The Merry Wives of Windsor Study Guide

The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare

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Introduction

The Merry Wives of Windsor focuses on how a community establishes and preserves its own standards. Outsiders like Falstaff, Fenton, Caius, and Evans cause a wide range of threats to Windsor's inhabitants. Evans and Caius threaten the conventions of language use that other characters rely on: the Welsh Evans has an accent, and Caius frequently misunderstands English expressions and imports French words into his speech. Even native speakers within the community often lack language skills—Mistress Quickly mistakes Latin for vulgar English, and Slender frequently mistakes the prefixes and suffixes of words. But language is nevertheless used by the characters to define an inside group and an outside group; and foreigners are on the outside.

They are the object of the host's tricks, and remain the subject of humor throughout the play. There are many ways in which modern communities use language to distinguish among groups, and sometimes to exclude certain people or groups of people. For example, slang associated with younger people often receives ridicule and rejection from the adult community.

Falstaff poses a different kind of threat to the community of Windsor: he uses language exceedingly well, and in fact he is fully in control of his own jokes, fully capable of mocking other people (and himself) through language. But his cleverness also works against him. The very ruse he sets up to earn himself money reveals his capacity for using other people for his own ends. Trickster figures often appear as social outsiders, in many other literatures and in social life. Falstaff is not unlike a modern "class clown" who plays clever tricks, shows off, or tells jokes to get attention. As a result, he is punished in an elaborate and ceremonial way that may appear strange to modern audiences. The entire community dresses up as fairies from local folklore in order to torment a stranger. A distant analogy in modern life might be the jokes and disguises designed to frighten people on camping trips or at Halloween. But the punishment Falstaff receives is also quite strange, and it takes on a magical and even solemn quality all its own. Class anxiety is the source of much of the play's conflict. The Order of the Garter, which provides an underlying context for the whole play, was an order of knights with special privileges and a special relationship to Queen Elizabeth. Much of the play is staged at the Garter Inn, so named because the Order had its annual feast at Windsor. The host and inhabitants of the Inn aspire to be members of the court culture of Windsor—or at least to serve that culture—but none of them actually has any contact with the court. Indeed, the community of the play is actually quite marginal to the court and to the trappings of nobility. Although they may have titles—Falstaff has the title of knight—these do not necessarily give them the cultivated conduct of gentry. Indeed, the play raises the question of what might constitute gentility, especially in relation to Anne Page. Though Caius has money and court connections, he is a blustering foreigner and therefore unfit to marry Anne Page; though Shallow and Slender remind us of their status as landowners, they are (as Anne says) "idiots" and therefore unfit to marry her. Fenton, with his connections to "the wild Prince and Poins," has no money, but Anne finds him suitable enough to marry.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* nearly everyone claims to be a gentleman on the basis of title, land, court connection, or money. Falstaff is excluded from the community based on his distinctly ungentleman-like behavior toward the Mistresses Page and Ford; Caius and Evans are mocked because of their indiscretions. Only Fenton and Anne Page show propriety and discretion□to the point of marrying in secret. In contemporary American life, class relationships are similarly ill-defined. Most people would claim to be "middle class," just as most people in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* claim to be gentry. Although wealth□or lack of it□is often accepted as the defining characteristic between classes, behavior and language are also used to distinguish class, just as they are in *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

Plot Summary

Act I

The play is set in Windsor, an English country town; its main characters are the middle class townsfolk who live at the periphery of royal Windsor castle. Falstaff, the play's central figure, is a dissolute courtier from out of town. As the play opens, Justice Robert Shallow, his nephew Abraham Slender, and the parson Hugh Evans seek out Falstaff for robbing Shallow and Slender the night before. Falstaff amiably admits his wrongdoing, and goes in to dine at the home of Mister and Mistress Page. Shallow and Evans convince Slender to woo the Page daughter, Anne, who will inherit her father's wealth. Evans sends his servant to one Mistress Quickly, to ask her to be the go-between for Slender and Anne Page. Mistress Quickly agrees, even though she is also working for her own master, the French Doctor Caius, and for Fenton, a gentleman. Falstaff, low on cash, has to let his servant Bardolph go to work for the innkeeper, the host of the Garter Inn. He plans to procure money by sleeping with Mistress Page (Anne Page's mother) and Mistress Ford.

Act II

Mistresses Page and Ford, on receiving love letters from Falstaff, vow to get revenge by leading him on, without telling their husbands. Meanwhile, Falstaff's own disloyal servants have informed the husbands of Falstaff's plans. Ford becomes jealous and, posing as a Mister Brook, finds out the details of Falstaff's trysts with his wife. Meanwhile, Doctor Caius has challenged Evans to a duel over Anne Page. Shallow, Slender, and Mister Page have all congregated to watch the duel, but the host of the Garter deliberately misdirects Caius and Evans, averting the conflict.

Act III

After some confusion, Caius and Evans meet and the host admits to having misled them. Doctor and parson make peace and vow to be revenged on the host. Page has come to prefer Slender as son-in-law. Ford, meeting the whole group, convinces them to go to his house and catch Falstaff with his wife. Mistresses Page and Ford plot to have Falstaff hidden in the laundry basket, carried out by two servants, and dumped into a muddy ditch near the Thames. When Mistress Page arrives at the Ford home with word that Mister Ford is on his way home, Falstaff falls into the trap and proceeds to climb into the laundry basket. He is on his way to the Thames by the time Mister Ford arrives. Meanwhile, Anne Page and Fenton declare their love for each other. Her parents reject Fenton on the basis of his being too aristocratic and too poor. Back at the Garter Inn, Falstaff rails about having been dumped in the Thames. Mister Ford, as Brook, finds out he has been deceived, igniting his jealousy all over again.

