

The Goodman Theatre  
Student Subscription Series  
2002-2003 Season

Student Guide

# The Beard of Avon

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## About the Playwright

Amy Freed, the playwright of *The Beard of Avon* is a former actor who has written several plays. *Still Warm* was based on the life of journalist Jessica Savitch, *Claustrophilia* examined the relationship between Edgar Allan Poe and his teen bride, *The Ghoul of Amherst* focused on Emily Dickinson, and *The Psychic Life of Savages* looked at the lives of poets Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Robert Lowell. *Freedomland* -- an extraordinary tale of dysfunctional families -- was a finalist for the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for drama. Her new play, *The Cotton Mather Story*, begins development next spring at South Coast Rep. She teaches courses in playwrighting and acting at Stanford University. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Southern Methodist University, a Masters of Fine Arts from American Conservatory Theatre, has worked as a teacher and director at the American Conservatory Theatre, VITA Shakespeare Festival, the California Shakespeare Festival, San Francisco State University, and Stanford University. *The Beard of Avon* has previously been produced at South Coast Repertory Theatre in California, at American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, and at Seattle Repertory Theatre. The following are excerpts from an interview Stanford Alumni Magazine, 2000.

### **STANFORD: What's your preference in writing plays -- tragedy or comedy?**

Freed: I think many things are just too painful to be anything but comedies. Life is kind of surreal, and the collisions of absurdity and grief and silliness are what laughter comes from and what tears come from. You can't drag people to the theater for more pain than life provides. You've got to give it some release, so I do write comically as much as possible.

### **STANFORD: Who are your models of today and yesteryear?**

Freed: John Guare, Tom Stoppard, David Mamet, Carol Churchill, Tina Howe, Susan Lori Parks. And Shakespeare is so interesting because he'll do a really complicated construct textually and then he'll immediately follow it with a simple rephrasing. He'll use some outlandish phrase that probably nobody understood then any more than now, like "the heel and catastrophe of the time," and then he'll immediately re-say it, really simply. He's playing on several levels of complexity, and to me that is so generous and so full of love. That's what I try to learn from.

**"I began by writing a comedy about people who are obsessed by conspiracies, and I became obsessed with this conspiracy,"  
-Amy Freed**

### **STANFORD: So what makes theater compelling for you?**

Freed: Everybody is shocked at how high the stakes need to be in theater for a play to really be alive. People have to want stuff so passionately on stage, and we're in an age of disconnect from our wants and drives. What is it to really want to solve a theorem or to want to break through into a new form of music? It's got to be as visceral as sex. And as a playwright, you've got to write to convey the greatest desire. It's so exciting when you start surrendering to understanding that writing for theater is really about people's deep wants. It's a very committed, openhearted kind of thing in an age of cool culture, where we don't show our hearts very much. It's antithetical to what we're trained to do, which is to hide who we are and hide what our real dreams are.

*In a Stanford Report article in January of 2002, Amy Freed says of the authorship debate: "There's something about it that has the attractiveness of a good mystery. You just can't leave it alone...I don't know if we'll ever know." In discussing the controversy, Freed doesn't take a side—a deliberate act to keep from tainting her play with bias. "I can sleep with the uncertainty," she says.*

# The Beard of Avon by Amy Freed

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**William Shakspeare...**A lad of Stratford. In his early thirties, mostly. Simple, honest, very appealing fellow. Possessor of hidden gifts.

**Edward De Vere...** 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford. In his forties. Wicked, charming, sexy, brilliant. A closet writer.

**Elizabeth...** Queen of England. Between forty and fifty. Proud and silly but also very wise and suffers.

**Anne Hathaway...** Shakespeare's wife. Lively, illiterate, promiscuous.

**Henry Wriothesley...** 20's. Young and beautiful. Third Earl of Southampton. Edward DeVere's lover.

**Old Colin...** and ancient shepherd, and Shakspeare's friend.

**John Heminge...** manager of an acting company

**Henry Condel...** his partner

**Geoffrey Dunderbread...** a boy player (played by a young woman)

Members of Elizabeth's court:

**Francis Bacon**

**Lady Lettice**

**Francis Walsingham**

**Lord Burleigh**

**Earl of Derby**

Additional members of Heminge's company:

**Richard Burbage**, a leading man  
and **Walter Fitch**, a playwright

**Others:**

A Minstrel with a Beautiful Voice

Some Characters in the Play are also...

## Historical Figures

**William Shakspeare (1564-1616):** the great poet of the English Renaissance, the immortal Bard. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, and married Anne Hathaway with whom he fathers a daughter, Susanna, and a set of twins, Hamnet and Judith. This spelling of his name reflects the position of “Oxfordians,” those who believe that it was actually Edward de Vere who wrote the thirty-six plays and numerous poems long attributed to “the man from Stratford.” This is a different spelling than the traditional, recognizable “Shakespeare.”

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**Edward de Vere (1550-1604):** Born at his family’s ancestral home of Castle Hedingham in Essex, he was the son of John de Vere, the 16th Earl of Oxford, and Margery Golding. In 1564 and 1566, Edward received degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford. In 1571, Edward de Vere was married to the daughter of William Cecil, the Queen’s principal minister of state. After a difficult marriage Anne bore Oxford three daughters that survived to adulthood: Elizabeth, Bridget and Susan. Oxford conceived theatrical entertainment for the Queen, he acquired the lease to the Blackfriars Theatre, and he patronized several distinguished acting companies. He was widely regarded as one of England’s most excellent writers—acclaimed so even in his youth. In 1588, Oxford’s wife, Anne, died. He remarried a few years later, wedding Elizabeth Trentham. She bore him a son and heir, Henry.

