of that wealthy period, of the prosperity and energy of the age, so the more dramatic, opulent and luxurious the costume, the better. Through this clothing the vitality and the high points of the period could be observed. There were a lot of clothes of foreign origins such as the French hose, the French hood, Venetians or the Spanish bonnet.

Dressing functioned more for display than for comfort. Such was the level of extravagant exaggeration that “The Sumptuary law” against the excess of apparel was passed to regulate how people could dress. The Church of England supported the restrictions in clothing in 1563.

3.1.2 – Men and women dress in Shakespearean plays.

There is not too much accurate information about the clothes worn in the early productions of Shakespeare. However, it is known that whatever geographical setting or chronological period were, the whole time and geographical canon for Shakespeare was the Elizabethan England. There was little attempt to present historical accuracy. So even in a play set in the ancient Rome, for example, the actors wore contemporary clothes.

The fashion's central tendency at that time, above all in the upper classes, emphasized gallantry and beauty.

The prototypical women's figure could be described as a structure in which shoulders must be wide, the waist must get narrower, and finally opened up to a flared skirt. The bosom was lifted at the neckline. The perfect women's appearance would be the image of an hourglass.

The garments used by women were:

- A smock, which was an ankle-length shirt worn next to the skin used to protect clothing from body oils.
- A bodice. (Part of a dress above the waist)
- A skirt. (known as kirtle or petticoat)
- A triangular piece known as "stomacher" which formed the front section and was joined to the bodice proper at the sides by ties, hooks, or pins. (Garment consisting of a V-shaped panel of stiff material worn over the chest and stomach in the 16th century)

The silhouette of men was characterised by its squared form reinforced by the abundant padding. It was very common to find vents and slashes as they made reference to sword battles that had taken place previously.

The typical garments used by men were:

- A smock, which was an ankle-length shirt worn next to the skin used to protect clothing from sweating.
- Drawers called "trousers"
- Boots
- Breeches
- A jerkin vest (tight sleeveless and collarless jacket often made of leather), a doublet (close-fitting jacket worn during the Renaissance) and an adorned hat made for a smart outfit.

3.1.2.1 – Men’s garments.

“How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour elsewhere.”

The Merchant of Venice (Lii.68-70),

W.Shakespeare

This male model which is going to be described is French in design and it is influenced by clothes from several countries, but it makes reference to the typical English Elizabethan garments.



In this picture, the Duke of Alencon (Henry of Navarre’s younger brother) wears a peascod doublet, venetians, hose, shoes without heels, and a band (ruff). The sleeves are usually detachable and interchangeable with other outfits. The venetians are brocade and he also wears hose made of silk held up by fringed ribbons (handwoven silk hose became the rage during the Elizabethan period in England). Over this basic model, he was dressed in a jerkin and his slops.

- Peascod doublet

The characteristic shape of the peascod-bellied doublet was that of a pot belly and to achieve this effect, three things were needed: a stiff tight under-lining, buckram to make prominent shape, and “bombast” (padding) to hold it out. The doublet had a peplum (skirt) and small wings surrounded the armhole and hide the points which were used to tie on the sleeves.

- *Jerkin*

A jerkin was often worn over a doublet. It was usually tight and had buttons to close the front. However, because of the peascod doublet, the jerkin cannot be closed.

- *Venetians*

The upper thigh was covered by the venetians, which were originally called “upper stocks” or “canions” when they started to be used by 1570. They are called “Venetians” because of its place of origin: Venice. Venetians were hose which could be padded.

- *Pansid Slops*

The Pansid Slops consist of a series of panes of one colour which are padded with padding in another colour. This garment usually goes over the venetians.

- *Hose*

Handwoven silk hose became the rage during the Elizabethan period in England. On the sides of the hose silk scarves act as a garter for each leg.

- *Band (ruff)*

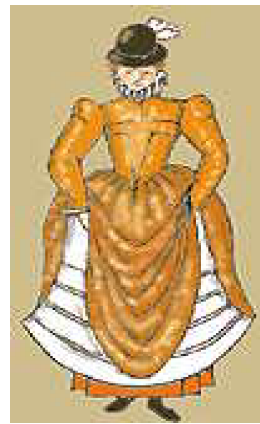
The ruff was a long strip of material which was attached on one edge to a band which would be tied around the neck and under clothing. The ruff was heavily starched and then an iron poking stick or setting iron was used to create the characteristic flutes.