Act IV

Mistress Page takes her boy William to school, but when she meets the boy's teacher, parson Evans, he sends the boy home to play. Mistresses Page and Ford have invited Falstaff to come again. This time they dress him up in the clothes of an old fortuneteller, the widow of Brainford, to disguise his departure when Mister Ford comes home. Ford doesn't like the fortune-teller either, and beats her/Falstaff as s/he runs away. The wives disclose their plotting to their husbands, and all four together decide to trick Falstaff one further time. They will arrange a tryst by an old oak, ask Falstaff to disguise himself as Herne the Hunter, and then beset him with "fairies" played by their children. Back at the Inn, Falstaff complains of his treatment. Caius and Evans report that "Germans" have stolen the host's horses. (Whether Caius and Evans have anything to do with this element of the plot is a point of critical contention.) Fenton offers the host more than he just lost in horseflesh to procure him a priest, so Fenton can marry Anne Page secretly.

Act V

Falstaff agrees to meet Mistress Ford again. Page tells Slender that Anne will be the fairy dressed in white, and that Slender should take her off and marry her. Mistress Page, at the same time, tells Caius that Anne will be in green and that he should take her off and marry her. That night, everyone converges at the oak. The wives flirt with Falstaff and then run away, and the "fairies" find Falstaff face-down on the ground. They pinch and torment him, burning his fingertips with candles. Slender and Caius carry off fairies dressed in white and green; Fenton carries off the real Anne Page. Finally, the Fords and the Pages reveal themselves to Falstaff, who amiably accepts his losses. Caius and Evans return, having abducted boys. Fenton returns and asks the forgiveness of the Pages for having married their daughter. They grant forgiveness and invite everyone to dinner, including Falstaff.

Characters

Bardolph:

Bardolf is one of Falstaff s servants. Because Falstaff doesn't have enough money to pay for the needs of his followers as a knight should do, the host of the Garter Inn takes Bardolph on as his tapster, or bartender.

Brook:

See Ford. *(Francis Ford is at times disguised as a Mister Brook).*

Caius (Doctor Caius):

Doctor Caius is a French doctor, and a foreign er. Along with Slender and Fenton, he wants to marry Anne Page. When he finds out that his housekeeper, Mistress Quickly, is at the service of rival suitors, Caius loses his temper in a stereotypically "Latin" outburst. He challenges the Welsh parson, Evans, to a duel. The comedy of this situation lies in the confusion between two foreigners whose mispronunciations only increase their mutual misunderstanding.

Caius's masculine bravado also has an element of foreign stereotype: in Elizabethan England, the French were frequently mocked as fops, full of transparently false masculine behavior. The host, who sends Caius and his rival Evans to two different places, makes fun of Caius's threatened violence. He also teases him about his profession, a less respectable one in Elizabethan times than in today's society. The host mocks the doctor's English as well.

Caius thinks the host is on his side, but when it turns out he's been misled he vows to get revenge. He and Evans witness Ford's jealous searches of his own house. But in between the central action the two play upon their own foreignness to get back at the host: when his horses are mysteriously stolen by the "Germans" staying at the inn, it is Caius and Evans who announce the theft. Though some read ers believe there is a missing scene in the play, or that the Germans are part of an undeveloped sub plot, it is possible that the parson and the doctor set up the theft to trick the host.

In the end Caius is the object of another trick. At Mistress Page's behest, he tries to steal Anne Page out of the fairy scene and ends up with a boy (another jab at his masculinity). "By gar, I am cozen'd," he cries (V.v.203). As a representation of an immigrant outsider in Renaissance English middle classes, Doctor Caius makes light of prejudice, but his character also reveals the ruthless exclusions of an insulated society.

Evans (Sir Hugh Evans):

A Welsh parson, Evans is, like Doctor Caius, a social outsider. But his place in the town's society is more secure: as the parson, he is also the local schoolteacher, and is looked to for conventional wisdom. The fact that he does not measure up to the ideals of a country parson provides the source of much of the humor of his character.

In his speech, Evans frequently omits initial "w's," replaces final "d's" with "t's," and replaces "b's" with "p's." His speech is also full of malapropisms (a malapropism is the misuse□generally unintentional and usually funny□of a word or phrase). When he performs a miniature classroom exercise by quizzing young William Ford in his Latin, his questioning is quite elementary and confined to rote learning.

Evans's ethics are questionable, especially given that he is a parson. In the opening scene, as Shallow threatens to take Falstaff to court, Evans distracts the irate justice by mentioning that the young Mistress Anne Page will inherit a large income, and suggests that Slender marry her. Parsons were often portrayed as the advocates of love in marriage over economic considerations, but Evans advocates Slender's monetary gain over any more noble aspirations. When Caius finds out Evans's role in setting up his rival, the challenge is issued. Evans, in a state of fear, waits for the upcoming duel with Caius. As he waits, he sings, confessing that he feels like crying (III.ii.22). Although the host had sent Caius and Evans to different locations to await the duel, Caius and Evans finally meet. Evans makes a show of insulting him, while aside he begs Caius to make peace. Eventually they reconcile. In the fairy scene, Evans participates in the final revenge on Falstaff, commanding the others to "Pinch them, arms, legs, back, shoulders, sides, and shins" (V.v.54).