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**Elizabeth I (1533-1603), Queen of England and Ireland:** the only child of Henry VIII by his second wife, Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth was next in order of succession after Harry’s other children, Edward and Mary. She was well educated, and when she was awarded the English Crown upon Mary’s death in 1558 it was with almost universal rejoicing. During her reign she proved to be a genius at keeping tight control over governmental affairs. She was well known for her unpredictable temper that kept her advisors on their toes. Elizabeth made sure that ruling England was her sole responsibility. She surrounded herself by brilliant advisors but kept their numbers small to keep her advisors from feelings of masculine superiority. She had many suitors, but England always came first and she only saw these suitors as a weakness or a threat to her supremacy. In dealing with religion, the Queen declared England as a Protestant power, but Catholics lived under relatively little repression during her reign. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Elizabeth rallied the English troops saying, “...I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king...”

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**Anne Hathaway (1556-1623): the wife of William Shakspeare.** Very little about Anne is known for certain – there is even some question about her name, which is sometimes given as Agnes Hathway. She was probably born at Shottery, near Stratford, England, the daughter of Richard Hathaway, a well-off local landowner. Anne married Shakspeare on 28 November 1582, and the birth of their first daughter, Susanna, followed that May. She gave birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith, in 1585. In 1597, the family was installed in New Place, Stratford, where Anne remained until her death on August 6, 1623. Shakspeare often visited his family and lived there from his retirement in 1611 until his death.

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**Henry Wriothlesley (1573-1624), 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Southampton:** English politician and soldier, patron of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan poets. His grandfather, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl, was Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl, Henry’s father, died before Henry was eight years old, and because Henry’s elder brother was also dead he succeeded the peerage in October 1581. He received the education of a courtier and attended St. John’s at Cambridge. Wriothlesley was an attractive and accomplished young courtier who drew the attention of the Queen and befriended her brilliant but doomed favorite, the Earl of Essex.

**John Heminge [pron. as in Hemingway] (ca.1556-1630):** an English actor associated with the theatre company that became the King’s Men in 1603. More importantly, he served as the company’s business manager, a position

he held for more than 25 years. He was a respected administrator and a proprietor of both the Globe and Blackfriars theatres.

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**Henry Condell** [*pron. like 'fondle'*] (? -1627): an English actor and partner to John Heminge. His first known appearance was in Ben Johnson's *Everyman in His Humor* (1598). Thereafter he performed regularly with Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men (after 1603, King's Men). He retired from the stage in 1616.

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**Francis Bacon (1561-1626)**: English philosopher, statesman, and essayist. Born in London, Bacon entered Trinity College in 1573 and studied science. Between 1576 and 1582, he studied law and politics and produced plays for courtly entertainment. Bacon was the author of *The Advancement of Learning* and *Novum Organum* (1620), books that outline his breakthrough delineation of the principles of an inductive scientific method. He died of bronchitis on April 9, 1626, having caught a cold while trying to see if stuffing snow down the throat of a dead chicken would delay its putrefaction.

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**Lady Lettice (1539-1634)**: The daughter of Sir Francis Knollys and Catherine Carey, she was a Maid of Honour in Elizabeth's court. A cousin of the Queen, she was also known as Laetitia Knollys and Lettice Knowles. She married Walter Devereux, the 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Essex, in 1562. Their daughter was Penelope, and their son, Robert Devereux, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex (he appears briefly late in the play). Two years after Walter died, she secretly married Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, one of Elizabeth's favorites. When the Queen found out about their nuptials, she banned Lettice from the court. In 1589 she was married for a third time, to Sir Christopher Blount.

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**Sir Francis Walsingham (1530-1590)**: English statesman and spymaster. He was the son of William Walsingham, Common Sergeant of London, and was educated at King's College, Cambridge (under strong Protestant influences) until 1550, when he went abroad to complete his studies. He was twice married; his second wife, Ursula (daughter of Henry St Barbe) bore him a daughter. He sat in the first two of Elizabeth's parliaments and supplied Lord Burghley with knowledge about foreign spies in London. He was knighted in 1577 and remained active in parliament until his death. He greatly enhanced England's skill at conducting espionage and counter-espionage.

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**Lord Burghley (1520-1598), William Cecil (Baron of Burghley)**: English statesman born in Lincolnshire, England. He grew up around scholars and attended St. John's College in Cambridge. He held his first position in Parliament in 1547 and was a member in some form until his death. In 1550, he was elected Secretary under Northumberland, who attempted to change the order of succession. Lord Burghley was a good scholar in the classical tradition and had a Puritan distaste for drama. His most important contribution to literature was *The Execution of Justice in England*.

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**Earl of Derby (1561-1642), William Stanley, (6<sup>th</sup> Earl of)**: Born in London, he began his studies at St. John's College in 1572. In 1582, he traveled abroad with his tutor Richard Lloyd; visiting France, Spain, Italy and other Mediterranean countries. He returned home five years later and became occupied with the theatre and the family company of players in Lancashire. In 1595, he was married to Elizabeth de Vere (Oxford's daughter). It is said that in 1599, William Stanley was "busy penning comedies" for his company, but none of his identified plays remain. This fact together with his initials (W.S.) have led some to hypothesize that he is the author of Shakespeare's comedies.

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**Richard Burbage (ca.1567-1619)**: English actor and painter. Richard's father, James Burbage (d.1597), was also an actor and member of the Leicester Players, of which he became the head in 1574. Richard himself was an established actor by the age of 20, and over the next dozen years became the most sought after actor in England. He was famous for his portrayal of Richard III as well as almost all of Shakespeare's leading roles.