- *Shoes without heels*

3.1.2.2 – Women’s garments.

This female model which is going to be described is based on a French tapestry in which a portrayal of Marguerite of Valois can be seen (1575), but it makes reference to the typical English Elizabethan garments.

In this Picture, Marguerite of Valois wears a square neckline which was typical at that time. The shoulder roll is added to the upper sleeve. The girdle pendant includes a pomander. Her skirt rests on a bum-roll farthingale. The sleeves and bodice are made of brocades, while the underskirt matches the band around the skirt.



- Farthingale

This undergarment was used to control the shape of the skirt. The farthingale was as long as the petticoat and there were three different kinds of farthingale during the Elizabethan era. One of them was the *wheel* or *drum farthingale*. The second one was the *bell* or *Spanish farthingale*. This bell shape was achieved by sewing stays onto a skirt. Finally, the third type was called bum-roll farthingale and consisted of a padded sausage-like hoop that tied in front and rest on the hipbone. The bum-roll was placed over petticoats and a petticoat and the skirt would rest over it. It is curious that women had to use cushions to sit down on them instead of using chairs because of the voluminous farthingales.

- Corset

It was an elaborate steel corset which was worn under the dress. The front bands of steel (lined and covered with thin silk or other material and often decorated with flat embroidery) extended downwards in a long tapering point as far as the pit of the stomach and the sides converged as low down as the hip bone would permit. It was the line from this to the lowest point of the corset that deceived the eye and made the figure look longer and the waist smaller than they really were. These steel bands were fastened by tight-lacing the back.

3.1.3 – Decoration / Materials.

Colours and decoration in clothing functioned as a whole to create a greater impact on the audience in the Elizabethan era. Both, men and women costumes were ostentatious and varied in colours, materials and ornamentation. Women wore rich and gorgeous dress as men did but men attire was even more complex as it has been expounded before.

The garments were highly decorated with braid, embroidery, pinking (pricking in patterns), slashing or puffing and sometimes encrusted with pearls, jewels, or spangles or trimmed with lace or artificial flowers.

Hats also played an important role in clothing. For example, craftsmen and London citizens usually wore a small cap similar to a beret. Feathers were a very common ornament used to embellish hats.

3.2 – Hairstyle and make-up in Shakespearean times and comedies.

3.2.1 - Hairstyle in Shakespearean times and comic characters.

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.⁽¹²⁾ 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 emphasized or achieved through a wide variety of cosmetics.

3.2.1.1 - Men's hairstyle.

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.⁽¹³⁾ 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.⁽¹⁴⁾



(12) <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/exploring/randi/england/england.html>

(13) <http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>

(14) <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.⁽¹⁵⁾



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.⁽¹⁶⁾ 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.



3.2.1.2 - Women's hairstyle.

The style of Queen Elizabeth was obviously more influential in women. The Queen had red hair, so this colour became a real vogue.



(15) <http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>

(16) <http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/springfield/eliz/hairstyles.html>

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.⁽¹⁷⁾

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.⁽¹⁸⁾



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.⁽¹⁹⁾



(17) <http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-hair-styles.htm>

(18) <http://www.extremecostuming.com/articles/twoelizabethanhairstyles.html>

(19) <http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/springfield/eliz/hairstyles.html>

3.2.2 - *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.⁽²⁰⁾



One of Shakespeare's most popular sonnets pokes fun at the common metaphors used to describe the ideal beauty of those days:⁽²⁰⁾

“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...”

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.⁽²¹⁾

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

(21) <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.⁽²²⁾ Finally, actors could also wear partial or total masks to produce a greater effect and emphasize funny or comic traits.



As it has been explained, 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.

(22)

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

3.3 – Voice in Shakespearean comedies.

3.3.1 - Importance of voice in Shakespearean performances.

The actors performing Shakespeare's comedies did not only have to pay attention to the way they made physical a role, that is "to create a believable character for the audience and to use the stage suitably", but they also had to use their voices "to communicate character's lines and express emotion".⁽²³⁾ That is to say, the tone of voice may sometimes reflect a character's psychology, emotion, mood, sexual excitement and so on. In the case of, for example, sarcasm or irony, it may also carry social information or may entail criticism.