Evans is not portrayed as a devoted servant of God. Although he has a clear role in the local community, he becomes both victim and aggressor in the course of the play.

Falstaff (Sir John Falstaff):

Falstaff is the play's central character. Falstaff also appears in *Henry IV, Part One* and *Two,* where he is the comic friend and a kind of surrogate father to Prince Hal. When Hal becomes King Henry V, in a famous and poignant moment, he rejects Falstaff in public: "I know thee not, old man" *(Henry IV, Part Two,* V.v.47).

Falstaff's role in the *Henry* plays has been the subject of much critical and dramatic debate; he is a complex figure who has immense power over language and whose conduct raises important moral questions not only about himself but about the young Prince as well. In both histories and comedy, Falstaff is a fat, old, dissolute knight who regards nothing with complete seriousness, not even the violent political turmoil of Henry IV's kingship. Theatrical tradition has it (first suggested by John Dennis in 1702) that Queen Elizabeth I was so enamored of the Falstaff character in the *Henry* plays that she asked Shakespeare to write a play about Falstaff in love, whereupon he produced *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the space of fourteen days. Many scholars

argue that there is no factual evidence to support this story and that in *Merry Wives* Falstaff is not in love. Additionally, the Falstaff Shakespeare portrays in the comedy is quite a different character from the comic knight of the history plays. It is tempting to regard him as the product of hurried composition, reluctance, or simply the overworking of an already-finished character—and in fact, critics of the play have largely expressed disappointment at this tamer and humbler Falstaff.

Falstaff s role in the comedy is simply different than that of the history plays. He is a knight who has led a dissolute life, spending all his money on "sack" (drink), to the extent that he cannot even support his followers. His response to this situation is to let Bardolph become the host's tapster and send Robin off to Mistress Page as a token of love. But Falstaff greets all of this with humor, not desperation. In the opening scene, when Justice Shallow calls him to account for having robbed him the night before, Falstaff admits that he did, and makes a show of calling his followers to account as well. But he suffers no remorse or consequences for the incident. And even when Pistol and Nym (followers who appear in the *Henry* plays in different form) refuse to deliver Falstaff's messages for him, he greets the fact with relative equanimity. He later uses their refusal as reason to refuse Pistol a loan, but the implication is that Falstaff has no loan money to spare anyway.

Falstaff's central activity, the wooing of the Mistresses Page and Ford in an effort to seduce them and then con them out of money, and the mishaps that befall him as a result, establish the fat knight as a distinct outsider to the Windsor community. The letter he sends to the women is full of offensive remarks that masquerade as compliments: "You are not young, no more am I; go to then, there's sympathy" (II.i.6-7). He combines barroom humor with blunt declarations of love, and at the end offers a mock love poem. As an effort to ingratiate himself, the letter fails miserably; he has essentially misjudged his audience. His efforts at wooing in person are no less clumsy: "Now I shall sin in my wish: I wish your husband were dead" (III.iii.49-50), he tells Mistress Ford. He does not hear the double-edged nature of Mistress Ford's declarations, and never suspects (even after being tricked twice) that the wives mean him harm. Indeed, throughout the play Falstaff seems to assume, in spite of his own dishonesty, that everyone else is honest to the point of naivete, and that everyone else means well. When Mister Ford comes to him as Mister Brook, Falstaff believes the man's elaborate story immediately, never suspecting that harm might come to himself as a result.

Falstaff's responses to the tricks played on him make light of the troubles he runs into. After Mistress Ford's servants have dumped him in the Thames, he mocks his own size, saying he would hate to die by drowning because "water swells a man; and what a thing should I have been when I had been swell'd!" (III.v.16-7). But he immediately agrees to see Mistress Ford again the next day, and naively tells "Mr. Brook" the whole story. After he has been disguised as an old woman and beaten by Mister Ford, he returns to the Garter Inn. This time, his response is somewhat more serious, worrying that, if those at court knew of his treatment here, they would "melt me out of my fat drop by drop ..." (IV.v.97-8). Nevertheless, he still does not repent; and as soon as Mistress Quickly comes to ask him to meet Mistress Ford one last time, Falstaff invites her in.

The brutality of these scenes increases as the play develops. Though Falstaff, of all the characters in the play, takes himself the least seriously, nonetheless he seems to be the one most in danger, both physically and economically. He is also most at risk of being excluded from any social community, whether it be court, Inn, or Windsor community generally. In his final punishment, he dresses as the spirit Herne the Hunter, complete with horns on his head, to disguise himself for a meeting with Mistress Ford. Ironically, he ends up wearing the cuckold's horns that he intended to put on Mister Ford (cuckold's horns were worn by a man whose wife cheated on him, or cuckolded him). When the "fairies" descend upon them□Mistress Quickly, Evans, Pistol, and the children in disguise themselves□the Mistresses Ford and Page run away, but Falstaff simply lies down on his face. The fairy torment is designed to be painful: they burn the tips of his fingers, and torment him with pinching, while accusing him of lechery. It is important to recognize that the comedy of these scenes coexists with violence and humiliation. The scene also resembles certain ritual fertility rites, in which a god of fertility is scapegoated and beaten.

In the end, Falstaff rises up again, the fairies run off, and the Pages and Fords appear to reveal the whole thing was a trick. Falstaff gives flimsy excuses for having believed they actually were fairies. He then tries to turn the attention against Evans, making fun of the parson's English, but the others are more concerned with mocking Falstaff instead. Finally, he accepts their mockery with his usual lightness of heart. Mister Page, ever the genial gentleman, invites Falstaff and everyone else to dinner. Falstaff does not exactly become a member of the society, but his acquiescence to their aggression allows him to make peace with them. He has provided not a real threat but an inconsequential comic challenge to their society.