In Elizabethan times, those associated with the royal court, whether they held an official position or not, were regarded as members of a higher social class than the commoners. They had access to higher forms of education, were privileged enough to travel to other countries, and were exposed to culture. Titles reflected the status of the upper class. One of the reasons many people think that William Shakespeare of Stratford would not be able to write all of the plays attributed to his name is that he is not from this upper class society of scholars and artists. In *The Beard of Avon*, several of the characters have a title. Let's see what their titles mean.

Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford

Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton

Lady Lettice

Elizabeth, Queen of England

Lord Burleigh

Earl of Derby

In modern terms, a king or **queen** is the hereditary head of a nation-state. This means that the royal title is passed down through a family line. In Europe today, there are only seven such monarchies: In Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and England.

An “**earl**” is equivalent in status to a “count,” which is related to the word “county,” which explains exactly what an earl is: the principal figure of a county.

A “**duke**” is from the Latin word “dux” which means “field marshal,” a military title. Today, the title has evolved to a mostly non-royal title, it is often assigned to any offspring of some heads of ruling households.

The titles “**Lord**” and “**Lady**,” as in Lady Lettice and Lord Burleigh, are assigned to those who are members of the court that hold no other title or position. A Lady of the court waits on the queen; a relative or just a friend. A Lord might be a member of parliament or holds another government position.

### *Try This . . .*

- You are William Shakespeare, author of 36 famous plays. Write a short story describing how you came up with the idea for one of your favorite plays.
- You are Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Write a short story describing how you came up with the idea for *Titus Andronicus*, and then explain why your identity must be kept a secret.
- You are Elizabeth, Queen of England. Write a story explaining why you decided to write *The Taming of the Shrew*, and explain why you want your identity as a writer kept a secret.

# Vocabulary

alliteration  
artifice  
beguiling  
buggeries  
chap  
citadel  
clad  
cormorant  
cormorant  
corset  
debauchery  
decapitations  
depraved  
depraved  
drivel  
eccentricities  
eccentricities  
effeminate  
epitaphs  
extempore  
extempore  
flagon  
fledgling  
garroted  
inconstancy  
jollity  
Juno  
lascivious  
lineaments  
lute  
metaphoric  
metaphoric  
nonpareil  
oderiferous  
pederastic  
penetrate  
penultimate  
pernicious  
pike  
plague  
platonic  
Platonic  
porridge  
precocious  
profligation  
prolific  
prolific  
pungent  
rucked  
savant  
seamed  
seamed  
skein  
skein  
sodomies  
sodomies  
specimens  
specimens  
spinner  
spinner  
stile  
sulfur  
temperate  
temperate  
through-line  
transmigating  
tripe  
unsheathe  
visage  
vitriolic  
wanton

## OnStage Worksheet

Read the *OnStage* newsletter provided and answer the following questions:

1. How many names have been suggested as being the true author of the 36 plays attributed to Shakespeare?

2. Name eight of those possible names.

3. What were the occupations of William Shakespeare's parents?

4. In what building structure was Edward de Vere born?

5. What happened to Edward de Vere when the Queen found out about his affair?

6. In what year did Edward de Vere die, and what is the significance of this date in reference to the authorship debate?

7. How did J. Thomas Looney come up with de Vere as a candidate for being the "real" Shakespeare?

8. What are the characteristics that Looney identified as being necessary to whoever wrote the plays?

9. Who received property and bequests in Shakespeare's will?

**Bonus:** How do you pronounce "Looney," according to Oxfordians?

# The Setting

The two settings of *The Beard of Avon* are the two places William Shakespeare spent his life: London and Stratford.

## Stratford

Stratford-upon-Avon is the birthplace and hometown of William Shakespeare. Today, travelers and tourists congregate there to pay homage to the great Bard. It is a small city 92 miles from London, a short bus or train ride for tourists.

The town is called Stratford-upon-Avon because it sits upon the Avon River. The name Stratford was originally Street Ford, or a crossing point. It is in Warwickshire, or Warwick County. Stratford was originally a market town. A visitor to Elizabethan Stratford might meet people who made their living off the land: hunters, fishermen, or farmers, much like some of William Shakespeare's and Anne Hathaway's family.

William Shakespeare was born in the small, quiet town of Stratford in 1564, his mother was a farmer's daughter and his father was a glover, or wool dealer. From age 7 to 14, he attended Stratford Grammar School, and when he was 18 he married Anne Hathaway. He spent most of his adulthood in London pursuing his career as an actor and playwright, and returned to Stratford late in life. He is buried there in Holy Trinity Church.

## London

Very different from the small, country feel of Stratford, London is a large, bustling city in the center of England. The population of London today is over twelve million people. The play *The Beard of Avon* gives us a major clue to one of the big differences between the two locations. In *Beard*, Will travels to London because it is the center of theatre and cultural activity. At the beginning of the play, Anne says "Good husband, be thy spirits lifted. There's Players at the Guild Hall." She points this out because it is an isolated, special incident. In London, one could go see a play practically every night of the week.

In Elizabethan times, the Globe Theatre was the theatre where the Chamberlain's Men performed Shakespeare's plays. It was a large, magnificent structure that could house 3,000 audience members. Imagine the difference – the Goodman Theatre seats only about 800 people.

A visitor to Elizabethan London might meet people from a variety of occupations: scholars, teachers, tradesmen, artisans, or even artists.

Today, London is a central place for visitors to England. People enjoy visiting Buckingham Palace, the home of the queen. Although England still has a government system of royalty including Kings and Queens, most of the responsibility falls to the parliament, which is located in London. The parliament, under the direction of the Prime Minister, serves as the main governing body in England.

