Five British Writers

Day 10

Chaucer
Shakespeare
Keats
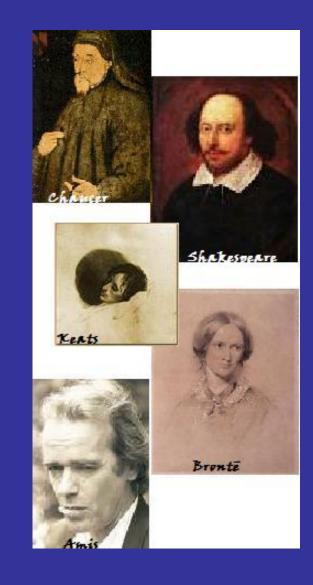Brontë
Amis

Historical Context

Probably written around the same time as *Hamlet*

First published in 1623

Three early records of performance, in the time of King James I:

2 February 1602 (feast of Candelmas)

6 April 1618 (Easter Monday)

2 February 1623 (Candelmas again)

- "At our feast we had a play called *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, much like the *Comedy of Errors* or *Menaechmi* in Plautus, but most like and near to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practice in it was to make the steward believe his lady widow was in love with him, by counterfeiting a letter as from his lady, in general terms telling him what she liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel, etc., and then when he came to practice, making him believe they took him to be made" –John Manningham, 1602 (in your edition on p. 179)

Revived after 1660 [restoration of the British Monarchy]

- "one of the weakest plays that I ever saw on stage" –Samuel Pepys, 1669

Today, one of Shakespeare's most popular plays…

Shakespeare as a Writer: 'First Heir of Mine Invention'

Venus and Adonis

published 1593, probably written c. 1592 when the return of the plague had caused London theatres to close

dedicated to the Earl of Southampton

7 new editions within a decade

15 editions total between 1593-1636

considered "bawdy gere" showing "lewd Venus" and a contemporary play, *Return from Parnassus*, depicted a lusty Cambridge student declaring he slept with it beneath his pillow

A Closer Look at Language

- ## Unrhymed Verse

  Iambic Pentameter

  10 syllables, five 'iambs' (combination of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable), da Dum da Dum da Dum da Dum

  "If music be the food of love, play on"

  "Bifel that in that seson on a day"

- ## Rhymed Verse

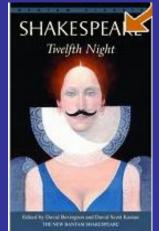 – capping couplets, heroic couplets

- ## Prose

Body and Text II

A boy playing a girl playing a boy…

How are we reminded of both pretended and real genders?

Does the cross-dressing solidify or subvert distinctions?

What's attractive about Cesario?

What is similar/different in Sebastian and Viola?

"Just as the saturnalian reversal of social roles need not threaten the social structure, but can serve instead to consolidate it, so a temporary, playful reversal of sexual roles can renew the meaning of the normal relation. This basic security explains why there is so little that is queasy in all Shakespeare's handling of boy actors playing women, and playing women pretending to be men" –C. L. Barber

SHAKESPEARE
Twelfth Night
Edited by David Bevington and David Scott Kastan
THE NEW BANTAM SHAKESPEARE

"Accounts of Shakespeare's plays constantly appeal, most often at the climactic point in the argument, to natural forces that underlie both social customs and literary models and give the characters their special powers. These critical invocations of nature are not themselves misleading…the mistake is to imagine that the natural forces invoked are timeless and free-floating. Between Shakespeare's culture and our own there has been at least a partial shift in male gender perception from a search for the hidden penis in women to a search for the hidden womb in men, and with this shift the 'natural forces' invoked in the representation of individuals have themselves changed. Moreover, a transformation of the way we understand the relation between sexual pleasure and generation has intensified this change" –Stephen Greenblatt

Play and Truth

What other double disguises are adopted?

How and when are disguises unveiled?
  For example, when is Viola's name revealed?

Is any change in social, gendered, moral, mental identity actually
  possible within this play?

What are the 'proofs' of identity?
  For example, is Antonio right that 'virtue is beauty' (3.4.371)?

Next Week:
Setting and Re-Setting Twelfth Night

On Stage
On Film

Don't forget to post discussion questions by Monday.

Orgel's essay is on our Website Media Room.

Remember you will need to watch Nunn's film for Thursday (and again before the following Tuesday).