In the *Henry* plays, Falstaff offers a humorous, but also serious, commentary on the dearly held values of king and court. He is also a genuine friend to Prince Hal. His rejection by the prince when he becomes King does not offer comfortable or satisfying closure to their relationship. In *The Merry Wives,* Falstaff is a foolish but relatively benign outsider, and relatively less threatening. He poses no real threat to the Windsor community, and indeed he can even begin to be integrated into it at the end. Perhaps Falstaff belongs more to the middleclass citizenry than to the royal court□but his status as a dissolute gentleman places him outside either social arena.

Fenton:

A gentleman who has kept company with the Prince Hal of the *Henry* plays, Fenton is the man Anne Page actually marries. He makes few appearances in the play. The love affair between Fenton and Anne Page takes place at the margins of the slapstick of jealousy, greed, and revenge that forms the main action of the play. Fenton admits to a certain level of involvement in the general climate of concern with money, and to "riots past" and "wild societies" (III.iv.8) of his own. Like Anne's other suitors, Caius and Slender, he says he began wooing Anne because of her father's income. But he assures her he has fallen in love with her, and he wins her in the end in spite of her parents' preferences for Slender and Caius.

Fenton, unlike Slender and Caius, is a gentle man. Though he has a wart above one eye (II.i. 144- 52) and therefore appears less than perfectly hand some, and though he admits he has no money, nevertheless he speaks in blank verse (often in Shakespeare the mark of aristocratic birth). Apparently, he spent time with "the wild Prince and Poins" (III.ii.73), that is, in the company of Prince Hal as portrayed in the *Henry* plays. This description of him has led to scholarly speculation about when *The Merry Wives* takes place in relation to the *Henry* plays, but such speculation has proven inconclusive.

Though Mistress Quickly, the go-between, cannot decide whose case she will argue with Anne, she is certain Anne does not love Fenton (I.iv.163-4). However, to the degree that Anne expresses an opinion at all, she appears to prefer Fenton. Unlike Caius and Evans, Fenton also receives the help of the host of the Garter, who procures a priest so the couple can secretly be married, to audiences, Fenton may appear to be more socially accepted, and more desirable, than the other suitors□partly perhaps because of his noble birth, but also because of his substantial absence from the play's central comic action.

Ford (Mistress Alice Ford):

Mistress Ford is the wife of the jealous Mister Ford and one of the two women Falstaff woos. Mistresses Ford and Page join forces to trick Falstaff three times in the course of the play in order to teach him a lesson. Mistress Ford also manages to trick her husband twice by sneaking Falstaff out of her house just as Mister Ford arrives. In the opening scene of Act II, when the two women receive their love letters from Falstaff, Mistress Ford is immediately out for revenge against him. She mocks Falstaff's status as a knight, his fatness, and his writing style. Her response makes clear that he is an outsider at Windsor: "What tempest, I trow, threw this whale ... ashore at Windsor?" (II.i.64-5).

Indeed, throughout the play, Mistresses Ford and Page together define the acceptable social behavior of their society. When Falstaff writes both of them inappropriate love letters, they expose his self-interested and offensive motives. When Mister Ford's jealousy increases and becomes more explicit, Mistress Ford exposes his unfounded distrust. The women know more than their husbands through much of the play, and certainly more than Falstaff. The first time they trick Falstaff, hiding him in the laundry basket because their husbands are arriving, they do not expect Mister Ford and Mister Page actually to arrive; but Mistress Ford quickly figures out that her husband has some outside knowledge of Falstaff's intentions. The women's next plot against Falstaff anticipates Mister Ford's arrival. They dress the knight up as the widow of Brainford, a fortune teller whom Mister Ford despises, and the jealous husband beats up the supposed lover without even realizing it.

Every time they trick Falstaff, it is Mistress Ford who plays the willing lover, pretends to be jealous of her friend, and asks the knight back again. She thus plays the part of the adulterous woman, even if she doesn't carry it out. Her language comically makes fun of Falstaff even as she flirts with him: "Well, heaven knows how I love you, and you shall

one day find it," she tells him (III.iii.80- 1). Indeed, nothing she says can be taken as an unambiguous expression of love for him. Even in her act of deception, she remains, in a sense, true to herself.

In the context of a play whose characters have a great deal of trouble speaking the truth, Mistress Ford's fundamental truth has a purpose. The jealousy subplot and the mock-adultery scenes are materials from the French comic tales known as fabliaux. In fabilaux, however, the adultery is usually enacted, not avoided. Here, the subplot of the jealous husband and adulterous wife plays itself out in a context of profound anxieties about inheritance. Whereas the Pages have at least two children, the marriageable Anne and the young William, the Fords have no onstage children□and hence no evidence of a productive marriage resulting in the continuation of family line and wealth. For them, Falstaff's wooing raises a serious problem: the knight wants to make himself the wrong kind of "inheritor" of Mister Ford's wealth. By entertaining Falstaff's efforts and then tossing him out with the laundry and having him beaten by her husband, Mistress Ford diminishes the threat he represents, and keeps both love and money properly inside her marriage. Her activities, then, preserve convention al middle-class values.