## Write a Letter...

- Imagine that you are Anne Hathaway, and write a letter to Will in London convincing him to come back to Stratford. Let him know all the wonderful things about Stratford he is missing.
- Write a reply letter, from Will to Anne, telling her all the things about London that make you love it so much. Explain to her why you have to stay.
- During the play, Anne takes a short trip to London, disguised as a prostitute. Write a letter from Anne to a friend, explaining all the new and exciting things she's seen on her trip.
- At the end of his life, Will retires to his hometown of Stratford. Write a letter from Will to his friends in London explaining why he decides to return to Stratford after his career.

# Play Production: Then and Now

In much of *The Beard of Avon* the characters spend time rehearsing or performing “Shakespeare’s” work. The quote here is from Heminge, who is the director of the play, and is instructing the actors to warm up before starting the rehearsal.

Great thanks to all for thine hard week’s work. Now nothing doth remain but to let GOOO. to PLAY! Wonderful, everyone- -let’s just come together shall we, everyone BREATHE – CONNECT --. A short warm-up please ---  
-Heminge, *The Beard of Avon*

Actors and directors at The Goodman and other contemporary theatres often rehearse a play in much the same way as the characters in *Beard*. However, play production in the Elizabethan era is actually very different than the way theatre artists do it today.

## Actors

**Then:** In the Elizabethan time, actors were referred to as “players” and worked as a company, or acting troupe, such as Leicester’s Men, Queen’s Men, Lord Admiral’s Men, or King’s Men. The acting troupes performed together under the direction of the troupe manager. Only men were allowed to be actors.

**Now:** Today, actors are generally hired on a show – by – show basis. When a professional actor goes to an audition, he or she is generally auditioning for one show only. When an actors arrives at an audition, they bring with them a headshot, which is a photograph of themselves, and a resume, which describes all the previous acting work they’ve done. Some theatres have an ensemble company, which perform in all of their shows, but many hire actors for one show only. Today, both men and women are actors.

## Payment of Actors

**Then:** Players could become shareholders in their acting company by purchasing part of the company. All shareholders divided up the profits after a production was over. Non shareholding actors were hired for specific shows and paid only 5 – 10 shillings per week; they played smaller roles in the plays.

**Now:** Once an actor is cast in a play, he or she is paid for the work just like any other job. The amount of money they make depends on whether an actor is a member of the actors’ union, called Equity, or is a nonmember, or non- Equity.

## Government regulation of theatre

**Then:** Queen Elizabeth was officially in charge of regulating what happened in the theatre. All plays had to be “licensed,” or approved by the Master of Revels, before being performed. Queen Elizabeth put a ban on plays about political or religious subject matter.

**Now:** In American society today, the government has very little to do with overseeing the theatre. The National Endowment for the Arts, or NEA, is a government organization that provides funding for various arts organizations and projects, but because of the first amendment, the American government does not have the authority to approve or disapprove of arts or theatre events.

## Plays and Playwrights

**Then:** Once an acting company purchases a play from a playwright, the play is the property of the company, no longer the property of the playwright. Because there were no such thing as copyright laws, an author's play could be performed by a specific company, then copied, or stolen, and used by a different company. Sometimes, a playwright would be hired by a certain company to write all of their plays. Also, playwrights were generally invited to oversee the rehearsals. Since directors did not exist in the Elizabethan period, the playwright had more input in the rehearsals than they do today.

**Now:** Playwrights today work independently, and write plays about subjects that they feel personally drawn to, such as a specific political or social issue. They make it their job to "sell" their plays to various theatres, attempting to have it be performed. Often, a playwright will be commissioned, or paid in advance, by a theatre to write a play or two about a specific subject that the theatre is interested in focusing on. If the play is a world premiere, that is, has never been performed before, the playwright attends many rehearsals and the process may require that the playwright make changes to the script. However, playwrights do not usually get involved in the rehearsal process; they leave rehearsals up to the director of the production.

## Set/Scenery/Costumes

**Then:** The theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were performed was The Globe Theatre. It is constructed in a circular structure with two doors at the back of the stage for entrances and exits. The "world" of the play relied largely on the actors creating it through their actions and words. The scenery that was there was usually so large it stayed on stage throughout the entire production; actors brought on other smaller pieces. The costumes were the major visual element of the play, and they were always the contemporary dress of the day.

**Now:** Depending on the budget of the theatre and the concept of the production, the set of a play today can vary from the large and extravagant set pieces that are common in the commercial theatre, to minimal sets that sometimes utilize only a table and stools, or even less. Large theatres often utilize the latest technology to produce sets that move, stages that rotate, and unique lighting effects.

## Publicity

**Then:** The public was informed of when a production would happen through the passing out of handbills and hanging of posters, and a flag was flown from the roof of the theatre on the day of a performance.

**Now:** Again, depending on the size and resources of the theatre, publicity can range from word of mouth and passing out fliers, to television and radio advertisements, posters, advertisements in newspapers, and utilizing the postal system. The internet and email is also a big asset in publicity.

## Rehearsal Process

**Then:** Rehearsals were run by playwrights or leading actors, and there was very little rehearsal time. Actors would receive only their lines and prompts (the lines directly preceding their lines) to memorize, so they didn't know the whole story of the play they were performing in! A prompter was the person who, during performances, made sure the actors were on stage at the appropriate time and who made a list of all needed costumes and props.

**Now:** Rehearsals are run by the director, a position that did not exist during Elizabethan times. The director decides on the concept for a production and controls, with the assistance of the stage manager (today's version of the prompter), the production process. Actors receive a copy of the entire script at the beginning of the rehearsal period to read and research the play's setting. Usually a cast will have a rehearsal period of about four to six weeks before performing the play.

