

Week 5: Renaissance Comedy

Shakespeare's Legacy:

- Common ideas/accepted views of Shakespeare:
- Revolutionary in the way he challenged his society, and utilised the English language
- Presented as the greatest writer of all time; part of the canon

Universal Themes?

- New-historicist + post-structuralist view: the idea that broadening Shakespeare's themes to be universal is stupid because the societal ideas and beliefs of Shakespeare's time were completely different
- New historicist reading: can only understand a culture if we look through their perspective
- Cultural materialism reading: can never fully understand that society, might as well put our own bias on it
- What about the emotional capacity of the time? Are emotions universally felt across time?
- His work wouldn't last so long if not for the audience's emotional connection
- Were Shakespeare's plays didactic or simply entertaining?
- Moral of story in *Much Ado About Nothing*: is it romance? Or taming a woman into her role in a patriarchal society?

Who is Shakespeare?

- English playwright of the Renaissance Era
- Ben Johnson was most well-known writer at Shakespeare's time
- A.C Bradley brought attention to Shakespeare in the 1800s

The Renaissance:

- Means “rebirth”
- Began in Italy in the 14th century – 17th century
- Renaissance moved to England in 16th century
- Medieval period preceding Renaissance: an era of religious didacticism
- Renaissance brought back Classical literature legends such as Aristotle
 - Note: name of eras and periods are coined *later*

Influences on the Emergence of the Renaissance:

- The fall of Constantinople: it was a religious and social hub; people were interested in ancient and classical texts and culture of antiquity
- People moved to Florence after Constantinople was captured; took their arts and ideas with them
- The Medici family: very wealthy, gave lots of money to church

Key Features of the Renaissance:

- Rise of philosophy, art, literature, music
- Religious humanism: idea that the human is the creator of their own identity, and creativity is given by God
- Secularisation of church and state
- Universal man: a cultured man who excels in multiple fields; philosophy, arts, science e.g. Leonardo da Vinci

Kings and Queens:

- Shakespeare lived under rule of Elizabeth I (the last Tudor) and James I
- Monarchy shaped society and culture of time
- Society was anxious of no successor because Elizabeth was unmarried and childless; these anxieties are highlighted in Shakespeare’s works