Ford (Francis Ford):

The jealous husband of Mistress Ford, Mister Ford spends most of the play trying to catch Falstaff and his wife together. When Pistol tells him of Falstaff's intention to woo his wife, Ford is immediately on his guard: "A man may be too confident" (II.i. 186-7), he says. Thus, while Page goes off blithely to enjoy the non-duel between Caius and Evans, Ford plots to keep watch on his wife. He engages the aid of the host, who agrees to introduce him to Falstaff in the disguise of one Mister Brook. He tells Falstaff an elaborate tale, claiming that he (as Mister Brook) has loved Mistress Ford for years, but that she claims to remain faithful to her husband and so won't have him. He hires Falstaff to seduce Mistress Ford in order to prove her faithlessness and hence win her for himself.

The complex parameters of this trick reveal a great deal about how Mister Ford views his marriage. As Mister Brook, he assumes that if he can prove Mistress Ford unfaithful in general, then she will accept not only Falstaff but also himself. His fear is that a woman does not differentiate among lovers, and that therefore his own wife cannot remain faithful to him in particular. If she is unfaithful at all, she is proven to be incapable of choosing a partner. This view of his wife as potentially incapable of choice is mirrored in his view of himself. For, as Mister Brook, he plays the part of a completely rejected lover. The fact that this is an act of make-believe does not take away the fact that Mister Ford raises the possibility of his own incapacity as a husband/lover to his wife.

The persona of Mister Brook, of course, ends up getting Ford into trouble rather than giving him useful information. It is through this deception that Ford learns of his wife's planned trysts with Falstaff. He tries to catch the two together twice, and is tricked twice by his wife. Both times, he has Page, Caius, and Evans in tow: they accomplish a kind of communal validation of the situation, assuring him that there is no one in the house.

But they are also the witnesses to his shameful jealousy, for which both Pages and Mistress Ford herself scold him several times. The first time Ford arrives during one of the trysts, Mistress Ford sneaks Falstaff out in the washing. Hence, the second time, Ford searches through the dirty washing.

Perhaps as a result of his vulnerable state, Ford is something of a domestic tyrant. The calmness with which Page accepts Falstaff's advances on his own wife serves to highlight Ford's comparative bitterness and violence toward Mistress Ford. The first words he speaks to her in the play are to deny his melancholy mood and tell her to "Get you home; go" (II.i.52-3). To this and other commands she generally acquiesces, even while protesting that he does her wrong in his jealousy, and even while delighting in the tricks she plays on him. Ford's violence is displayed when Falstaff is dressed as the widow of Brainford, the fortune-teller whom Mister Ford dislikes. He has forbidden the widow his house, and when Falstaff appears in her dress he beats him and calls him witch, "old cozening [tricking] quean" (IV.ii.172), hag, rag, baggage, polecat, and runnion, or scabby woman.

While the Fords and Pages speak in prose throughout most of the play, Ford's use of prose and poetry stands out. When he is at his most jealous, his prose is full of epithets and overstatements: "Fie, fie, fie! Cuckold, cuckold, cuckold!" (II.ii.213-4) he sputters after first meeting Falstaff at the Inn. His longwinded explanations in the person of Mister Brook, like the complexity of the plot to catch out his wife, reflect a lack of control or self-governance. He apologizes to her after his first unsuccessful search of their house, but immediately seeks out Falstaff to check out his wife's story. Yet after his wife reveals the truth of her plotting, he turns (in IV.iv) to poetry, speaks briefly and humbly, and asks her pardon at last.

Host of the Garter Inn:

The host acts as enabler and judge of a great deal of the activity around him. He also creates a good deal of purposeful disorder; Page suggests that the host is something less than a fine, upstanding member of the community when he says, "Look where my ranting host of the Garter comes. There is either liquor in his pate, or money in his purse, when he looks so merrily" (II.i.89-91). Like the Fords and Pages, the host represents the middle classes, who earn their money rather than inheriting lands and titles. But his role is to play host to the gentry, specifically Fenton and Falstaff, who represent two extremes of gentlemanly conduct. Both gentlemen, it is worth noting, are low on funds. The Garter Inn refers to the knightly Order of the Garter, to which noblemen were named by the Queen and formally dubbed at Windsor Castle. But knighthood itself, and the Order of the Garter in particular, had a great deal more ceremonial meaning than actual courtly function. The host's character, and the events in and around his Garter Inn, make light of the Order of the Garter, the status of knighthood, and the notion of gentle birth itself.

Like the Fords and the Pages, the host sets up an elaborate ruse, sending the duellers Caius and Evans to two separate places, gaining entertainment and power from the

mockery of these two social outsiders. He mocks their malapropisms and their misunderstandings. He teases Falstaff as well, but more respectfully, for Falstaff is after all his client. When Mister Ford asks him to keep his identity secret from Falstaff, the host willingly does so; later, when Fenton asks his aid, he procures a priest so that Fenton and Anne Page can be married. These duties reveal that he is dependent upon the money and goodwill of visiting gentlemen from outside the community and the respect of citizens within it. The host does not treat Caius with the respect he offers those with firmer social standing.

The host is not immune from mockery and genuine harm. Even though stealing and procuring money by trickery are suggested throughout the play, the host is the only character from whom goods are actually stolen. When his horses are stolen, the host becomes serious, and even rather desperate, for the first time in the play. That Fenton immediately makes up for the loss by paying the host to get him a priest does not undo this moment: the host's vulnerability has been exposed.

The host, then, has an unstable role in the play. His class consciousness might be seen as a result of this instability. His Inn exists on the periphery of a royal residence without actually having much to do with the court. His aggression toward Caius and Evans can be seen as light and humorous, or as the more sinister expression of his own marginal status. If he excludes others, he can gain a sense of inclusion himself.