## Performances

**Then:** Performances happened in the afternoon, in broad daylight, and the audience was free to come and go from the theatre as they pleased. There was no intermission, so audience members mingled about while watching the play. Also, there was no box office, or tickets. The Elizabethan equivalents of today's ushers were called "gatherers," usually women, and they took money at the door of the theatre.

**Now:** Performances are generally in the evening, except an occasional Saturday or Sunday matinee, and usually there is a process of reserving tickets ahead of time and picking them up at the box office when you arrive for the performance. Most plays are divided in the middle by a ten or fifteen minute intermission, and the lights in the house (or audience) are dark during the show, showing all focus on the actors on stage.

## Be a part of the theatre industry!

- ❑ Most theatres have someone on the staff that does Public Relations, or publicity. This is the person, or team of people, who make sure that the productions are advertised so people will know about the performances and come see them.
- ❑ Imagine that it is Shakespeare's time and you are in charge of publicity for *The Beard of Avon*. Choose whether you think a handbill (or flier) or a poster is a more effective form of advertising.
- ❑ Now, imagine that you are in charge of publicity for a production of *The Beard of Avon* today. Choose whether you think a handbill or a poster is a more effective form of advertising for this production.
- ❑ Plan and design a handbill or poster. While you are planning your design, consider these questions:
  - What information will you include, and why?
  - Who is your target audience?
  - What will your color scheme be?
  - Which characters will you mention, and why?
  - What will you do to make it look attention-getting?
- ❑ Complete a poster or handbill for each time period. You can complete two posters (one for each production), two handbills (one for each production), or a handbill for one production and a poster for the other.
- ❑ Once your project is complete, think about these questions:
  - How are your two publications different?
  - What are the two target audiences like?
  - How do your drawings reflect the different societies and time periods?

# THE BEARD

In the title of the play *The Beard of Avon*, the word **beard** means something very different than the most common definition of the word, that which is the hair covering the lower portion of the face. The meaning of the word **beard** in the context of the title is significant to one of the major issues of the play; authorship.

## BEARD

*N. 1. The hair on a man's chin, cheeks, and throat. 2. A hairy or hairlike growth such as that on or near the face of certain mammals. 3. A tuft or group of hairs or bristles on certain plants, such as barley and wheat. 4. One who serves to divert suspicion or attention from another.*

As you can see from the fourth definition entry, the word “beard” can also refer to someone who serves as a disguise for someone else. On Halloween or any other occasion that we might dress in costume, one might use a mask or a beard to hide one’s identity or to appear to be someone else.

“Heminge, I need a Mask. A Beard. To lend me his name. A front man who can be trusted.” –Oxford, *The Beard of Avon*

In *The Beard of Avon*, Edward de Vere asks Will Shakespeare to be his beard because he was ashamed to admit that he is associated with the theatre, because at that time playwrights and actors were of a lower social class than de Vere. When he says, “Well, to FRATERNIZE with ACTORS – is to debase oneself” (Act I, Sc. 5) de Vere is suggesting that it would be degrading and embarrassing to work with actors. So, he asks Will Shakespeare to be his “beard,” or, his disguise. There are many reasons someone might recruit a “frontman” to mask their true identity. Here are some examples:

- A man is embarrassed to tell the woman he is in love with about his feelings for her. So, he recruits a friend to deliver the love letters for him and pose as the actual writer of the letters.
- A student did not finish her homework in time and does not want to suffer the public embarrassment in class, so she sends her twin sister to school instead.
- A homosexual man is not ready to tell his parents that he is gay, so when they ask to meet his new love interest, he asks a female friend to pose as his girlfriend.
  - Can you think of others?

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Have you ever wanted to hide? Has there been a time in your life when you have wanted to have a “beard?” Maybe you were embarrassed about something or you weren’t ready to face impending consequences. Answer the following questions and write your thoughts.

- When did you wish to have a disguise?
- What had happened that made you feel this way?
- Who were you hiding from?
- Who did you wish you could ask to be your beard?
- What did you do to solve the problem?

## Would the REAL William Shakespeare Please Stand Up?

J. Thomas Looney, in his book titled *Shakespeare* was the first to suggest in 1920 that it was Edward de Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, who was actually responsible for writing the thirty-six plays traditionally assigned to William Shakespeare, of Stratford, England. However, for nearly 200 years prior to that publication in 1920 there has been some speculation that the work we attribute to Shakespeare was perhaps actually written by someone else. The numerous websites, books, articles, and televised debates about this issue prove that a large population of people truly care about this issue. This ongoing controversy between the **Oxfordians** (those who believe it was de Vere, Earl of Oxford) and the **Stratfordians** (those who believe the plays were in fact written by Shakespeare, of Stratford) has come to be known as the **Authorship Debate**, that is, a debate about who the real author was.

### *How do you spell... Shakespeare?*

As historical documents get passed down through generations, only a few get preserved. Of the documents we have today, only a few of them have William Shakespeare's signature, and of those signatures, the last name is spelled various ways. The various spellings include **Shaksper, Shagspere, Shackspeare, Shaksper, and Shaxspere**, to name a few. Oxfordians claim that most of the documents found in Stratford bear the spelling **Shaxspere, Shaksper, or Shakespere**, and the plays and poems are signed with the name **Shake-speare**. Some believe that the hyphen (-) signifies the use of a **pseudonym**. This further proves that the man from Stratford was indeed a different person than the writer of the plays.

#### Want to know more?

Check out . . .

[www.shakespeare-oxford.com](http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com), [www.shakespeareauthorship.com](http://www.shakespeareauthorship.com), *Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography* by Diana Price

#### Read the article "Shaksper vs. the Earl: The Shakespeare Authorship Controversy" on page 8 of OnStage Newsletter and answer the following questions.

