

Shakespeare's audience: research synthesis

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



The uneducated lower class audience was interested in the violence Shakespeare's plays consisted of. The Elizabethan era's culture was violent and cruel. For example, if an individual did not enjoy plays, they could witness a "public execution by hanging, beheading, or any number of gruesome ways." (Wave ; Davis, 109). To keep his violent audience entertained and engaged in his plays, Shakespeare had to include an ample amount of violence throughout them. Sometimes, audience members would become fatigued.

To really excite and give them a rush to awaken his audience members, he would spontaneously throw in action scenes right after, or in the middle of a tragic, or comedic event. One example can be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Not too long after Romeo and Juliet are married, a fight occurs, and after Romeo heard Tybalt has killed his beloved friend, Mercutio, he tells Benvolio "... La] fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!.... for Mercutio's soul!" (*Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare). Romeo, who had remained calm throughout Tybalt and Mercutio's dispute, later kills Tybalt to avenge Mercutio.

Directly after their marriage, a calm and joyous scene, Shakespeare has an abrupt action scene imputed to thrill his audience. Although the lower class enjoyed a good comedy, they also went to the theater to watch the newest foray into suicide, debauchery, and murder. Once again in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, he has a thought out plan that seems well, transform into a violent and disastrous one. After Juliet sees her lover has killed himself, she is left alone by Friar, while she is awaiting Friar, she becomes frightened by the watchman entering the tomb and says "O happy dagger!

This is thy sheath; there rust and let me die. "(Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare). She was fearful of the watchman seeing she was still alive, and in turn committed suicide. Shakespeare misled his audience through a bloody, twist ending, which was exactly what they would have enjoyed watching. The lower class members of Shakespeare's audience enjoyed his anatomical humor. He wanted his audience members to have sterling junctures while watching his plays, so he included an abundance of sexual innuendos.

Shakespeare was at times too " bawdy, sometimes vulgar, many times pushing the bounds of good taste. " (Cork Milner). Shakespeare at some points was abrupt and too direct with one of his jokes, but audience members still enjoyed them. Shakespeare is known for his masterful way with words. Some say he was clever at playing around with them. One area where he used this talent is when he inserted sexual innuendos into and find that the clever wit of his sexual innuendo not only has comic significance, but is used to develop character, themes, and plot as well.

"(transmedialshakespeare. wordpress. com). While using sexual innuendos to appeal to the lower class, Shakespeare was also using them to mold parts of his plays, which is why people often refer to him as one of the greatest play writes of all time. He used every bit of his plays to his advantage, and through the use of sexual innuendos, he was able to mold parts his plays, while still entertaining his audience. Shakespeare knew how to give his audience members individually what they came for because " Shakespeare realized sexual jokes, especially double entendres, put the twinkle in the performance," Oohn Basil).

He used his specialty of wordplay to conjure clever sexual innuendos and naughty puns throughout his plays. William Shakespeare's educated spectators were allured by his use of mythological allusions. Only the upper class was able to afford an education and were able to understand all of the " references from Greek & Roman mythology in his plays... they are an identifier with ancient tales, and also tie in stories most of the populace was familiar with"(wcuenglish. net).

Shakespeare's use of Theseus as the Duke of Athens and Hippolyta as his queen immediately allows the educated audience to make a mythological connection in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As the audience identified one character from Greek mythology, they then naturally associated the other characters with this mythology if they were a member of the upper class and had an education. For example, two other characters, Oberon and Titania, could be compared with their mythological traits to be viewed similar to Zeus and Hera.

His audience could make connections and know when that when Theseus says " Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour Draws on apace" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare) that the story was a mythological allusion of Theseus and could recognize his Amazonian queen Hippolyta, and understand the specific myth being drawn. Another example that the upper class would be able to point out would be Puck relating to Eros, the Greek god of sexual love and beauty. The love juice that Puck places over characters' eyes to make them fall in love with the first thing they see after waking is equivalent to Eros' golden arrows, having the same effect.

The audience could correlate these distinct characters due to their connection to Theseus. Shakespeare more directly compares the two characters when Oberon says " Flower of this purple dye... Hit with Cupid's archery... Sin in apple of his eye" (A Midsummer Night's Dream Shakespeare). Lastly, Shakespeare appealed to the upper class through clever wordplay. Shakespeare was an ingenious man, an ample amount of these puns are in all of his plays and " Like most Elizabethans, Shakespeare loved puns... the average per play was around eighty.

Many of Shakespeare's original puns depended on words that were spelled different, but sounded alike" (Wave & Davis, 54). Shakespeare's brilliant word play could only be enjoyed by the upper class, because of their education; they were able to understand the multiple meanings of some of the words. Enjoying the genius and humor in Shakespeare's work of clever word play, was something the lower class was sadly not privileged with. One example of the clever word play Romeo that " tomorrow you shall find me a grave man. "(Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare).

In this Shakespeare meant grave as Mercutio being serious, but here it also alludes to his imminent death, aimed towards his educated audience members who would be able to infer this. Shakespeare's clever word play required a trained ear to be able to fully understand all of what Shakespeare intended to get across. For instance when Mercutio says " Sure wit, follow me this Jest now till thou art worn out thy pump, that, when the single sole of it is worn, the Jest may remain, after the wearing, solely singular. " (Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare).

This one is a double pun. One meaning is that the sole of the shoe, the pump they are talking about, is single, which is to say, it has only one layer of leather. Shakespeare puns the sole of a shoe with "solely" trying to say only, exclusively and puns the word single with "singular" meaning one of a kind, unique and says that his joke is exclusively unique, or solely singular. Shakespeare knew only the educated would be able to catch his double meaning wordplay and perhaps, he would also test them on how much they would receive from his word play.

William Shakespeare tried captivating his audience while they watched his plays, but certain aspects included in them were specifically aimed for different classes. He used mythological allusions and clever word play for the upper and the violence and sexual innuendos were meant for lower uneducated class audience. Shakespeare was an ingenious play writer and knew what his audience members were entertained by and he knew exactly how to appeal to their tastes of theatre.