Mistress Quickly:

See Quickly

Nym:

Nym is a follower of Falstaff. Nym joins Pistol in rebellion against Falstaff's lordship, and tells Page that Falstaff is in love with his wife.

Page (Mistress Anne Page):

The marriageable daughter of Margaret and George Page, Anne Page has three suitors: the justice's nephew, Abraham Slender; the French Doctor Caius; and Fenton, a court gentleman and an outsider to Windsor society. Mistress Page has very little to say in the course of the play. Mistress Quickly claims that "Never a woman in Windsor knows more of Anne's mind than I do" (I.iv.27-8)□which is to say, no one in Windsor knows Anne's mind. Anne appears in the first scene, where she tries politely to get Slender to come in to dinner; she appears more puzzled than flattered at his clumsy efforts to woo her. Anne also rejects Caius as a suitor, saying she would rather be buried alive and pelted to death with turnips than marry him. That Anne prefers Fenton is implied in one brief scene in which he assures her that he loves her and has lost interest in her money (III.iv.1-21). But the clearest evidence of her preference is that she allows Fenton to carry her off and marry her amid the confusion of the fairy scene. Her

mother plots for Doctor Caius to carry her off, while her father plots for Slender to do so; both are foiled. Even then, Anne says at the end only, "Pardon, good father! good my mother, pardon!" (V.v.216). When her parents ask her why she didn't go off with their chosen suitors, Fenton answers for her, claiming that her parents "amaze" or bewilder her with their questions. Anne's character is essentially a blank on which others play out their desires. Still, in the conventional comic way, she chooses (it seems) to marry for love rather than for money.

Page (George Page):

A citizen of Windsor, George Page is the husband of Mistress Margaret Page and father of Anne. Unlike Ford, Page does not suspect his wife of adultery with Falstaff. He is more interested in other things: inviting his friends to dinner, watching the entertaining comedy of the non-duel between Caius and Evans, and solving the more serious problem of marrying off his daughter. All of these interests give the audience a view of middle-class social values. Page is eager to watch the two duellers "scold" each other (II.i.232), but he would rather not see them fight. While the host manages the bulk of the encounter between them, mocking them and lying to them about each other's whereabouts, it is Page who makes sure each man keeps his sword sheathed. The controlled humor of the scene seems to depend upon his intervention.

Page's attitudes also inform the community's final response to Falstaff. He calls the Herne the Hunter trick "sport" (IV.iv.13), making clear that the whole thing is all a game. But at the same time, he also emphasizes that Falstaff is to be punished and disgraced in seriousness as well. He even calls Falstaff a devil (V.ii.13). Yet in the end, it is Page who also invites Falstaff to dinner after the fairy scene. This combination of condemnation with geniality pervades Page's character.

The only time Page expresses anger is when he catches Fenton visiting his daughter privately; even then, he simply forbids the gentleman his house. Page's objection is that Fenton is too much a gentleman for Anne, "too great of birth" (III.iv.4). Page believes that Fenton wants Anne because he has led a dissolute life, spent all his inherited wealth, and needs her money. Page's anxieties about the match may be founded on a sense of affection for his daughter, but more explicitly, he is worried about where his own earnings will go. He even threatens not to pass along his wealth if she marries Fenton (III.ii.74-8).

Page chooses Slender for his daughter, another act that can be seen in the light of his general social values. Slender's character is summed up in his name, and Page's preference for someone of equal or lesser social standing is a safe, conservative choice. What Page fails to see, of course, is that Slender is as much interested in Anne's money as all her other suitors□and ironically, even more so than Fenton. But when Anne marries against his wishes, Page finally accepts the fact with relative equanimity: "Well, what remedy? Fenton, heaven give thee joy!" (V.v.236).

Page (Mistress Margaret Page):

A citizen of Windsor, Margaret Page is the wife of George Page and mother of Anne. Along with Mistress Ford, she tricks Falstaff into believing that Mistress Ford accepts his advances. In contrast to her friend Mistress Ford, Mistress Page is a mother. She never plays the adulterous woman, never flirts with Falstaff, and from the first time she reads his letters she exhibits more serious offense at it than Mistress Ford, who responds with puns and mockery. When the two women trick Falstaff, Mistress Page plays the messenger, bringing Mistress Ford timely warnings of her husband's approach. Mistress Page is also involved in the search for a husband for her daughter Anne. She exhibits somewhat more concern for her daughter's welfare than does her husband, asserting in an aside that Slender may own land, but "is an idiot" (IV.iv.86). She prefers Doctor Caius because he has money and connections at court. Neither of the Pages asks Anne whom she loves, and love as a condition for marriage remains a secret and subversive sentiment. Mistress Page, like her husband and Mistress Ford, serves to uphold the middle-class values of monetary security, marriage security, and proper social conduct generally. She appears late in the play taking her son William to school. Because her husband thinks William is not learning enough, she asks the parson to show evidence of William's studies; when he quizzes the boy in Latin, she is pleased with the small learning he shows. There is no doubt the Pages value education; but Mistress Page is uneducated herself, and ignorant of the kind of education to which she sends her son. Education, like husbands and wives, emerges as an object to buy and to own.

Pistol:

One of Falstaff's disgruntled followers, Pistol refuses to deliver Falstaff's love letters for him and tells Ford that Falstaff loves his wife. He plays the mock gentleman with gusto: he quotes Ovidian myth and scraps of other plays, and often speaks in blustering blank verse, usually used to mark gentry characters in Shakespeare's work. When the "fairies" torment Falstaff, Pistol plays Hobgoblin and urges them to put burning candles to Falstaff's fingers.