1. What are the three major arguments Felicia Londre gives in support of de Vere? Give evidence for each.
1. Who does David Kathman say are some of the other candidates who have been proposed as the "alternate Shakespeare"?
1. When was the first folio put together, and who edited it?
1. When does Londre say that the name "Shaksper" changed to "Shakespeare" in the public records?
1. What is the significance of Edward de Vere's sons-in-law?
1. Why does Londre say that de Vere chose a pseudonym?
1. According to Kathman, what is the significance of the fact that we don't know much about the lives of Shakespeare's contemporaries, John Webster and Christopher Marlowe?

### Evidence for De Vere

- ❑ He was educated: degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford, and studied law; he was well read and well tutored.
- ❑ He traveled extensively, visited Navarre (the setting of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*) and Roussillon (the setting of Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*). He also visited Italy, the setting of numerous Shakespeare plays.
- ❑ He was injured in a sword-fight late in life, and this may account for his weariness, as is depicted in Sonnet 66 "Tired will all these, for restful death I cry"
- ❑ Stratfordians claim that de Vere died prior to some of the plays being written. However, there is no clear proof of what date those later plays were finished.
- ❑ Some claim that the spelling of the name on the plays and poems is Shake-speare, the hyphen signifying that it is a pseudonym, or made up name. de Vere had many reasons for adopting the name "Shakespeare" as a pseudonym: At court, Oxford was known as "Spear-shaker" because of his skill at tournaments. Oxford's coat of arms bears a lion shaking a spear.

### Evidence for Shakespeare

- ❑ Although there is no record of Shakespeare having a formal education, Shakespeare's closest friends in Stratford were cultured, literary men.
- ❑ While there is no evidence that William traveled abroad, he did make his way from Stratford to London. From 1594 on, the plays of Shakespeare were performed exclusively by the acting company known as the King's Men. William Shakespeare was a prominent member of this acting company.
- ❑ William Shakespeare of Stratford had a son, named Hamnet, a very similar name to the title character in his famous play *Hamlet*.
- ❑ Edward de Vere died in 1604, before several of the Shakespeare plays were written, including his famous play *The Tempest*.
- ❑ It's true that no one single document states categorically that William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, but then no such document exists for any other playwright of the time either.
- ❑ The name "William Shakespeare" appears on the plays and poems.
- ❑ There are not many other examples of a hyphen signifying a pseudonym.

## Stage a Debate in Class

### *How to Prepare for the Debate:*

1. Formulate a debate **resolution**. A **resolution** is a statement that expresses the feelings of the class on a particular issue. For this debate your resolution is: “Resolved, Edward de Vere, the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, is the author of the 36 plays and other poems traditionally assigned to William Shakespeare.”
2. One person from the class will volunteer to be the **moderator**, and one person will volunteer to be the **timekeeper**. (The timekeeper must be someone with a watch.)
3. Half the class will argue for the resolution, half the class will argue against the resolution. Those arguing against the resolution are the **Stratfordians**, those arguing for the resolution are the **Oxfordians**.
4. Once divided in half, each group elects a main speaker. The remaining members of the group function as researchers and subsequent speakers to provide support for the main speaker.
5. Each group prepares and submits a **debate brief**. This should be no longer than one page, and it should include one paragraph providing background information, three to five paragraphs outlining the main arguments (*with* evidence to support those arguments), and a bibliography.
6. The information in the brief can serve as the outline for the main speaker’s opening speech. Here are some tips for organizing the opening speech:
  - a. Begin with an attention-getting fact or thought.
  - b. Explain your side of the debate: state it clearly.
  - c. Preview the arguments that lead you to this conclusion; talk about what you are getting ready to say.
  - d. Explain each argument.
  - e. Give statistics and evidence to support each argument.
  - f. Leave time for a short summary; talk about what you just said.
  - g. End with an attention-getting fact or thought.

### *On the day of the debate:*

1. The moderator will **Call the Debate to Order**. The moderator is in charge of keeping order and quiet in the debate room.
2. The moderator will read aloud the resolution, loudly and clearly, and then introduce the main speakers.
3. The timekeeper will announce the beginning and ending of the time period in which the main speaker is allowed to speak. The standard times for a debate are six minutes for each main speaker and three minutes each for subsequent speeches from the class, but these time periods may be shortened or lengthened.
4. The Oxfordian speaker speaks first.
5. The timekeeper will call “times out.”
6. The moderator opens up for subsequent speeches or questions from the floor.
7. The Stratfordian speaker speaks second.
8. The timekeeper will call “time out.” The moderator opens up for subsequent speeches or questions from the floor.
9. When the debate has ended, participants discuss whether or not any of their initial opinions were changed during the debate. The debate process is evaluated by the teacher/ judge.

## The Disguise Element

In several of Shakespeare's plays the element of mistaken identity is essential to the plot of the play. He uses mistaken identity and disguise as a writing tool, to open the door for all kinds of comic twists and plot-deepening situations. Amy Freed borrows Shakespeare's famous writing tool, the Disguise Element, in The Beard of Avon. Check out some of the places it appears:

- Although Shakespeare serves as a beard for Oxford in the play, he never actually puts on a disguise. In a way, it is actually Oxford who disguises himself by letting the world believe it is Shakespeare who wrote the plays, and not he. Other characters in the play put on a physical disguise, or costume, to conceal their identity.
- First, Anne Hathaway dresses as a man (Old Colin) in order to leave Stratford and travel to London to find Will. She does this because she feels that she will be safer dressed as a man than she would have been dressed as a woman.
- Then, when Anne arrives in London she meets up with her cousin, Lucy, who helps her get disguised in a "sluttish fashion." She tricks Will in to thinking that she actually is Lucy, and hides her true identity.
- In Shakespeare's time, male actors played female characters. In fact, women were not allowed to be actors, so the only way for female characters to be portrayed was by men. In The Beard of Avon, the character of Geoffrey Dunderbread plays a woman in many performances.