Therefore, such a process of information may be achieved having in mind pronunciation and projection of words through correct breathing and articulation as well as through the tone and emphasis that an actor puts on words. However, although not all comedies rely on voice, the level of comicalness depends on developing either a unique voice or a subtle tone.

Shakespeare established a balance between ridicule and sympathy materialised on the tone or the pitch of the voice of the characters, so sometimes one does not know how to react towards these characters because there is no in-between (e.g.: the character of Caliban in "The Tempest"; the two Dromios in "The Comedy of Errors"). Such a reaction could be laugh.

3.3.2 – Voice and Gender.

Voice and costume have been said, in the case of Shakespearean drama, to become a lively register of gender. During the Elizabethan period the first professional companies were developed. The so-called 'Boys Companies' were acting groups associated to schools or churches.

(23)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Actor>

However, women were not allowed to perform, so boys performed their roles. That is the reason for the controversy about whether they acted in a realistic way or if these boys performing feminine roles were actually being burlesque.

Moreover, if a person can identify oneself with another human being, the use of humour may have an effect; and also, if the audience is, somehow, tested throughout the use of cross-gendered characters and situations to achieve that empathy between the actors/characters and the audience, then the play should succeed in terms of comicity. So, the fact that male actors with deep voices played female characters (having high-pitched voices) and the increasing appearance of actresses in some of Shakespearean plays would become a source of laughter.

Despite the fact that in Elizabethan period women should be silent, chaste, and obedient, and silence was considered to be the best eloquence for women, Shakespearean comedies are remarkable, among other things, for their frequent representations or fantasies of women's language as competent, eloquent, fluent, witty, or powerful. Shakespearean female characters among others are all permitted to speak abundantly, to be listened to and responded to, to be appreciated for their words, and allowed to do things with words such as changing minds, transforming situations, harming others or helping them, etc.⁽²⁴⁾

3.3.3 – Talking to the audience.

Shakespeare used soliloquies in order to address the audience. A character sometimes addressed the audience rather than speaking for himself in order to show important information for the development of the play such as his or her intentions. Notwithstanding, for some scholars, these soliloquies seemed artificial and unrealistic but it could be argued that they had dramatic purposes and they increased the funniness of a comedy.

(24)

Berry et al. (2001)

The tone of voice and the pitch used by the actors in the performances might have allowed Shakespeare to criticize society at that time or at least to make the audience laugh. In fact, it has been suggested that the casting of a performance of a Shakespearean play “was the means rather than the end” in each case “to engage active audience involvement”.⁽²⁵⁾

4 – CONCLUSION

In this conclusion, we would like to mention some of the difficulties we have found preparing this paper. Furthermore, we would like to state the differences and intentions concerning the oral exposition and the written material.

On the one hand, we must mention the difficulties that any person could find when he is preparing an essay about Shakespeare. There is an enormous amount of information that is very interesting and useful, but at the same time, there are a lot of data which are repeated. Besides, someone can get completely lost and confused because of this amount of information if the research has not been made in a proper way. We should pay attention to the editors of the websites, for instance. Sometimes any teenager can publish unreliable information and we can use it as if it had been taken from a reliable source.

On the other hand, we would like to comment some of the differences between the written material and the oral presentation. It is important to mention that both parts are complementary and each one has its own function. When we were preparing our paper about comedies, we witnessed that one of the most important values of Shakespearean comedy is the concept of ridiculization. So we decided that we must use that idea in our oral exposition. We all agreed that the oral exposition must be dynamic, funny, interesting and a mixture of audiovisual elements in order to make the audience laugh. We wanted to catch the audience's attention and we decided that one way of catching it was to create some famous characters and personalities that they all probably know. We used our voices, dresses, make-up,... to create those characters, trying to show that Shakespeare also used the actors in order to ridiculize that society and of course, those actors, used to imitate some famous personalities of the time.

Finally, although new technologies are very useful in order to prepare a group work, we would like to state that we consider the traditional way of working in groups more appropriate for this kind of project. Anyway, this failure could be our fault and therefore we will try to improve our skills for next time.

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