Quickly (Mistress Quickly):

Mistress Quickly serves as the go-between for all of Anne Page's suitors□Fenton, Caius, and Slender□as well as the messenger for the Mistresses Page and Ford in their efforts to trick Falstaff. (She bears the same name, but seems to have no other relation, to the hostess of the tavern in *Henry IV, Part One* and *Two.)* Mistress Quickly's name suggests something about her character, not simply that she is a speedy messenger (which she is not, particularly) but that she is light and superficial; that her intelligence is anything but "quick"; and, since "quick" is a word for "pregnant," that she enables couples to come together. When Simple asks her to play the bawd (or go-between) for Slender, she makes it plain she does not even know Slender, but agrees to take money to help him woo Anne. Mistress Quickly claims to "know Anne's mind as well as another does" (I.iv. 164). That is not saying much, since Anne's mind is never expressed.

Mistress Quickly makes no effort to hide the fact that she is wooing Anne for all her suitors. With Falstaff, however, she is quite effective in convincing him that Mistress Ford wants to accept his advances.

Mistress Quickly, like many of the other characters in the play, has trouble with the English language. She makes constant bawdy mistakes, like telling Falstaff that when the servants dumped him in the Thames "they mistook their erection" (III.v.39-40). When she witnesses the scene in which Evans quizzes young William Page on his Latin, she takes the Latin words for offensive English ones. However, at the end of the play, she suddenly becomes capable of lyrical poetic language. In the fairy scene, she commands the fairies in graceful rhymed pentameter, complete with references to the Order of the Garter. In this speech (V.v.55-76), she commands that the fairies bless Windsor Castle and its royal owner, allowing it to uphold the knightly values of the Garter that have been mocked throughout the play.

Robin:

One of Falstaff s servants, Robin is sent by Falstaff to Mistress Page as a sign of his love, whereupon Robin helps Mistresses Page and Ford trick Falstaff.

Rugby (John Rugby):

A servant to Caius and to Mistress Quickly.

Servants:

Servants appear to help the action along in IV.ii, when Mistress Ford commands them to carry out the laundry basket in which Falstaff has hidden; and again in IV.ii.

Shallow (Robert Shallow):

An old country justice, Shallow makes inflated claims to professional and aristocratic status. He opens the play with a blustering scene of fury against Falstaff and his men for having robbed him the night before. In the process he brags that he is a justice and signs all his papers "Armigero" (one who bears arms), thereby claiming knightly status. Essentially, he insists that he is as much a knight as the intruder Falstaff, and will prove it in court. He is easily distracted from his anger, though, at the mention of the potential marriage of his nephew Slender. Indeed, for most of the rest of the play Shallow is absorbed in wooing Anne Page for his nephew, to the extent that Anne tells him, "Good Master Shallow, let him woo for himself (III.iv.50-1). But it is at Shallow's rather fawning request that Page comes to watch the duel, and through the course of the play Shallow becomes successful in obtaining the Page's good will toward Slender. Shallow is also occupied by the duel between Evans and Caius, to which his response mainly consists of bragging to Page about his own past prowess. Along with Page, Slender, Caius and

Evans, he also witnesses (silently) Mister Ford's second search for Falstaff at his house. Shallow is an important professional member of the local community, who is included as the audience to most events. But his role is peripheral, and in his concerns about class status, he exhibits little of the aggression that drives many of the other characters.

Simple (Peter Simple):

Simple is a servant to Slender. When Caius rails at him (I.iv) and when Falstaff lies to him (IV. v), he plays the part of his name: passive and not very smart.

Slender (Abraham Slender):

A landowner, and a suitor of Anne Page, Slender is obedient, shy, and superficial in his efforts to woo Anne. This pursuit is his main role in the play. Like Evans and Shallow, he has trouble pronouncing and understanding language, and frequently misuses words. When the parson and the justice convince him to woo the young lady, Slender has trouble understanding what they are asking of him, and even then he has trouble expressing his obedience. "If you say, 'Marry her,' I will marry her; that I am freely dissolv'd, and dissolutely" (I.i.251-2), he says, mistaking "dissolved" for "resolved" and "dissolutely" for "resolutely." And when the Pages invite him to dinner, he tries to play the coy lover, but fails miserably, seeming instead only shy and unbearably awkward. Most of the rest of his love suit consists of repeating-"O sweet Anne Page" throughout the scene of the non-duel (in which it is Evans, not he, who fights his rival lover, Caius). He also allows his uncle Shallow to woo her for him in III.iv. His efforts to win her affection do indeed "dissolve" in the end, when he elopes with the postmaster's boy by mistake.

Slender is a member of the local gentry, and as such he owns land and a small inherited income.

Unlike Fenton and Falstaff, he seems to have retained his limited wealth and remained a country gentleman rather than travelling to court and around the countryside. But he is provincial and apparently poorly educated; his use of language is no more reliable than that of the Welsh Evans or the French Caius. His uncle, the pretentious Justice Shallow, apparently claims to have enough land to bear heraldic arms (though it may be doubted that he actually does own that much land). As an accepted member of the local society, though, Slender offers a critique of his own milieu. Page prefers him as a suitor to Anne because he is safe and, unlike the outsiders Caius and Fenton, he fits easily into the Windsor society. Love is not relevant to his suit; indeed, he seems uncertain whether Anne herself is relevant, for at one point in his wooing he tells her, "Truly, for my own part, I would little or nothing with you. Your father and my uncle hath made motions" (III.iv.63-4). Slender does whatever the older men tell him to do. As Anne says, Slender is a fool, and he makes the foolishness of Windsor society apparent.