### Shakespeare's Use of Disguise

Some of Shakespeare's plays, which use the disguise element, are Twelfth Night, As You Like It, Measure for Measure, The Merchant of Venice, and Comedy of Errors. Twelfth Night is referred to in Beard. Oxford tells Will about a play he has written, about a "man who loves a man," and says that it is called Twelfth Night. Shakespeare's Twelfth Night is about a set of twins, a male and female. In order to get closer to the Duke, who she is in love with, the female twin disguises herself as a male and becomes a servant to the Duke. However, she gets mistaken for her male brother, which further complicates the plot. Imagine how this would have been even more complicated when all the actors were men!

"Will, I had a play I never dared to show. . . About a man who loves a man and dare not show it. Take it for me, finish it - - and proclaim me when I am dead. It's called Twelfth Night, in which a boy loves a lord. And almost dies of it. . . this Twelfth Night has a good plot. But call it - - what you will."

-Oxford, *The Beard of Avon*

### Design Anne Hathaway's Costume!

A costume designer is the person who designs and oversees construction for all the costumes in a production. The costumes must be aesthetically pleasing, and must also be functional. That is, the actor wearing the costume must be comfortable and the clothes must be easy to wear. The costume designer must also work with the concept that the director has decided for the play. For example, if a designer is choosing costumes for a contemporary production of Romeo and Juliet, the designer will choose clothes that fit the time period chosen, rather than Elizabethan costumes.

- Re-read the section of the play where Anne goes from being dressed as herself, to being dressed as Old Colin, to being dressed as her cousin Lucy.
- Consider the style of clothes of the time period in which the play takes place. Research Elizabethan clothing.
- Design and create costume renderings for all three of these costume changes. Imagine that you are the costume designer for this show, and you must create a costume that is easily and quickly changed.
- Use any medium you'd like (colored pencil, marker, paint, collage, etc.) Create three very different costumes, and write a paragraph explaining the design process. Explain why you chose the colors you chose, the medium you chose, and explain how the actress will easily and quickly change from one

## ***Exploring Disguise in Contemporary Shakespeare Films:***

- ❖ In William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet with Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes, the filmmakers take a contemporary approach to a familiar play. In the scene where Juliet meets Romeo, they are at a masquerade, or costume, party. This movie, which was released in 1996, is an example of a contemporary adaptation of an Elizabethan play. In the film, the characters are not dressed in a style that was popular in the Elizabethan era, but rather dress and behave as contemporary people in the 1990s.
  - Watch the masquerade party scene from the popular movie and detect the significance of their disguises.
  
- ❖ In Shakespeare in Love, Gwyneth Paltrow's character dresses as a man in order to get the chance to act in plays. Not only is disguise an element that the filmmaker borrowed from Twelfth Night, but the main character played by Gwyneth Paltrow is named Viola, just like the character in Twelfth Night who dresses as a man. Also, the characters in Shakespeare in Love perform the play Twelfth Night. Shakespeare in Love, released in 1998, is an example of a contemporary film, set in Elizabethan times. So even though the film was conceived and produced in the 1990s, the costume and setting are loyal to the Elizabethan era.
  - After watching this movie, can you imagine what it would be like to be forced to disguise your identity in order to participate in an activity you like? Can you think of any contemporary examples of people who have to disguise their true identity in order to be accepted?

## **Disguise and Dramatic Irony**

Disguise was used as a comedic, dramatic, and sometimes suspenseful writing device in Shakespeare's work. During Elizabethan times, the theatres did not have access to the special effects and extravagant sets we have today. The main design element was the use of costumes. Often, actors wore special costumes to indicate a disguise. For example, a character that is in disguise might wear a mask or a headpiece to suggest that a disguise is being used. When a character was disguising himself as a different character, this information was obvious to the audience but not to the other characters. This is an example of dramatic irony. The audience will adhere to that convention and, even though the audience recognizes the actor, they will go along with the assumption that the character is in disguise. Pay close attention to the disguise scenes in The Beard of Avon. When you watch the play, notice how you react to the character's disguise.

**Think about contemporary films that you see today.**

- What role do special effects play in creating dramatic or suspenseful moments?**
- Consider the role disguise had in Elizabethan theatre, before access to special effects, and the role that it plays in contemporary films today.**
- Write a paragraph about the use of disguise in Shakespeare and its connection to dramatic irony.**

## Love Sonnets

Shakespeare wrote a group of poems known as the sonnets. Most of his sonnets focus on the theme of love. A **sonnet** is a fourteen-line poem, written in **iambic pentameter** (ten syllables per line), and the Shakespearean sonnet is written in the following rhyme scheme:

ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

Notice that in Sonnet 104 the last word of each line rhymes according to this rhyme scheme. For example, *old* rhymes with *cold*, *eyed* rhymes with *pride*, etc. Each of Shakespeare's sonnets follows this exact rhyme scheme, and each is written with fourteen ten-syllable lines.

### Sonnet 104

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,  
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,  
Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold  
Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,  
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turned  
In process of the seasons have I seen,  
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned,  
Since first I saw you fresh which yet are green.  
Ah yet doth beauty, like a dial hand,  
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived;  
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,  
Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived;  
For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred;  
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

Read Sonnet 104 above and compare it with the sonnet that Will and Oxford write together in Act 2, Scene 3 of *The Beard of Avon*.