Further Study

Anderson, Linda M. *A Kind of Wild Justice; Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies.* Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987.

Anderson argues that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a play "obsessed" with revenge, and offers a detailed and readable analysis of its three separate revenge plots. She also gives an accessible account of other critical opinion, including the general tendency to ignore the play.

Barton, Anne. Introduction to *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* by William Shakespeare. In *The Riverside Shakespeare,* edited by G. Blakemore Evans, 286-89. Chicago: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

Barton discusses the play's possible commission by Queen Elizabeth and its performance at the Feast of the Garter in 1597. She also analyzes the play's content, especially Falstaff's relation to the Windsor community and the meaning of the play's many misuses and abuses of English language.

Bradbrook, Muriel C. *Shakespeare the Craftsman.* The Clark Lectures, 1968. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

In a chapter entitled "Royal Command: The Merry Wives of Windsor," Bradbrook offers a discussion of the play in terms of its (possible) intended audience. She elucidates the play's humor by connecting it to the political events of the time, including English relations with German and French politicians, and argues that the play is a marketable and professionally astute accomplishment because of its topical nature.

Bryant, J. A. "Falstaff and the Renewal of Windsor." *Publications of the Modern Language Society* 89 (1974): 296-301.

Bryant sees Falstaff's role as painful and comic; he argues for the productive effect of the Herne the Hunter scene, where Falstaff is scapegoated to renew Windsor society. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* fulfills the expectations of comedy, making us "see the mysterious terms on which we live, accept those terms, and once more concede that the game shall go on".

Craik, T. W. Introduction to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by William Shakespeare. *In The Oxford Shakespeare,* 1-72, 223-30. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Craik reviews the play's occasion, date, and critical and textual histories; he analyzes the substance and dramatic structure of the play in detail. The edition contains illustrations of Windsor, photos of stage performances and manuscripts, and appendices on a textual "crux," Marlowe's song "Come live with me and be my love" (see III.i), and an explanation of Falstaff's disguise.

Erickson, Peter. "The Order of the Garter, the Cult of Elizabeth, and Class-Gender Tension in *The Merry Wives of Windsor."* In *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology,* edited by Jean Howard and Marion F. 6'Connor, 116-42. New York and London: Methuen, 1987.

Erickson's exploration of the relations between social forces and the play focuses on class and gender tensions. He argues that although the women characters create comic subversions, they return in the end to a bourgeois, patriarchal framework.

Evans, Betrand. *Shakespeare's Comedies.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.

Evans coined the term "discrepant awareness" to describe the various levels at which characters understand events. His work explains the understanding of events that various characters in the play possess and analyzes the subtle ironies that stem from the exploration of the discrepancies between these understandings.

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience.* New York: Summit Books, 1981.

In the context of an early feminist analysis of Shakespeare, French sees the women in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as a radical threat to male supremacy. The society of Windsor, which she analyzes in one chapter with *The Merchant of Venice,* is "masculine" in its preoccupation with possession of property, money, and women.

Green, William. *Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

Green views the play as an outgrowth of the election of Shakespeare patrons to the Order of the Garter in 1597. Green's book provides useful background and explanatory material□along with some fascinating documents.

Kegl, Rosemary. " The Adoption of Abominable Terms': The Insults that Shape Windsor's Middle Class." *Journal of English Literary History* 61:2 (1994): 253-78.

Looking at how characters insult each other in *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* Kegl redefines the social and economic context of the play. She views the play's middle class as defined by a set of unstable social ties among people with often contradictory interests.

Leggatt, Alexander. *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare.* Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1973.

Leggatt illuminates a genre otherwise lesser known to students; Shakespeare produced only one citizen comedy, *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* while the genre became increasingly popular with other playwrights. The section on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* specifically (146-9) asserts that the play has the distinct moral purpose of preserving chastity, and views the jokes on Falstaff as "appropriate comic punishments."

Oliver, H. J. Introduction to *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* by William Shakespeare. New Arden Edition, i-lxv. London: Methuen, 1971.

Oliver offers extensive discussion of the text; the relation of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to the histories of *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V;* the possible occasion and date of its composition; critical sources; and a critical description of the play.

Roberts, Jeanne Addison. *Shakespeare's English Comedy:* The Merry Wives of Windsor *in Context.* Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1979.

Roberts explores thematic and genre issues such as Falstaff's character and the comedic content of the play. She argues that the play offers a disturbing look at Falstaff's downfall within the Windsor community.

Slights, Camille Wells. *Shakespeare's Comic Commonwealth.* Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993.

In a chapter entitled "Pastoral and Parody in The Merry Wives of Windsor," Slights explores the threat posed by Falstaff and his men from outside of the Windsor community. She argues that the play's resolution depends on the "cohesion of the local community and its resistance to external pressures," even as the local community shares the characteristics of greed and pride with the threatening outsiders.

White, R. S. *Twayne's New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare:* The Merry Wives of Windsor. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

This is the most complete critical introduction to the play. It contains material on the history of stage performance and operatic adaptations, as well as chapters on the town of Windsor, women in the play, plot structure, and language.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Shakespeare for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Shakespeare for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Shakespeare for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Shakespeare for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Shakespeare for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535