- Do they come up with an exact replica of the actual sonnet above?
- Find some things that are different and some that are the same.

There are three types of sonnets written in English: Spenserian sonnets, Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnets, and Shakespearean (or English sonnets). The Shakespearean form was originated by William Shakespeare. In *The Beard of Avon*, Will and Oxford collaborate and write a sonnet together. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, and they are usually compiled together either in a book of sonnets or in addition to his plays. Instead of titles, the sonnets are numbered.

### Sonnet Activities

- Writing a Shakespearean sonnet is very much like plugging numbers in to an equation. Try writing your own! First choose one of Shakespeare's sonnets and try substituting a few words of your own. Then, start from scratch and write a sonnet that is completely your own. Read it aloud to the class when you have finished.
- Re-read Sonnet 104 above, and try to decipher its meaning. Look up all the words you don't know, and then write a letter to the person Shakespeare is addressing.  
Write the sonnet in your own words, ignoring the rules about rhyme scheme and pattern. Just try to convey the meaning the Shakespeare intended.
- Learn your favorite sonnet by heart. Perform it in front of the class.

## Love Relationships in *The Beard of Avon*

One of the many plot-thickening elements Shakespeare used when he wrote his comedies was that of love relationships. Several of his comedies have plots, which revolve around a marriage, a courtship, or one person striving to get the attention of another. These many relationship pairings are components of several of the Shakespeare comedies, and Amy Freed has also paired many of her characters in *The Beard of Avon*. Shakespeare's use of love relationships falls into several categories.

### Types of Relationships

- Love relationships that are unrequited, or unresolved. Usually this occurs when one person is pursuing another, but the person being pursued is not interested in forming a relationship.
- Love-at-first-sight relationships are also very common. Many of the classic romances in Shakespeare plays began with a love-at-first-sight meeting. For example, the characters of Romeo and Juliet profess their love for each other immediately after they meet.
- Some relationships become established over time. This is a relationship where, when we first meet the characters, they might have a mild liking or even dislike for each other, but over the course of the play they learn to love each other. For example, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the characters of Kate and Petruchio are antagonistic toward each other at first, but learn to love each other by the end of the play.
- Friendship love exists between pairs of people who trust and confide in each other, but their love is not romantic in nature.

### Relationship Pairings in *The Beard of Avon*

**Will and Anne**

**Will and "Lucy"**

**Anne and Oxford**

**Writohesley and Oxford**

**Queen Elizabeth and Oxford**

**Shakespeare and Oxford**

### Examine the Text

For each of the pairings in the list, identify places in the script where evidence of their love for each other appears. Then, decide which of the types of relationships listed, if any, each of the following pairings fit in to.

Write a paragraph for each pairing, explaining why it is significant to the plot of the story. Freed would not have included each of these relationships if they did not have an importance to the plot. Examine why you think she included them.

## Love Relationships Further Explained...

**Will and Anne.** These characters are both historical figures- William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, obviously, both lived in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were actually married and together parented children. We know from official documents that Anne was a few years older than Shakespeare. However, we know very little about what their relationship was actually like.

**Will and "Lucy."** Will falls in love with Anne when she is disguised as her cousin Lucy. This is a great example of Freed borrowing Shakespeare's use of disguise in romantic comedy in order to complicate the plot.

**Wriothesley and Oxford.** These two seem to have a consistent, committed relationship from the beginning. One element that is interesting is their age difference. The relationship becomes interrupted, however, by Oxford's fling with Anne.

**Queen Elizabeth and Oxford.** Oxford was known to be one of the Queen's favorite courtiers, impressing her with his dancing and his athletic ability shown during jousting tournaments. In 1586 (when de Vere was 36) the Queen authorized a grant of one thousand pounds a year for life, to be paid to him quarterly from the state treasury, with no strings attached. This extraordinary sum of money, being paid to a courtier who often disobeyed the Queen, has led many scholars to believe that the Queen had a special affinity for de Vere, one extending beyond his accomplishments at court.

**Shakespeare and Oxford.** This is a relationship that is left up to interpretation. Is Shakespeare attracted to Oxford in a romantic way? Or are they simply friends? Find some clues in the play that might suggest either.

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Shakespeare's sonnets often expressed feelings of love. Besides the Shakespearean sonnet, there are other types of sonnets. While the Shakespearean sonnet is always comprised for three stanzas and a couplet, an Italian sonnet is comprised of an octave and a sestet. The octave (the first eight lines) is made up of the rhyme scheme **ABBAABBA**. The sestet (the final six lines) is made up of any various rhyme schemes including any combination of c, d, and e. For example, it could be **CDCDCE**. Many writers have written sonnets based upon this formula, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who wrote the following love sonnet:

XVII

*My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes  
God set between his After and Before,  
And strike up and strike off the general roar  
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats  
In a serene air purely. Antidotes  
Of medicated music, answering for  
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour  
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes  
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.  
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?  
A hope, to sing by gladly? . . . or a fine  
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?  
A shade, in which to sing . . . or palm or pine?  
A grave, on which to rest from singing? . . . Choose.*

- Compare this sonnet to Shakespeare's Sonnet 104. How is the language and word choice different? Is imagery used the same way in both sonnets?
- Do they each communicate the theme of love? Explain your answer.
- Using either the Shakespearean sonnet form or the Italian sonnet form, write your own love sonnet.
- Choose one of the love relationships found in the play and write a sonnet on one of their behalves.
- See if you can incorporate some of the words on the vocabulary list in your sonnet.
- If you choose, read it aloud to the class.